

Sia: Lady Croissant The Album Review

My first introduction to Sia came through the speakers of a seedy club I had no business being in. My teens played out in the early 2000s in Beirut, with its lax laws on everything including underage drinking. The obscure 2001 vocal house track *Drink to Get Drunk* featuring the introspective vocals of the Australian singer-songwriter never charted internationally, reaching 91 in the UK and only marginally higher in the Netherlands, but it quickly became a key backing track to my predictably confusing teenage years.

It wasn't until a few years later that I would hear *Breathe Me*. Released on her third studio album *Colour the Small One* in 2004 in the UK, it didn't find its way to mainstream airwaves and across now-defunct peer-to-peer file sharing networks until the album was re-released in the US in 2006. Piano-led, with painfully personal lyrics sung in low and gasped breathes, it's an understatedly powerful song, wholly identifiable in its honesty and vulnerability. Like many others, I lived vicariously through this and several of her other tunes that vocalized uncomfortably dark moments plainly, perfectly, and unapologetically.

Classic Sia tunes are sad songs sung in minor keys that manage to never cross from cathartic to Evanescence-styled self-indulgent fatalism, despite being pulled into albums with jarringly frank titles such as "Healing is Difficult" and "Some People Have Real Problems". Her songs are by trademark raw, real, and hauntingly beautiful. The lyrics excruciatingly honest, and her husky ethereal voice used with restraint to paint and emote carefully chosen words not showcase her enviable vocal range, except in surging transcendental glimpses. Her songs are crafted as a cathartic musical release and sung that way.

If the height of your musical education came by way of the past five years or so of radio, you would be forgiven for not knowing this. Born Sia Furler, she's on a first-name-only basis as the force behind most of the songs that have charted astronomical success in recent years.

New single *Elastic Heart*, a collaborative effort with The Weeknd and Diplo featured in the Hunger Games sequel *Catching Fire*, is currently making international waves. Her voice powerfully leads both David Guetta's hit tracks *Titanium* and *She Wolf*, as well as infectious club track of 2011, Flo Rida's *Wild Ones*.

This was incidental. Deciding to retire as a performance artist and become a full time songwriter instead, she penned dozens of chart-friendly hits from Rihanna's *Diamonds* to Celine Dion's *Loved Me Back To Life* and Ne-Yo's *Let Me Love You (Until You Learn to Love Yourself)*. Flo Rida and Guetta decided to keep her demo vocals on their songs, because sing she mostly certainly can.

In total the chanteuse's discography to date consists of five studio albums, two live albums, and 21 singles including the aforementioned three as a featured artist. There's a lot of variety to choose from and she's certainly gone in several different personal and artistic directions. As remarkable as her new work is both in catchy composition and vocal prowess - the best of Sia is her frank and brutal early ventures into uncharted emotional territory.

The 2007 live album *Lady Croissant* is the perfect introduction to classic Sia, or reintroduction to different renditions of her best work, depending on where you stand. Called a "mini-album" by her label, it's a collection of eight live tracks recorded during a concert at the Bowery Ballroom in New York a year prior and one new studio recording.

With a tight accompanying band and little audience atmosphere, it feels less like a live album as much as a well assembled overview of key moments of the singer's career that covers a lot of ground in not much time; one new studio track, one new live track, two from her time with indie-electro band Zero 7 that launched her early career, one from her solo debut album *Healing is Difficult*, three from *Colour the Small One*, and finally one cover tune – the Pretender's classic *I Go To Sleep*, given the Sia treatment.

The album starts off with the uncharacteristically carefree *Pictures*, the new studio recording, and quickly moves into live versions of the key singles off *Colour The Small One*. Modern classics *Don't Bring Me Down* and *Breathe Me* are moving and highly distinctive renditions, sung in drawn out consonants as Sia pulls power out of the words to the point that the lyrics don't really matter except as vehicles for raw emotion. Her vocal manipulation dances off the oddly named *Lentil* as well as *Destiny* from Zero 7 days, executed with the same mixture of powerful fragility.

To each his own but at least for me, context is key, and Sia's journey from wholly soulful broken songbird to the Max Martin of this generation is one highly worth exploring. Her style is haunting in its absolute inimitability and *Lady Croissant* is the Cliff's Notes to a lasting legacy.