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2023-01-18 Short Films on the Big Screen: The 2022 Sundance Short Film Tour

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SZA's SOS and Its Fifth Week On Top of the World: Album Review

Eliza Blythe, Volunteer Reporter

Grammy award winning R&B artist SZA spent her fifth consecutive week at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 for her second studio album, "SOS." The album, released Dec. 9, 2021, is one of only four albums that have spent at least five weeks at the top of the charts in 2022, including Taylor Swift's "Midnights" (five), Bad Bunny's "Un Verano Sin Ti" (13) and the Encanto soundtrack (nine).

Solána Imani Rowe, recording as SZA, released her debut studio album "Ctrl" Jun. 9, 2017 in a Hip Hop/R&B playing field mainly dominated by Grammy winning artists like Kendrick Lamar, Travis Scott and DJ Khaled who have already established themselves over the past few years in the industry. "Ctrl" became an instant hit with tracks like "The Weekend" and "Broken Clocks" which showcased a female's vulnerability in sexuality within a genre of music that has traditionally relied on lusts of men to sell records.

"SOS" has displayed a rawness similar to its predecessor, emphasizing the intensity of SZA's romances when under the public eye, as well as the constant praise and questioning of her body and body count that comes with the attention for her art.

The album cover mimics a paparazzi photograph taken of a seemingly isolated Princess Diana sitting on the diving board of a yacht during the last week of her life. Searching for serenity—yet painfully aware of the fact that cameras with millions of eyes wait eagerly to capture her every emotion, Diana is perched over the ocean and her soon approaching tragic fate. "SOS" is SZA's attempt to process the emotions of pain, pleasure, grief, desire, loss and success in her own words, all while living in the public eye. In a way, her connection to the Diana photograph offers a more hopeful outcome of her struggle to control her own voice in the spotlight of fame while simultaneously coming to terms with letting go of things outside her control.

Exploring paradoxes of reality and persona, love and hate, "SOS" takes listeners through a shocking twenty-three song long track list that takes listeners twisting and turning through different emotions and genres. In bass heavy songs like "Shirt" and "Forgiveness," pride in her success clashes with the fear of rejection. Icy vocals paired with her ability to spit bars makes for an impressive display of range for a sophomore album. Held together with ambition hit melodies, a diverse approach to genres and production makes for a collection of styles and an obvious act of collaboration between industry secret talents.



Natalie Schorr

“Kill Bill” is the first full length song on the album and one of the most popular after gaining attention on social media. With a floaty, smooth beat and catchy lines, it’s an easy hit with an even more sensational music video released Jan. 10, featuring the artist in a production based on the famous Quentin Tarantino film that the song and its title homage.

Taking inspiration from early 90’s martial art action films and comics, director Christian Breslauer wanted to fulfill SZA’s request to create a narrative heavy video for her fans who had gotten strands of narrative material in the past. The music video begins with a tragic betrayal where her man shoots up the trailer she’s in with a squad of men with machine guns. SZA’s quest for revenge takes her on a killing spree in search of the man who wronged her.

In contrast with the violence in the rest of the music video, a different song from the album, “Nobody Gets Me,” plays at the beginning of the video, reaching into a tenderness that is painfully obvious in the slow, drained vocals.

In between tracks there are some clips of conversation between SZA and her spiritual coach that I found to be some of my favorite aspects of the album. At the beginning of “Far,” over sounds of rolling waves, we hear her ask, “How do I deal with rejection? I am dealing with a lot of rejection right now., and it makes me feel very small.” The ocean is crashing as he answers, “Well that’s great if nobody wants you. You’re free.”

“SOS” sitting at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 for as many weeks as it has speaks to the album’s success, which is even more impressive given that it is a sophomore album. It would be no stretch to say that SZA can expect a lot of nominations come award season.