

Vienna Teng & Alex Wong

Musical kindred spirits, painting their songs with wide brushes on an impressive array of musical colors



“A brilliant, introspective diary of an album.”
— *American Songwriter*

“Masterful musicians and intriguing arrangers ...
songs that both mesmerize and mystify.”
— *Blurt Online*

“For those seeking meaning in music ... should not be
missed by any means.”
— *Stereo Subversion*

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Watching them onstage, you'd think that singer/pianist **Vienna Teng** and percussionist **Alex Wong** have been making music together all their lives. In fact it's only been a few years, but the chemistry of two kindred spirits is unmistakable. Together the duo have crafted a sound that the *Associated Press* calls “ambitious yet always tuneful...gorgeous and haunting.”

The two first met in 2002 at an open mic. “**Alex's** band played last,” **Vienna** recalls. “Their song was a masterpiece, the lyrics, the arrangements, everything. I went home feeling inspired and kind of intimidated, like I'd just found out how far I had to go.” What stuck in **Alex's** mind, though, was the epilogue. “I thought **Vienna's** music was beautiful, and I hoped we'd cross paths again at another coffeehouse or something. Then a few months later I turned on the TV and there she was, performing on **Letterman!** I just sat there thinking, ‘Who is this girl?’”

Both their careers have taken off since then. In addition to the *Late Show with David Letterman*, **Vienna** has appeared on NPR's *Weekend Edition* and the *CBS Early Show*, and toured with artists like **Shawn Colvin**, **India.Arie**, Duncan Sheik and the **Indigo Girls**. **Alex** has produced records for celebrated singer/songwriters **Ari Hest** and **Amber Rubarth**, as well as his own project **The Paper Raincoat** (recently a featured artist on iTunes), and won Best Original Score in the L.A. Weekly Theater Awards for his work on *Everyman For Himself*. When his busy schedule finally allowed him to join **Vienna** on tour in 2007, “something clicked,” she says. “The songs came to life in a way they never had before. It was like a whole new dimension opened up.”

When time came for **Vienna** to record her next album (her second for Rounder Records), it made perfect sense for **Alex** to produce it as well. Their first studio collaboration, *Inland Territory*, was released in April 2009 to glowing reviews: *American Songwriter* hailed the “brilliant, introspective diary of an album,” while *Blurt Online* (formerly *Harp Magazine*) lauded its “sheer effervescent beauty” and songs that “demand repeated exploration.” “For those seeking meaning in music,” *Stereo Subversion* wrote, “[*Inland Territory*] should not be missed by any means.”

The pair recorded the album over five months and in four cities, with instrumentation ranging from found-object percussion to woodwind ensembles to polyphonic choirs. “It was a kind of an overachiever project,” **Vienna** says with a laugh. “We had this really diverse set of songs—some were inspired by reports on polar ice caps and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; some wanted to be orchestral; some felt like they should be recorded live in an old parlor; some wanted to be prog-rock epics. And we honored the wishes of every one.”

Doing justice to a lushly textured record is a challenge for any live band, let alone one comprised of just two members on stage. “I've always appreciated bands whose shows don't just regurgitate the record back to you note for note,” **Alex** says. “Our approach is ‘the record is the record; the live show is the live show.’ Each should be compelling in its own right.”

Using an array of instruments both common and exotic, along with looping pedals and effects—but no pre-recorded tracks of any kind—the duo veers from intimate to epic and back again, ethereal one moment, fiery the next. Sometimes their classical training shines clearly, in Vienna's intricate piano work or Alex's carefully choreographed percussion arrangements. Other times it's their love for an ever-widening range of genres: folk, pop, jazz, country, even atonal modern music.

Always, though, it's about the song. “Songwriting doesn't end with chords and a melody—it continues through the production choices we make in the studio, the arrangements we play live,” **Alex** says. “**Vienna's** lyrics are full of depth and detail, and everything I do musically is about enhancing their meaning, creating a world for them to live in.”



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