

ALBUMS

Duma

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By Mehan Jayasuriya

GENRE: Experimental

LABEL: Nyege Nyege Tapes

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The Kenyan noise band's debut is inventive and abrasive, a timely distillation of global chaos and techno-dystopian dread.

The duo of Martin Khanja and Sam Karugu make music that's manic, heavy, and impossible to categorize. It's electronic and caustic, though it can also feel pensive. Machine-gun drums and piercing shrieks form the foundation of most songs; there are occasionally little ribbons of melody to cling to, but more often than not, static, synth

drones and sculpted feedback provide the only adornment. This is music that comes apart at the seams, that glitches and convulses, that revels in the sounds of people and machines stretched to their breaking points.

Both Khanja and Karugu are veterans of Nairobi's thriving metal scene. Khanja's previous band, Lust of a Dying Breed, pushed speed metal into industrial territory: their final release traded in blast beats for the jittery sound of programmed drums. Duma goes even further, dispensing with any allegiance to genre, though the band draws liberally from black metal, power electronics, grindcore, drone and even hip-hop. As a composer, Karugu is an agent of chaos: these songs are crammed full of pummeling bass hits, stacked polyrhythms and other violently rhythmic sounds—it's easy to picture an Ableton grid crowded with overlapping drum tracks. He sometimes employs recordings of hand drums as well, though even these are usually played at inhuman tempos. Khanja, meanwhile, can howl like a black metal vocalist, bark like a metalcore singer, or even yelp with a kind of frenzied glee. His throat-shredding vocals are often the only constant in these songs as tempos shift, tracks drop in and out of the mix, and waves of noise advance and recede.

With a few exceptions, *Duma* has two distinct halves: the most frantic songs are front loaded while the songs on the back half are more meditative, though just as unflinchingly dark. In practice, this can feel a bit like putting on a soothing face mask after an exfoliating scrub. "Omni" opens with a skipping pulse that feels like it could induce tachycardia, eventually settles into a trap beat and then plunges back into discord—it sounds a bit like a corrupted MP3 of a TNGHT song. Lead single "Lionsblood" buries black metal vocals under an assault of manic hand drums, while "Uganda With Sam" sounds like minimalist electronic music overlaid with hardcore growls. There are spookily atmospheric songs as well. "Pembe 666" marries mechanical-sounding drones to a spoken word piece, a reading of Revelation 5:6 in Kiswahili. It sounds every bit as haunting as the verse it quotes ("...[A]nd in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes").

While it's hard to point to any one act that Duma sound like, their music does have some analogues. The breakneck polyrhythms of Tanzanian singeli music (as heard on their label, Nyege Nyege Tapes' releases of artists affiliated with Sisso Studios) aim for a similar sonic overload. And in ethos and ambition, Duma seem to draw from some of the most iconoclastic acts from the past decade of extreme music: they are elementally similar to early Fuck Buttons and as willing to fail the black metal purity test as Deafheaven and Liturgy. But where all of those bands aim for some kind of transcendence, Duma is content to frolic in the ugliness found here on earth. The textures they employ on *Duma* evoke overloaded circuits, corroded machinery, and heavy metals leaking into groundwater. This is the sound of human dread and misery, soundtracked by devices destined for the trash heap. Few records released this year better capture both the chaos and anxiety of our current moment.

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