

E A R T H S I D E

ALBUM REVIEW



Cinematic Rock

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Progressive rock or progressive metal is either mediocre cacophonies of technical gibberish, or moments when all the stars align to produce the most mind-blowing bands. Thankfully, Earthside is a part of the latter.

A small overview, quoting from their official website: "Earthside is a New England-based creative collective that plays an absorbing style of modern progressive music they call 'cinematic rock.'" The main band consists of four immensely talented and well-learned musicians — Frank Sacramone (keyboards), Jamie Van Dyck (guitars), Ryan Griffin (bass) and Ben Shanbrom (drums) — along with equally talented guest musicians and the Moscow studio symphony orchestra. (With all this, they set out to make their epic 2015 debut album, "A Dream in Static".

The album opens with The Closest I've Come, an eight minute instrumental behemoth of a song that begins with a grand start that blooms into a keyboard solo that makes you do a double-take when you realise you're in for an hour of adventures. From there, you move onto many foreboding and equally grand interludes before ending with another climactic keyboard solo, abruptly ending with the snap of the drums and leaving you awestruck.

Just when you think it can't get better, you move to Mob Mentality, ft. Lajon Witherspoon and the orchestra. Initially, this song seems too pretentious, but after a few listens when you can finally wrap your head around the sheer majesty of this piece, it gets even better. A lovable

quality of this song, in my opinion, is the arrangement of the orchestra (which, by the way, was entirely done by Van Dyck). Instead of being the usual background texture, the orchestra takes on a very opera-like vibe and carves out its own portion in the song. This song is where the beauty of classical music and the grit of modern metal collide.

The title track is where you finally understand the atmospheric approach



Earthside is taking with this album. This track features the heavenly and shrill vocals of Daniel Tompkins, starting off with an ethereal, dream-like tone before plunging into something heavy and nightmarish, never losing the grand vibes it set from the very start of the album.

We find our first and only lull in Entering the Light where the orchestra

makes its return along with a hammered dulcimer player called Max ZT. While this instrumental song is much softer than the others, it doesn't make it any less interesting. After all, how many songs can boast of making you feel like you're on a journey while a guy is shredding on a hammered dulcimer?

And now, for Skyline, one of the most imposing instrumental tracks you'll hear. Consisting of two parts, the first part is

grand and imposing, with what I would call perfectly timed drums, a wonderfully growling guitar, sick basslines and the quaint tones of a piano. The first part sets you up for the hopefulness of part two, that slowly and gradually builds up into a climax that, for me at least, surpasses all the other songs, before tapering off slowly. Heads up: try spotting the techni-

cal Easter Egg in part two.

We then move on to another vocal track featuring the powerful, heavy singing of Björn Strid. I would get into how great this track is too, but really, it's rather repetitive at this point. Honestly, it's just six minutes of solid gold music.

Speaking of solid gold music, let's stop for another six minutes and appreciate the sheer insanity that is The Underground. This is the song that keeps peaking over and over again and after each peak, just when you think it's over, it peaks again. By the time it's actually over, you're paranoid about thinking that it's actually finished and hope that it isn't.

And finally, we have our heart-wrenching conclusion with The Contemplation of the Beautiful. When I first heard this, I honestly almost hated it because it seemed unnecessarily drawn-out and the featured vocalist (Eric Zirlinger) didn't do well enough to save the track. However, after you get over the initial "where did it all go wrong?", this piece of work is actually quite painful to listen to, and out of all the tracks, I feel like this has the most cinematic atmosphere the band was trying to reach (it's still my least favourite though).

All in all, it's one whole hour of stunningly well-composed and well-produced music. Yes, there may be quite a few people who may not prefer it due to its length (and depressing nature), there's no denying that these guys have created something beautiful. The only downside to this is the fact that now there's nowhere left to go but up, and they've got to create something just as good for the second album.