

Puluche Album Review Rubric ©

Artist: Alice in Chains

Album Title: Dirt (1992) - Columbia

Criteria

Rating

Categories	4 - Exemplary	3 - Proficient	2 - Developing	1 - Underdeveloped	Rating
<u>Compositions</u>	Every song is quality and has a distinctive appeal of its own. Tracks have a perfect flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal.	Many quality songs with some distinctive appeal. Tracks have a good flow and continuity that enhance the album's overall appeal.	Some quality songs with distinctive appeal but not sustained. Track flow and continuity have little effect on album's overall appeal.	Few to no quality songs lacking any distinctive appeal. Track flow and continuity have little/poor effect on album's overall appeal.	15
<u>Breaking Ground</u>	Has impressive elements of high creativity and is experimentally innovative. Developing own signature sound. Shows extreme growth and/or potential as a substantial and influential artist.	Features elements of creativity and uniqueness. Shows growth and/or potential as a developing and influential artist, but some stagnation as an established artist.	Has very few moments of creativity and uniqueness. Shows a little growth and/or some potential as a developing artist, but notable regression as an established artist.	Has no creativity and uniqueness. Shows no growth and/or little potential as a developing or established artist.	20
<u>Engagement</u>	Music has a transcending quality with numerous songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels. Many songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality.	Music has transcending qualities with some songs that grab the listener on respective emotional/social levels. Some songs have an addictive effect and memorable quality.	Music has some transcending qualities with few songs that appeal on respective emotional/social levels, as well as having any addictive or memorable qualities.	Music has minimal transcending qualities and few to no songs that appeal on respective emotional/social levels. No positive memorable qualities - only negative.	20
<u>Lyrics</u>	Has a strong lyrical voice with multiple thought-provoking messages with clear and/or possible meanings and depth.	Has notable lyrical voice with some thought-provoking messages and/or possible meanings and depth.	Has limited lyrical voice with few-to-no thought-provoking messages, meanings and depth.	Has a weak lyrical voice with no thought-provoking messages or meanings and seriously lacks any depth.	20
<u>Production</u>	Masterful sound quality with noticeable studio techniques employed that demand headphone inquiry. Vision flawlessly executed. Overall packaging and artwork effectively compliments and enhances album enjoyment.	Very good sound quality with some noticeable studio techniques that demand headphone inquiry. Vision is acceptable. Overall packaging and artwork compliments album enjoyment.	Decent sound quality with few-to-no noticeable studio techniques employed. Vision is questionable. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album.	Questionable sound quality with no noticeable studio techniques. Lacks vision. Overall packaging and artwork fails to compliment album.	20

Comments

Grunge rock was an integral part of the early 1990s rock landscape and as with any genre there are always a few bands that stand out above the rest, oftentimes shaping and defining the genre. In the case of grunge rock, Alice in Chains was a cornerstone of the genre and their album *Dirt* remains one of the most defining and recognizable albums of any genre.

Although grunge rock could be considered beyond its infant stage when *Dirt* was released in 1992, the genre as a whole hadn't had enough time to fully develop to a point where it could enjoy national mainstream success, perhaps aside from Pearl Jam's *Ten* and Nirvana's *Nevermind*. *Dirt's* critical and commercial success only helped propel grunge rock to the national scene.

It wasn't with ease that Alice in Chains worked their way up to the point that they would become one of the most recognizable groups of the early 1990s. Turmoil with the band and the producers – arguments primarily dealing with drug use by Alice in Chains lead singer Layne Staley – coupled with the addictions other group members faced created an often tumultuous environment leading up to and during the recording of *Dirt*.

Paradoxically, the battles and demons the band members faced not only helped write some of the greatest lyrics one will find in the grunge music, but helped the band truly capture the heavy, dark, and distorted sound that Alice in Chains fans expected and loved.

Early works of the band certainly did feature the dark and distorted sound found in *Dirt* – after all, Alice in Chains manifested the quintessential grunge sound perhaps better than any band of the era – but *Dirt* was Alice in Chains' magnum opus mainly due to the perfect combination of darker, more somber lyrics and sound thanks in large part to the heavy distortion featured throughout the album.

The lyrics featured throughout the album revolve around various topics such as mortality and the darker side of drug use, although two of the album's most well known songs – “Rooster” and “Would?” – serve as tributes and remembrances to two crucial figures in the life of lead guitarist Jerry Cantrell.

“Rooster,” known for its lyrical overtones of the Vietnam War, was written based off the strain and hardships Cantrell's father after returning from the Vietnam War. “Would?” is a tribute to one of grunge rock's most important early figures – lead singer of the band Mother Love Bone Andrew Wood. Mother Love Bone is perhaps best known as the launching point for future Temple of the Dog and Pearl Jam musicians Stone Gossard and Jeff Ament.

Throughout the course of listening to *Dirt*, Alice in Chains does a fantastic job of making the listener feel the darkness many of the band members were battling. Part of the strength of *Dirt* isn't just that the well-known singles carried the album. Rather, the lesser known tracks such as “Dam That River,” “Sickman,” “Rain When I Die,” and “Angry Chair” are all fantastic standalone tracks as well. “Dam That River” was actually written after a fight between bandmates Jerry Cantrell and Sean Kinney, but more notable is the pounding, in your face riff that isn't found as prominently on other tracks which instead favour a more distorted and gloomy sound. Equally impressive in “Dam That River” – and other tracks as well – are the combination of rhythmic, head banging guitars coupled alongside powerful guitar solos. “Rain When I Die” is a track that's a little slower than some of the others on the album in terms of its tempo, but features some of the album's strongest vocals – the primal scream that characterized many of grunge rock's best albums, but especially

	Alice in Chain songs.	
<u>Commendations</u>	<p>Although later albums were released by Alice in Chains, <i>Dirt</i> will forever remain the band's crown jewel and one of the best albums not only within grunge rock, but one of the best albums of the 1990s. The singles "Them Bones," "Would?," "Down in a Hole," and "Rooster" would all become some of the most important and recognizable hits of the early 1990s. "Rooster" and "Down in a Hole" were the only singles released from <i>Dirt</i> that reached the top 10 of any U.S. chart, but given that grunge rock was still yet to reach its full mainstream potential the success of the singles is certainly impressive.</p> <p><i>Dirt</i> remains of the of the most acclaimed albums of the early 1990s in terms of its commercial success, reaching number 6 on the <i>Billboard 200</i> chart. The 5 million copies sold and four-time platinum certified album was the highest selling album by Alice in Chains.</p>	
<u>Next Steps</u>	<p>Alice in Chains would go on to release <i>Jar of Flies</i> which interestingly was the first EP in history to reach the top of the <i>Billboard 200</i> upon its immediate release, and the self-titled <i>Alice in Chains</i> in 1994 and 1995, respectively. These two albums succeeding <i>Dirt</i> would be the final albums released with Layne Staley as the lead singer as the band would go on hiatus before the eventual death of Staley.</p> <p><i>Jar of Flies</i> saw similar levels of praise to that of <i>Dirt</i>, but Alice in Chains final self-titled album didn't enjoy the same level of success as the albums that preceded it, although its important to remember exactly how high the bar had been set.</p> <p>Alice in Chains began performing comeback shows starting around 2005, and actually released an album in 2009 titled <i>Black Gives Way to Blue</i> that received fairly high levels of praise from fans and critics. Additionally, a 2013 release titled <i>The Devil Put Dinosaurs Here</i> followed a similar vein to that of <i>Black Gives Way to Blue</i> in that the album has enjoyed some success. These two albums, however, featured some different line-up's than their earlier releases due to the death of both former lead singer Layne Staley and bassist Mike Starr in 2011.</p>	
<u>Reviewer</u>	Carl Whitaker	IRC: Adam Schneider