

Magu the Dog's 'Life On The Line' is More Than Just Chill Beats to Study to

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If you've poked around the Internet enough, you've heard music like [Magu the Dog](#). Maybe names like Ol' Burger Beats and Tomppabeats come to mind, or maybe you think of an anime girl scribbling endlessly in her notebook as her cat stares forlornly at the rain outside. This is the smooth jazz of the Internet age—low-commitment music where the identity of the creator doesn't matter so long as it evokes that laid-back, slightly wistful vibe, like watching ships disappear in the rain. This music can provide a cocoon from stress and the horrors of the world: an easy escape.

But the beatmaker born Tyler Ingraham doesn't let us off the hook so easily, and the only time his latest tap *Life On The Line* is about escaping from anything is when we hear the sampled voice of Kevin Briggs, the former Highway Patrol officer who's talked somewhere in the neighborhood of 200 people out of jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge. "I have lost interest in life," he intones. "I have to go." The track is called "Wasabi," and if you remember the first time you stuck a wad of that green goo in your mouth as a kid, you know how it feels when this track ends.

This is not your run-of-the-mill stoner fodder. It works just fine as that, mind you, and it's hard not to imagine anyone being enraptured by its swooning string samples and plaintive vibraphones. But in context this lushness feels almost maudlin, like Sinatra wandering through Nelson Riddle's wee small hours. A lot of this kind of beat music aims for a vaporwave-adjacent retrofuturism, but tracks like "Your Caress" and "Deleted Scenes" use the textures of century-old parlor music to evoke an older and scarier nostalgia—like wandering into the ballroom scene from *The Shining*.

"Deleted Scenes" opens with a voicemail from the producer's dad. "I hope all is well and I hope that you still at least care about me a little bit," he sighs as melodramatic Disney strings saw and mourn. Voicemails from family members are so cliché on rap albums they're almost a punchline, serving as shorthand for pathos, but they're less common on beat tapes, which rarely dive particularly deeply into their makers' state of mind. The voicemail fades out, and a new rhythm rises out of the mix, as if he's put off calling his pop for another few minutes to work on his beats.

What exactly is bothering Ingraham so much? He doesn't tell us here, and though of course he has no obligation to spill his soul to strangers, we don't get many revelations about his dark nights of the soul and are mostly left with an ominous patina of fatigue. Ingraham has worked with plenty of rappers and charges for beats, so to at least some degree *Life On The Line* is a demo reel, a way of showing off what he's capable of behind the boards. But if his goal is to have rappers call him, Ingraham ought not to be surprised if they open those calls with "are you OK?"

-Daniel Bromfield

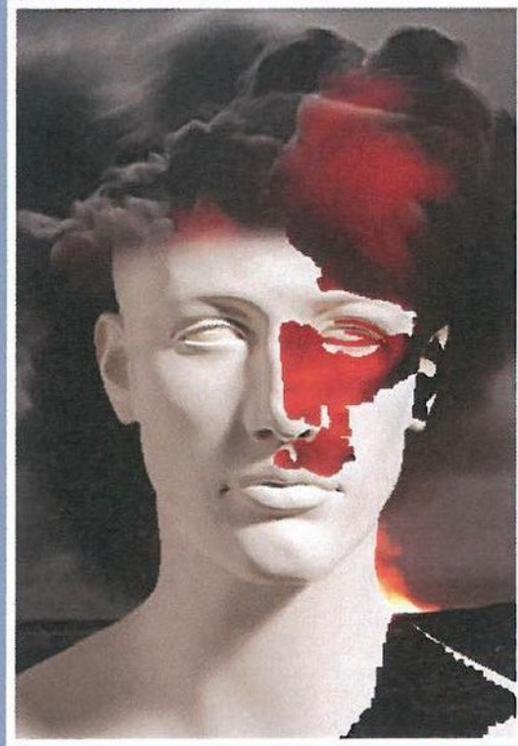


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