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CULTURAL HISTORY: SIENNA'S ROMANTIC VISION FOR A POSTMODERN AGE

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A thousand years from now, historians will access musical recordings and videos of performances to understand what life was all about in the 20th and 21st centuries. Arguably, there's no better way to vicariously experience the lunacy that was the 1960s and 70s than listening to Pink Floyd's "Dark Side Of The Moon," or no more direct glimpse into the heart of a romantic than the latest disc by Passenger or Ed Sheeran. Put simply, musical compositions encapsulate passions and attitudes in a way that mere essays or news documentaries can't.

Another romantic soul worth listening to is European electronica artist Sienná, who is busy travelling the globe and documenting a life in love with beauty. Her most recent release, the single "I Know Why" is the first on her "Anneis" label, and a departure from her previous releases. With vocals by Sienná and Hallvard Gaardløes, the lovely tune begins with an ethereal guitar figure and a sound close to dreampop before venturing into a more experimental style. The single is Sienná's debut as producer and engineer as well. See and hear the video on you tube: <https://youtu.be/plMaMZNbcjs>

Born and raised in Japan but now situated in Norway, Sienná rebelled against the conservative norms of her childhood to pursue music; since launching her career she has toured all over Europe bringing alternate versions of her recorded music to audiences. From the beginning, Sienná partnered with producer Abon to release an EP and three full length records.

About the differences between her recorded music and what happens live, Sienná explains: *"We are three musicians on stage, and we always simplify them to the max, and also give a larger space for Hallvard (my bassist) and Vegard Lien (my keyboardist) to groove and improvise as they like. So, the audience may always expect something different than what they hear on the albums. I also experienced how much my music varies according to whom I perform with...I think especially house-music lovers tend to be surprised how groovy we are as a live band who does jazzy improvisations. It's just like extra spices on the grooves they dance to. Live music lovers tend to be surprised how unique we are. Well, the world of music has become pretty much crossover, though we can still surprise people. I love it."*

Cinematic and Danceable Soundscapes

Sienna's most recent full length album, *Japonesque* (2013) is true to her romantic vision, imbued with a poetic sensibility that celebrates the beauty in imagination, memories, and reflections on everyday life.

Sienná explains: *"I had been trying to combine "European" type of music and Japanese music in my weird electronic way since 2008. What I tried to do on the album "Japonesque" was to do it much better. I guess 'what one likes, one will do best' as Japanese say. The word 'Japonesque' means something characteristically Japanese, with influence of something European – like my music, as well as my personality. The main concept came from me being nostalgic about my hometown Kyoto. I am far away from home, but I close my eyes and see in my mind what I used to see. Sometimes I start to hear sound added to it like a movie scene. So I take a note of what comes to my mind with any synths available at that point – that is probably why it becomes electronic-based music. I believe I am best at forming my ideas with synths."*

The disc relies on a mix of sampled, digital and classic analogue synth sounds along with skillful guitar and bass, and features Sienná's characteristically tasty dance grooves along with cinematic, sublime experimental tunes and Sienná's exotic vocalizations. It seems ideal for play in many venues,

from home to public spaces. In addition to drawing upon the well-springs of imagination, Sienná is inspired by her travels, as is the case with the tunes "Gion" and "Fontabranda di Siena."

"It can happen wherever I am," she explains. "I heard sound when I was walking down on the Gion district in Kyoto, or when I was sitting by the fountain in Siena (Italy) named 'Fontabranda Di Siena.' Timing is always unpredictable, but yes, I think travel is certainly a very good way for me to collect impressions. The sound I hear first can be changed as it processes later, but the basis and its concept usually stay unchanged. It's interesting that you tell me about the medieval references. It's nothing conscious about it from my side, though very very true! I am basically an educated cultural historian, so I admire things and places with long histories and stories. Also, I like to use my imagination and pretend stepping back in time here and there. That may be why people call me 'an awake-walking day-dreamer' and 'a contemporary traditionalist?' I don't know."

The album reaches a point where Sienná's personal experiences intersect with universal experience in a cycle of four songs: "Tranquility (Black Tortoise of the North)", "Ascension (Azure Dragon of the East)", "Rest (White Tiger of the West)", and "Play (Vermilion Bird of the South)." These alternately soothing and danceable new jazz/electronica soundscapes combine atmospheric melodic elements with improvisation, resulting in sound paintings that engage the listener's imagination.

Sienna explains: *"The titles of the four songs represent what I used to do in each part of the town, combined with an image from the Four celestial guardians of Kyoto on the four compass directions – a kind of Feng shui concept the town was built upon. The northern part is a deep mountain area where I felt an endless tranquility. Sometimes I spent 'rest time' with my parents in the western part. I went to a school located in the eastern side, where I 'ascended.' And, I lived in the southern part. It was my 'playground.'"*

It's the sense of play that permeates the album that makes it so much fun to listen to; experimental but always melodic, "Japonesque" documents an artist at play, with the recorded medium as a canvas teeming with color.

The disc's lovely final track, "New Day," features lush pads, vintage analog drum sounds, tranquil piano and Sienná's baritone/tenor voice urging listeners towards "wonderland," where "we keep the dream." Like the rest of the album, it's a gorgeous sound painting depicting the life of a dreamer. "Japonesque," produced by Abon, features Sienna on keyboards and vocals, Hallvard Gaardløes on bass, and Abon on guitar. It has a lot to offer fans of jazz, pop and electronica who appreciate first rate musicianship and production, in a disc that engages the imagination and, at times, inspires you to put on your dancing shoes, or just chill out and enjoy. Get it on iTunes, Amazon, and hear it on Spotify. Find out more at www.sienna-web.com