

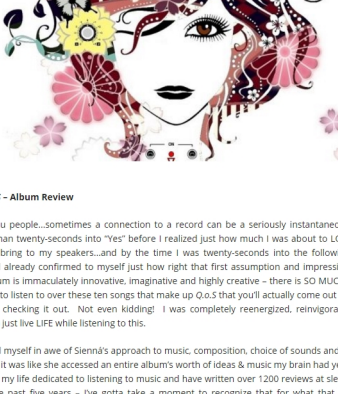
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SIENNÁ - Q.O.S

BY JER@SBS / APRIL 22, 2017

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Sienná - Q.o.S - Album Review

Let me tell you people...sometimes a connection to a record can be a seriously instantaneous thing. I was barely more than twenty-seconds into "Yes" before I realized just how much I was about to LOVE what Sienná was going to bring to my speakers...

I quickly found myself in awe of Sienná's approach to music, composition, choice of sounds and impressive mix in many ways. It was like she accessed an entire album's worth of ideas & music my brain had yet to hear. Given that I've spent my life dedicated to listening to music and have written over 1200 reviews at sleepingbagstudios alone over the past five years - I've gotta take a moment to recognize that for what that really is - that's amazing, straight-up.

Sienná comes by her talents & skills in what I'd assume is a natural progression that reflects both her worldly-experience and true love of the art of music. Born & raised in Kyoto, Japan, and now living in Oslo, Norway, she's already spent a great deal of time in the electro-scene and been heavily involved in the music-scene from what looks to be the past twelve years or more...

That being said...I don't expect ALL of you to come with me on this adventure. Sienná is making a very different style of electro-music that is either going to instantly form a connection with you...or quickly reveal itself to be two-steps ahead of you the entire way through. For some people...people like myself that truly appreciate the all-new...you'll love it; but being realistic, I also know that this amount of pure imagination and innovation can also lead to a more niche audience overall.

From the very first haunting piano-note of "Yes" at the misty, mysterious & crystalline atmosphere surrounding it & developing around it...she had me hooked. It seemed very avant-garde...very creative and entirely committed to its ideas; every sound is played with the confidence that tells you Sienná has placed everything with real care. The sparseness of the music and the use of space is captivating to the ears...and don't even get me started on just how cool the added bass is & spoken-word vocals - I LOVE this kind of stuff!

"World Citizens" took the entire sound in such an incredible, unexpected direction. With the unique style of "Yes" starting the album, it's theoretically impossible to know where Sienná would turn to next...she could have gone in any direction but MAN am I happy she chose this one! "World Citizens" is built upon solid low-end grooves and tribal-style vocals layered overtop...dynamically-structured and full of bold-meets-bizarre synth-hooks - I couldn't get enough of the hypnotic groove that this song slips into. The mix is absolute perfection to the ears...I love how she moves the vocals from upfront to the middle & back again...rotating between the captivating elements that make this song spectacular and constantly giving our ears something new to listen to along the way.

If you hit up her page at Bandcamp, you'll likely start on the song "Quintessence" where it's currently set to. Normally...as a reviewer this drives me nuts...but there are also times like this where it makes a heck of a lot of sense to me. "Yes" isn't going to be the song that pulls people into Sienná...if listeners are anything like me it certainly will...but I don't think that necessarily applies to many people out there. "Quintessence" however, is actually as stocked-full of universal accessibility as an electro-song could ever hope to be...I can't imagine anyone out there not movin' & groovin' to a really one whether they're sitting or standing; so for this track to be the first introduction to her music is actually a truly good move on her part and smart way to expose people to this record.

Back to the beats! "Sixth Sense" brings the energy back into the mix through a bouncy bass rhythm and...hmm...what is that...a banjo sample? I have no idea how she's gone about creating this song from the ground up...the title of "Sixth Sense" had to be in reference to the "If you build it, they will come" strategy of being a part of this song as it evolved layer-by-layer & piece-by-piece. Like...put it to you this way...they said Beethoven heard his music in his head before he ever even thought to write it down...so...I mean...if you can imagine all of what's happening on "Sixth Sense" inside of Sienná's head before she even recorded it...well...that'd be amazing wouldn't it? But that's the thing here...you kind of have to imagine that it DID live in her somewhere beforehand; as crazy as the foundation, movement and structure of "Sixth Sense" might be - notice that each move is once again made with the confidence and assuredness that it's all going to make sense to our ears in the end...and it certainly does to mine.

That being said...as soon as "Aoi (葵)" began...I forgot all about "Sixth Sense." I forgot about space, time, my own name...even forgot about Donald Trump for one sweet, blissful moment and got absorbed right into the incredible textures and tones of the amazing atmosphere that Sienná has created with "Aoi (葵)." While it would be a very tough choice to choose my ultimate favorite off of Q.o.S - this song absolutely makes it tough not to: I loved every second of this song. "Aoi (葵)" starts strangely...and it takes about a minute or so to reveal the subtleness of the full-scope of this idea...but the payoff is 100% there in this sonic-adventure of a Mogwai or Sigur Ros - you'll get "Aoi (葵)" completely. It's full of that mysterious & incredibly satisfying sound and the increasing intensity in its subtle glacier-paced evolution makes for one of the albums most spectacular & memorable moments.

What's really to love about this record though...is that every time you think you've heard the best track on it there's another one of equal strength with an entirely new sound that's right around the corner. "Eastern Plays" was like that for me...I was convinced that after hearing "Aoi (葵)" that whatever would come next couldn't be as compelling - yet here we are again, finding out that Sienná is doing this music-thing because she's a serious expert in her field. "Eastern Plays" confirms that she can be just as diverse in her sound as she can be creative with it but also proves that when you structure, assemble and mix music as vibrantly as she does, that you can truly take the sound of your record in all directions and still achieve as massively satisfying and cohesive flow to it all. She heads more towards the Dn'B areas of electro with this particular jam...but once again finds strong ways to innovate the sound with clever additions to the atmosphere on "Eastern Plays" - this song really moves and it's bound to take you with it wherever it goes...so be ready to enjoy the ride.

The closest thing I experienced to any kind of mixed feelings about any song on this record came in its late-stages with the song "Follow My Instructions." I almost felt like I'd have to move this song into my own "guilty pleasures" playlist...I almost felt like there was too little going on in this song for me to be enjoying it as much as I seemed to be. But here's my challenge to you...Follow My Instructions might be a minimalist structure overall...but for real...YOU try to resist the bounce and pull of the electro-hooks on this cut! Minimalism in music has been made successful for a reason by those that do it RIGHT like this...every element that comes through the speakers on "Follow My Instructions" is perfectly placed, bold, crisp & captivating to the ears; there might not be a whole lot going on, but every sound truly counts for something in the final result here. Dig the pacing & mix of effects on the vocals...dig the artistic & creative vibe this song has altogether...and COME ON people, you know I'm right about this one...you can't resist that main-hook of the low-end groove in this electro-jam either can you?! "Follow My Instructions" is like combining electro, rhythm, poetry and a work-out class all into one - tons of energy in this one brilliant moment in time...as much as I truly tried to resist it, I really dig this tune too.

I also think you truly have to admire the way that Sienná has insightfully used vocals as an instrument in her music on Q.o.S - an aspect of her music that is best shown on display through the final song on the album, "PM." The vocal-flow and melody in the singing perfectly mimics traditional instrumentation and moves captivatingly throughout the song. The natural accent of the vocals gives it an additional charm & allure...and for much of the song, they're the dominant sound we hear alongside a sparse but highly-effective atmosphere you won't be able to take your ears off of. "PM" is beautifully sung and evolves fantastically as it plays with a gentle, isolated sound & style that make for a perfect ending to Sienná's latest record...the kind of ending you'll remember...the kind of ending that makes you instantly want to repeat and seek out the uniqueness you'll find on this album over and over.

This entire album truly falls into the category of real art. Massively impressed with Sienná's talent, writing and confidence to create music that's off the beaten path, but that still hits the mark of satisfaction and then exceeds it by every possible measure. A real highlight for this year in creativity, imagination and the courage to follow the wildest of ideas - Sienná is one of those artists that can send something my way ANY time and I'd be more than willing to check out what she's come up with next. Easily one of the most inventive and innovative electro-artists out there in the music-scene today and an extreme pleasure to listen to.

Find out more about Sienná at her official pages below!

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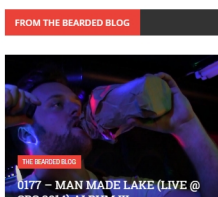
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