

I-LP-ON: Äanet

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If *Äanet* resembles a Pan Sonic album more than most of the music Ilpo Vaisänen's made on his own this decade, it's no coincidence. The Finnish band's other half, Mika Vainio, died in 2017, leading to a rapid canonization and a glut of archival material—including *Äanet*, which combines new pieces with field recordings made by Vaisänen on a 2000 Pan Sonic tour. Though it resembles the sprawling, echo-drenched techno of Vaisänen's excellent last two records as I-LP-O in Dub, *Äanet* also has a lot to do with Pan Sonic's pranksterish abstractions in sound and form. It's poignant to imagine Vaisänen trying to make a Pan Sonic album on his own, sans his friend, using field recordings as a séance. But to frame this record in the story of a legendary dead man would be to both ignore both Vaisänen's talent and the fact that the music he's made this decade is some of the most consistently excellent from the Pan Sonic camp.

On *Äanet*—"vote" in Finnish; Vaisänen maintains a mischievous leftist streak in his titles—the Finn spins a rugged landscape that'll seem hostile to most but an alluring challenge to listeners who've traveled the poles of experimental music. His music is monochrome and austere but never as oppressive or suffocating as a lot of ambient and techno that likewise borrows cues from dub. It's crisp in an icy way. It feels good the same way a smarting wind or a plunge into a cold lake might feel good. It's sorta purifying.

Vaisänen dropping "dub" from the name is significant. There's plenty of echo here, but it doesn't spiral into space, instead adding an interesting wetness to the drums, as if they're dripping with dew or melted frost. The obstinacy of the drums suggests some kind of mechanical process at work, and *Äanet* is kin to Norwegian neighbor Biosphere's masterpiece *N-Plants* in suggesting the way machines grind away while no one's around. That album predicted the 2011 Fukushima disaster in its concerns about the vulnerability of the power plants it toured, and the field recordings have a way of suggesting that as those machines grind away to keep us alive and comfortable, the natural world moves at its own obstinate pace.

An image that frequently came to mind while listening was of plumbing, working away in the walls of some old basement or train station, its processes sustaining us while going unseen by the everyday eye. *Äanet* is not terribly interested in space the way most dub is. It errs just on this side of being claustrophobic. It's less sharp and crisp than the Dub records, more muted, more interested in bass and midrange than treble. And while I-LP-O in Dub tracks could have potentially drifted on forever, *Äanet* is far more tightly controlled. Many of its tracks clock in

around a minute, and it maintains a real sense of momentum that makes it feel a little like a rock album (it's 38 minutes long, about the length of a vinyl classic from rock's first two decades). When it ends with "Manat," which is more or less a single tone, it sounds like a disused machine left to run after its operator's bailed: Elvis leaving the building, if you will.

These advances do not make Vaisänen's music any more accessible; this remains mostly music for laptop-punk aficionados. In fact, one stretch of the album that lasts less than a minute leaves a sour enough taste that some might not readily go back. It's on "Turun Sattuma," when the drums have petered out and all that remains is a thick floor of bass. It's a wonderful, atmospheric moment. But then a sharp blat of noise rises out of the distance, followed by a few others, and we're thrown into shock. Jarring moments of sudden discord can be a great way to amplify tension, but this album doesn't really seem to be about tension, and it's a rude intrusion into a space that, in spite of its unfriendly climate, is actually pretty nice.

