

Sarah Slean

By: Kelly Thompson

Sarah Slean walks onto the stage in her signature style, with delicate bare feet and donning a shimmering dress. After settling her tiny frame in front of the keyboard, she leans into the microphone to make a few witty jokes before launching into her first song. The room goes quiet under the spell of her voice. Sarah Slean is not your typical Canadian songstress, but rather, has found success as an indie talent who both sings and writes her own music, that is, when she finds the time between her painting, poetry and acting career. "Music will always be my first love, but there is no hard and fast division between art forms for me. It all comes from the same place, that window through which we are able to look out from the finite world into the infinite."

If only the world knew how close it came to losing such a national treasure, just a few years ago. After the booming success of her *Night Bugs* album in 2002, when Slean was just twenty-five years old, she questioned if she was meant to live as a musician. She chose to move to a remote cabin near Ottawa, secluding herself in the forest of her beloved country. "It had gotten to such an intense place because I was so sure that music was my calling, but I could not abide the way it was happening in my life touring, the vanity and superficiality of the business, the exposure to the world's judgment, the pressure and scrutiny I just couldn't philosophically get behind it and it was ripping me apart." But after several months of seclusion, Slean emerged more determined than ever to return to her craft. "When all the artifice is stripped away and the million eyes/opinions evaded, I naturally create. Effortlessly, thoughtlessly, like breathing. That was all the answer I needed. After all the false skins were removed, I was, at ground, an artist." Shortly afterwards, Slean created 2004's *Day One*, another raging success, and has been delivering a series of hits ever since.

Even with such wide-ranging musical success, Slean remains determined to tour through the country she loves, making the rounds not only to major city centres, but smaller Canadian towns like Nelson, BC and Elora, ON. With such rigorous touring schedules, Slean maintains that it is her loving audiences that create the perfect atmosphere to deliver her stellar shows. "The miracle of life itself! The spectacular phenomenon of existence, that I am able to go places all over this beautiful

country and play to people who want to hear me." She also jokingly admits to needing lots of water and the occasional bourbon to keep her energy high during the late nights.

Land and Sea, Slean's latest musical conquest, has two different sounds on separate albums, presenting them in one neat package. *Land* offers more upbeat tunes whereas *Sea* was played alongside a full orchestra, allowing for melancholic and sweeping melodies. "I noticed that the songs were dividing themselves into two very distinctly different camps: ecstatic, infectious, liberated pop, and philosophical, interior, contemplative hymns...In the past, I would have put them



on the same album, or tried to mix those aesthetics into the same song. But in this case, the two voices seemed so clear and fully ripened, that I thought mixing them would diminish both." Slean used two different producers for each album, allowing each to have their own separate sound but ensuring they complemented one another, ultimately resulting in an album that will receive endless hours of play on your iPod. Alas, only Slean herself can truly explain the beauty behind her music. "I provide an open channel, a clear path, because there's something in your body, an intelligence, that knows exactly what it's after. It hears the song not yet born, or the image not yet painted... Some complete songs have come to me like that. And they feel like letters from the universe itself." If Slean's songs are indeed letters from the universe, then the cosmos must look very fondly upon her.