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SIENNÁ'S Q.O.S.: POWERFUL, EXOTIC WORLD BEAT PSYCHEDELIA

APRIL 11, 2017 LEAVE A COMMENT

There's something very exciting happening in new music from Oslo, Norway. Sienná, the singer/songwriter/instrumentalist/studio w/ho and now DJ has gone solo for her fourth full length release, leaving her band behind, to create a new set of songs in the nu-jazz genre. She immersed herself in the studio for a couple years to create an album that's difficult to define; jazz is really just the starting point. On Q.o.S. there are various permutations of techno, ambient, world beat, electronic psychedelia and avant-garde, and a powerful experimental impulse that makes it a joy to listen to.

From the first song, the esoteric, ambient "Yes," Sienná's masterful composing and mixing skills are evident; next is the electro-psychedelic jazz funk of "World Citizens," which then leads to a set of synth-driven world beat tunes incorporating her Japanese heritage in the form of samples of traditional instruments, primal beats and chants, and top-notch keyboard work. The breathtaking diversity of the songs are stunning examples of musical cosmopolitanism, and very unique contributions to the electronica genre.



Much like the tarot card that inspired the title, the release evokes mystical, powerful ideas. I admit I didn't know what the title meant at first.

"It could be 'Quality of Service,' the god of the Edomites; hahaha or whatever (your) interpretation is," Sienná explains. "But mine comes from an amazing tarot card reader from the UK whom I speak with a few times a year. She said a Queen of Swords represents my personality. And my music is a double edged sword, isn't it? :)"

Indeed, there is a duality on Q.o.S.; many of the songs have a strong dance beat along with some trademark Sienná moves like energetic funky bass and primal chant vocals — all designed to get your feet moving, while a handful of

"I feel free like a bird and very happy about this. This is a completely new chapter for me." Sienná

tunes represent Sienná's reflective side in ambient, down tempo numbers that affect the heart and mind. Both varieties feature exotic instrumentation and intriguing samples of vocals and ethnic instruments along with mystical, wordless vocals by Sienná. I asked her if Brian Eno was a conscious influence.

"I guess so," she says. "I've been listening to Brian Eno occasionally, but I've been an eager fan of the next generation (like Ryuichi Sakamoto) who interpreted Brian Eno further — so, does it make me 'the third generation?' I can absolutely notice where the traditional roots are originally coming from, though."

Under Japanese Influence

As a Japanese expatriate living in Norway, who as a child rebelled against family expectations to become a musician, Sienná returns to her own roots on Q.o.S. with a series of songs that reflect her Japanese heritage. Is this nostalgia for home or an affirmation of her heritage? I asked her.

She explains: "Yes both, and the concept. Somehow I decided to make three songs relating to three major festivals around the major historical shrines around Kyoto ('Iwashimizu,' 'Aoi' and 'Kasuga'). But I must admit, the inspiration of 'Iwashimizu' came originally from a moment when I was in a little town named Lewes in East Essex, UK. But later, after I added some Japanese instruments etc, feeling of the song was something similar to what I feel about the place 'Iwashimizu'— home (until I moved to Norway in 1995)."

This trilogy of tunes, as well as "Sixth Sense" (with its incorporation of traditional Japanese texts and folk melodies) and "Eastern Plays" (which features a moving display of taiko drums along with vocal chants and cutting edge electronica) combine dance music with traditional Japanese influences, resulting in a long set of electronica that excites one's dancing impulses and one's mind at the same time. For example, the playful "Follow My Instructions" is just the kind of avant-garde dance number that's ideal for club action.

The album is the result of years of experience on the stage and in the studio, to the extent that it represents a synthesis of music theory and performing skills that have become second nature. Sienná explains: "There's no theory or conscious approach, except an approach that I feel is good, true and correct for me, even though it wasn't for most people/musicians. While I spend time with my unborn songs, I make many changes to make myself happy. So I guess you're just listening to the result of a long process of my self-improving (if it wasn't my self-centeredness — which I'm allowed to do so only in my music, not in reality)."

Q.o.S. is a true solo album: Sienná is responsible for every aspect of its creation, a departure from the ensemble she had worked with on previous albums and in live performances. "Only me now," she explains. "We are all good friends. But the circumstances around us changed dramatically. It doesn't make sense for me to be a part of the team anymore. I did all the work (songwriting, performing, producing, mixing, mastering and designing album cover) by myself alone. I feel free like a bird and very happy about this. This is a completely new chapter for me."

Sienná's setup includes heavy use of the Roland D-50, both for its sounds and as a MIDI controller connected to Logic Pro X software on a MacBook (which she also uses in her role as a DJ). Her favorite plug-ins for Logic Pro X are the ES2 and Alchemy soft synths, and the Drum Machine Designer. Lots of samples abound. For example, the incredible taiko drums on "Eastern Plays" were achieved by using a blend of sounds from Drum Machine Designer and actual taiko samples Sienná recorded in Kyoto from 2005 to 2009.

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