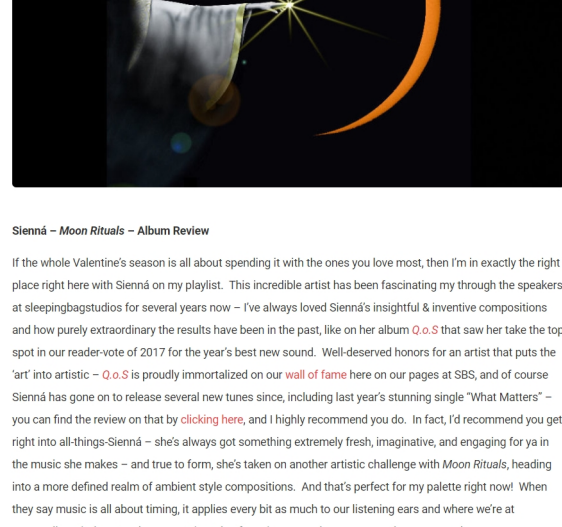


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Sienná – Moon Rituals

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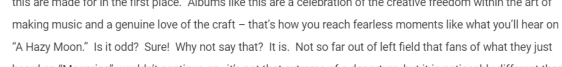


Sienná – Moon Rituals – Album Review

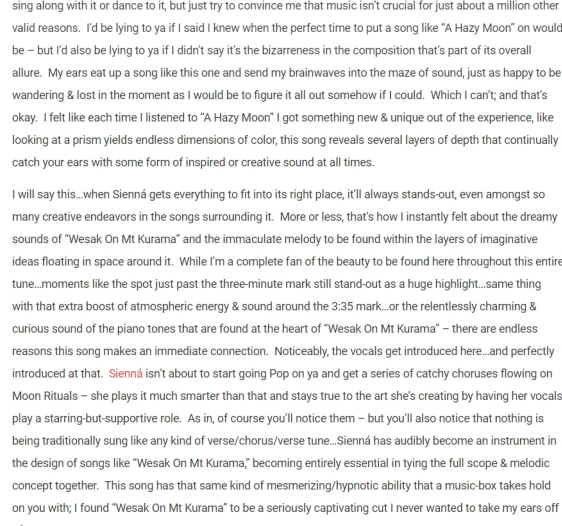
If the whole Valentine's season is all about spending it with the ones you love most, then I'm in exactly the right place right here with Sienná on my playlist. This incredible artist has been fascinating my through the speakers at sleepingbagstudios for several years now – I've always loved Sienná's insightful & inventive compositions and how purely extraordinary the results have been in the past, like on her album *Q.o.S* that saw her take the top spot in our reader-vote of 2017 for the year's best new sound. Well-deserved honors for an artist that puts the 'art' into artistic – *Q.o.S* is proudly immortalized on our wall of fame here on our pages at SBS, and of course Sienná has gone on to release several new tunes since, including last year's stunning single "What Matters" – you can find the review on that by clicking here, and I highly recommend you do. In fact, I'd recommend you get right into all-things-Sienná – she's always got something extremely fresh, imaginative, and engaging for ya in the music she makes – and true to form, she's taken on another artistic challenge with *Moon Rituals*, heading into a more defined realm of ambient style compositions. And that's perfect for my palette right now! When they say music is all about timing, it applies every bit as much to our listening ears and where we're at personally as it does to when a certain style of music or sound comes around...you wanna be as open as you can when you're listening to everything out there, but there's no denying that sometimes you're just in the mood for a certain style of tunes more than others. Maybe it's a phase, maybe it's a permanent thing – you never know...I have times where the ambient genre is a downright essential part of my diet for months, but even when it's not the most prevalent style of music I might be listening to at the time, I know there are specific songs & certain records that I can always go back to when I need them. I got back into the ambient/instrumental section of my playlist at the end of last year with the release of the Forest Robots record *Times When I Know You'll Watch The Sky* – and on the advice of that project's sole-member Fran Dominguez, that experience led me to other incredible acts like Amina and GoGo Penguin. So if Sienná wants to take a more decisive turn into the atmospheric elements of ambient sound on *Moon Rituals*, believe me, that'll be more than welcome to my ears right now – I'm 100% stoked to check this out!

Sienná proves to be a composer that can keep her composure throughout the ambitious & adventurous spirit roaming through the set of nine new songs on *Moon Rituals* – but that's no massive surprise, given her reputation for awesomeness. With cleverly controlled precision and her outstanding ear for sound, she makes the most of each environment, idea, and experience you'll find on *Moon Rituals*, ultimately delivering another highly unique addition to her catalog and a record stocked full of captivating music.

"Moonrise" is a breathtaking combination of contrast, melody, emotion, and mythical sound. Though it'll take on a fully different direction in sound than what you hear at the very beginning, I gotta say – I probably would have been fully stoked if the first two minutes were all I got from Sienná! Hearing the major twists that occur, like the shift around the two-minute mark, end up taking this opening track to a whole other plane of existence from where it all began. Drifting in on the whispering wind as the song begins, "Moonrise" morphs into so much more, and Sienná crafts the changes made with subtle & understated expertise that keeps the ingredients minimal & the results at their maximum. And what about that cherry on top just prior to the five-minute mark when the beat kicks in? Because that's pure audio awesomeness right there is what that is. I like the fact that the vast majority of the tunes on *Moon Rituals* are essentially beat-less in the typical sense most listeners would expect...or at least rarely have the drums playing more than a strong supporting role...but I also won't deny the impact that adding a more noticeable beat straight into the spotlight here makes to the finale of this first cut on the record in its ability to get the attention of the people & the spark of energy sounding fired-up early on. "Moonrise" feels like it's told & revealed expertly in three extremely well-defined chapters within its structure...you've got its mystical opening, its curious instrumental middle, and the conclusive ending you'd hope to find that brings everything together while still ramping up the enticing sound even more. From the artistic integrity within the layout & structure, to the highly interesting selection of sounds and the amount of imagination & creativity that Sienná flexes on "Moonrise," you're sure to be impressed.



SIENNÁ A Hazy Moon 月朧



Songs like "A Hazy Moon" absolutely bring a smile to my face...because I recognize a composition like this just isn't the kind of creativity that comes your way every day. I mean...I'm not here to tell ya that "A Hazy Moon" isn't likely to make it on the airwaves of your favorite radio-station – but that's not why songs or records like this are made for in the first place. Albums like this are a celebration of the creative freedom within the art of making music and a genuine love of the craft – that's how you reach fearless moments like what you'll hear on "A Hazy Moon." Is it odd? Sure! Why not say that? It is. Not so far out of left field that fans of what they just heard on "Moonrise" wouldn't continue on...it's not that extreme of a departure, but it is noticeably different than so much of the music you'll find out there on the shelves these days. And I'll be damned if I don't support that or embrace it when it's coming straight at me from the speakers like Sienná's "A Hazy Moon" – maybe I can't sing along with it or dance to it, but just try to convince me that music isn't crucial for just about a million other valid reasons. I'd be lying to ya if I said I knew when the perfect time to put a song like "A Hazy Moon" on would be – but I'd also be lying to ya if I didn't say it's the bizarreness in the composition that's part of its overall allure. My ears eat up a song like this one and send my brainwaves into the maze of sound, just as happy to be wandering & lost in the moment as I would be to figure it all out somehow if I could. Which I can't, and that's okay. I felt like each time I listened to "A Hazy Moon" I got something new & unique to experience, like looking at a prism yields endless dimensions of color, this song reveals several layers of depth that continually catch your ears with some form of inspired or creative sound at all times.

I will say this...when Sienná gets everything to fit into its right place, it'll always stands-out, even amongst so many creative endeavors in the songs surrounding it. More or less, that's how I instantly felt about the dreamy sounds of "Wesak On Mt Kurama" and the immaculate melody to be found within the layers of imaginative ideas floating in space around it. While I'm a complete fan of the beauty to be found here throughout this entire tune...moments like the spot just past the three-minute mark still stand-out as a huge highlight...something with that extra boost of atmospheric energy & sound around the 3:35 mark...or the relentlessly charming & curious sound of the piano tones that are found at the heart of "Wesak On Mt Kurama" – there are endless reasons this song makes an immediate connection. Noticeably, the vocals get introduced here...and perfectly introduced at that. Sienná isn't about to start going Pop on ya and get a series of catchy choruses flowing on *Moon Rituals* – she plays it much smarter than that and stays true to the art she's creating by having her vocals play a starring-but-supportive role. As in, of course you'll notice them – but you'll also notice that nothing is being traditionally sung like any kind of verse/chorus/verse tune...Sienná has audibly become an instrument in the design of songs like "Wesak On Mt Kurama," becoming entirely essential in tying the full scope & melodic concept together. This song has that same kind of mesmerizing/hypnotic ability that a music-box takes hold on you with; I found "Wesak On Mt Kurama" to be a seriously captivating cut I never wanted to take my ears off of.

Similar in terms of its major strengths – the piano at the beginning of "Moon In The Water" is one of the album's strongest overall moments and enticing gateways into any of the tunes you'll find in this lineup. With its combination of synth-string sounds rising & falling alongside the piano and Sienná's impressive use of space throughout this song, she fully reveals just how skillful she can be in the art of subtlety. For all its simplicity or sparseness of sound, the impact of every note is immeasurable...*"Moon In The Water"* appears as fragile as it does bold, as breakable as it is beautiful. To myself personally as an avid fan of Sienná's music, I'd be tempted to put "Moon In The Water" right up there with some of my other favorites from her catalog...I think this song has an admirable level of expressive & evocative melody that brings the entire mind, body, and soul on a journey well worth taking. In terms of tangible melody that the everyday listener can latch onto...I'd probably argue that there's more to be found just under the surface of "Moon In The Water" than people will find on most tunes likely...which should play to this song's advantage. Despite being a slow tune, which is generally always a harder sell to the public ears, "Moon In The Water" compensates for its tempo through a radiant array of breathtaking contributions and complementary sounds. Like the shimmering reflection of the "Moon In The Water," every so often you'll notice the melody bubble straight to the surface and realize how much it's been there the whole time – I think Sienná has done an award-worthy job with this song and created another strong highlight in her catalog overall. The piano is absolutely exquisite. 100% charming and completely immaculate.

"Tsukiyomi" would be another complete favorite of mine from *Moon Rituals*...it's outright exceptional in every way if you ask me. For you see dear readers, dear friends...there are songs you want to listen to in an effort, and there are songs where you want to squish your whole face right up against the speakers to in an effort, and those are every morsel of sound they have to offer – and that's what you get with "Tsukiyomi." The incredible drum sounds in this song alone are worth the price of admission, but you'll also find that the selection of vibrant & neon elements in the mix along with endless amounts of entertainment through frequency, texture, and tone. As if you needed any more reasons to want to listen already, lemme continue on & give you another – because really, the main strengths of a song like "Tsukiyomi" are found in the professional control Sienná applies to this cut's composition, structure, movement, and pace...it's another song where it's every bit as much about what's not being played as what is – that's how she's able to make such a magnificent impact in the most delicate ways. I'll go into this all a bit more by the end when talking about "Crescent Moon" later on, but you'll notice how "Tsukiyomi" increases the range of depth, sound, mood, and atmosphere in this lineup of songs. Regardless of whether or not these more ethereal or eerie compositions become the people's favorite or not, there's inherent value in more diversifying the set-list with imaginative ideas like these – songs like "Tsukiyomi" stand-out strong for their true direct cadence and contribute to the record's versatility. The chilled-out world of sound created by Sienná takes a decidedly stranger twist with "Tsukiyomi" for sure, but in my hearts of hearts, I can only hope that the people out there are seeking out something authentically interesting & challenging to the typical conventions of songwriting & sound like I am. I can recognize that a track like this probably isn't for everyone out there...but if you're the audiophile type...if you dig on compositions that endeavor to be as unique as possible, you'll love what Sienná creates here.

"The Harvest Moon – Viewing Banquet" was definitely one of the more adventurous and artistic cuts on *Moon Rituals*...or at least, that's how I heard it personally. You could identify so many incredible elements & influences here in this composition...from its graceful ballroom atmosphere, to the subtle & compelling tribal-esque drums, to the virtually impossible-to-define sounds Sienná's gathered along the way, "The Harvest Moon – Viewing Banquet" sways in & out with an avant-garde, jazz-like precision. When the piano comes twinkling into the mix just prior to the two-minute mark...you'll notice that Sienná's not concerned so much with perfect tones there as she is with perfect expression. I'll go into this later on at the end of the review in discussing "A Pale Morning Moon" as well, but suffice it to say for now that, these aren't mistakes you're hearing – these are purposeful choices. As to how we hear these moments or respond to them...well...that'll be an individual thing I suppose, suited to your own personal tastes, but for myself, I highly enjoyed moments like hearing the stressed-out melody of the piano come crashing to an end and how that contrasted brilliantly with the rest of the chilled-out sound of the music & emotions found on "The Harvest Moon – Viewing Banquet." Overall though, I found myself more impressed by Sienná's ambitious creativity here than perhaps anything else; like I've been saying from the get-go here, she's not sticking to the script, walking any kind of trail already blazed by others, or on any kind of a mission to make the MTV generation happy – she's on a quest to wake up the rest of the people out there looking for more of a sensory experience in the music they listen to. And you know I've got total love and respect for that... Sienná's carving out her own niche in music's history.

Shivers. "Snow, Moon, Flowers" is freakin' magnificent. I love the icy soundscapes that Sienná has tapped into throughout this crystalline composition and the orchestral inclinations you'll find it takes on at the beginning. Lots to love here once again, technically "Snow, Moon, Flowers" is the longest track on *Moon Rituals*, but every element threaded into the mix stacks up big time for enticing entertainment. For real though...listen to the music...listen to the vocals...listen to the way Sienná plays with timing & style on this tune and how extraordinary this song becomes as a result..."Snow, Moon, Flowers" is the kind of song that makes it completely clear that she's an artist that thinks about music on a whole other level than most ever will. This is where the art of music becomes like more like solving a puzzle where the picture isn't clear at all at first...

Sienná had to visualize where she would fit into the image of this melody and did an exceptional job of bringing everything into focus by becoming the perfect piece we all needed to see this through her eyes. What I think is even more lovable about "Snow, Moon, Flowers" is that, if you were to look at it on paper, you'd quickly spot the complexities of its design – but to hear it...to hear how seamlessly and gracefully Sienná performs & structures this tune...is remarkable. And while a trickier track like this one, combined with its slower pace, wouldn't normally be my recommendation as a single...I felt like the degree of accessibility on "Snow, Moon, Flowers" was extremely high. Right on that border or Trip-Hop/Chill-out music, Sienná scores a huge win with a majority impressive, crossover sound that's as catchy as it is calm & serene. Again, in terms of next-level thinking and insightful, artistic compositions...I mean c'mon now people – how could you beat this? "Snow, Moon, Flowers," is endlessly inviting & smooth...Sienná hits the mark right on target here.

An artist with a genuine gift for being able to speak through her music without even saying a word, Sienná chants & sings her way through the opening of "Crescent Moon" and conjures up one of the most interesting mixes of pensive & intense beauty that you'll find on the lineup of this record. Of all tunes, "Crescent Moon" is likely going to be the cut that helps everyone appreciate the expansive range of emotions on *Moon Rituals* the most...in fact, I'd go as far as to say that, by comparison to her most smooth & serene moments, a track like "Crescent Moon" can even feel oddly uncomfortable at times. Hard to say what creates that completely...it's the kind of indefinable quality in music that clings right to your bones...even if you wanted to escape the pull towards this track, you couldn't...it holds you paralyzed & tracks intensely, gripped fully by the slow-burning intensity at the core of the melody. If you can think of tracks like...say like "A Warm Place" by Nine Inch Nails for example...different tunes of course, but that same magnificent use of movement & sound that captivates your mind completely. Some will interpret as eerie or haunting, others will connect to the beauty found deep within the layers of depth & melody, or appreciate the bold artistic design that "Crescent Moon" has – the bottom line is that Sienná is making music that's bound to provoke some sort of reaction, feeling, or response to. And if that ain't what making music & sharing it with others is really all about, then I have no idea what I'm actually doing here at all. It's that unique ability to transfer emotion, thoughts, and feelings through sound that makes artists like Sienná such a rare gem in our music-scene to be celebrated and treasured.

The warm glow of "A Pale Morning Moon" becomes the final send-off and last track from *Moon Rituals*. One of the rare moments where I wasn't 100% sure Sienná was going to find the solid ground we're so used to from her at the beginning, "A Pale Morning Moon" starts to really summon its strengths as it heads towards the second-minute and builds to its greatest highlights from there on. I mean...don't get me wrong...it's Sienná after all...I don't want anyone out there to think I was questioning her for even a remote second – I know beyond all things, that she'll always create something redeeming within any given song she writes. Still...even in knowing all that, I did raise an eyebrow or two over the inclusion of a couple raw notes in the melody of the piano on "A Pale Morning Moon" in terms of hearing how they jarred with the rest of the existing atmosphere soaring around them...but on the artistic & experimental level that I know Sienná thrives on, I fully understand how they got in there. As to what these noticeable off-notes might represent, or what they meant to the artist behind the music...that's probably anyone's guess – but I like the fact that you'll find sounds in "A Pale Morning Moon" that are polished enough to stand-out & cause some debate. One of my favorite songs of all-time for instance, a song called "Golden Porsche" by the band Mogwai, has one of the most hideous frequencies/notes inside of the most gorgeous melody you'll ever hear...I've even asked the band about its significance personally, but never gotten a response. Some things are perhaps best left unexplained and up to our own interpretation...and music is definitely one of those things. In any event, I suppose we're talking about a fraction of the song to begin with...the vast majority of what you'll find is uncompromised magnificence that sounds spectacular in its majestic shroud of melody, most of what you'll find on "A Pale Morning Moon" is unquestionably smooth and accessible to the people listening out there. Sienná is always going to get bonus points from me for her artistic courage...though I can also recognize that any kind of complexity in a song's design creates a potential barrier between the creator & the listeners out there. To me, the proof that the artistic merit and personal reward of making a record like *Moon Rituals* speak entirely for itself – the mere fact that this inventive album exists is all the evidence you should need to know that the experience in making it was fully worthwhile. It's worthwhile to listen to for sure – and arguably, in terms of creative-freedom, personal evolution, and artistic expression, it might just be even more rewarding to be the one responsible for putting this music out into the world for all to enjoy.

Spectacular sound in these songs and radiantly unique ideas flow through this entire set-list; it's another album full of innovation & imagination from Sienná, and further confirmation that her insightful, next-level approach to composition has her leading the way for the rest of the artists out there to follow.

Find out more about Sienná from her official page at: <http://www.sienna-web.com>

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"I'm passionate about what I do, and just as passionate about what YOU do. Together, we can get your music into the hands of the people that should have it. Let's create something incredible."

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