

# Yamantaka // Sonic Titan: Dirt

SC [spectrumculture.com/2018/04/16/yamantaka-sonic-titan-dirt-review](http://spectrumculture.com/2018/04/16/yamantaka-sonic-titan-dirt-review)

Daniel Bromfield

April 16, 2018



*Dirt* is compressed within an inch of its life, a production decision that defuses moments that should be explosive. There are more organ solos, operatic arias and bludgeoning guitar codas here than on just about any album you're likely to hear this year, but good luck remembering them: they don't stick out from the music, elevating it to the dizzying heights we desire from good prog rock. Instead, they merge so thoroughly with the overarching whole you'd have a tough time recalling which songs they were on. Grasping the album's narrative, which sounds awesome (Native American creation myths! Futuristic bubble people!), seems equally unlikely; it is practically impossible to come to grips with when the vocals are so remote, landing just south of intelligibility.

But it's easy to appreciate Yamantaka // Sonic Titan's knack for proggy bluster, even when that bluster doesn't make as much of an impact. The Canadian collective, now led by drummer Alaska B after the departure of crucial early collaborator Ruby Kato Attwood, invariably ends up on the right side of the line between excess and pretentiousness. Their albums are conceptual, but goofily so. Absent from this music is the prog pretense of elevating rock music to the level of Western art music, and "Western" is only half the equation, anyway: their

double-barreled name reflects Alaska B's Chinese-Irish (and Attwood's Japanese-British) heritage, and their aesthetic is permeated with anime and East Asian theater. This is a good-hearted band, one easy to root for.

*Dirt*, like their last album *UZU* from 2013, consists of 10 songs over 42 minutes. This is odd in a genre that favors songs that stretch past the point of sanity, but there's no shortage of stuff going on in these pieces: they're never ones to pass up heavy-metal guitar freak-outs ("The Decay," "Hungry Ghost") or intricate guitar lattices ("Someplace.") *UZU* was lighter on its feet than their first album *YT//ST*, focusing more on pianos and harmonies than feedback and sludge. But the personnel changes in the last five years seem to have inspired a return to heavy form. *Dirt* lets you know what you're in for with an introductory squall of black-metal noise ("Karonhiake") and rarely lets up save for the ghostly, fingerpicked first half of "Hungry Ghost."

This should be the recipe for a rock album for the ages: the kind of work that inspires frantic air-drumming, devil horns and wide-eyed stares in tandem with voluminous bong rips. But *Dirt* is all but defused by its production, which emphasizes the low end and seems designed for the kind of high-end headphones that people checking out an avant-garde Canadian prog-rock record aren't particularly likely to own. It's almost Wall of Sound-like, but the band just seems walled in. This is the approach a producer should take to an Atlanta trap album, or perhaps the fourth or fifth Washed Out album. But this is a band with "Sonic Titan" in their name, and, as such, they deserve better.