

Geotic: Traversa

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Will Wiesenfeld takes comfort in the virtual. His newest album *Traversa*, released under the pseudonym Geotic, takes place in a reality that's a little brighter, cleaner and more comfortable than our own; it's Kanto, it's Johto, it's Hoenn, it's Hyrule, it's Animal Crossing. Artists commenting on the information age tend to focus on its dystopic qualities, but Wiesenfeld zeroes in on the positives. This is a more instinctive reaction for queer people, as those who learned to be or were beaten into being shy and guarded in life can find a free voice in the digital world.

In Wiesenfeld's music there's often a degree of separation between our universe and the one he sings about. This year's *Romaplasm*, released under his better-known moniker Baths, took place on a planet where knights ride on horseback and airships rule the skies. This prism served to emphasize the universality of the feelings he sung about. Here, the focus is entirely on the world. *Traversa* isn't really worldbuilding—the tracks are too similar to each other to give the sense of a vastness stretching beyond the borders of the album—but it's a simulacrum of a utopian place, a brief respite from cynicism for us and for Wiesenfeld.

The palate is similar to *Romaplasm*: major-key songs at house tempos. Organic instruments are all but absent, the exceptions being the murmur of Wiesenfeld's voice and a string section that tugs at the music's margins. The "real" instruments don't add any grit, though, but uplift this simple music to almost maudlin levels of stary-eyed ecstasy. They sound just as spotless and spit-shined as anything else here, anyway. This music doesn't seem to exist in any space except for the device on which it was made and the fantasies in its creator's head that birthed it.

It's rare to find music so artificial yet welcoming outside of a video game soundtrack, a clear influence here from the leap-frogging lattices of square-wave synths to the eighth-note-centric composition of these eight pieces. Much music that engages with contemporary technology is about being a passive consumer of digital media, bombarded by menu screens, ringtones and cheery instructional videos. *Traversa* is rare in that it's about being an active consumer of digital media, and the album replicates the feeling of diving headfirst into your favorite video game. It simply doesn't care if that experience is "real" or not as long as the feelings are.

It's easy to see art that's relentlessly positive as myopic, to assume it can never be as authentic or complex as more ambiguous or negative art. Some listeners might scurry away once Wiesenfeld sings "quiet tree frogs" on opening track "Knapsack." But Wiesenfeld's vocals serve the purpose of purging the music of cynicism and making it clear that everything he's doing is sincere. In electronic music, singing about tree frogs represents a bigger risk than muddying your work with noise or singing about the darkness in your soul. Wiesenfeld saves that kind of thing for Baths. With Geotic he wraps himself in a perfect world, and so can we.

