Life

EXPLORING THE FLEETING SELF ON ELENA TONRA'S 'SAVE AS'

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Ex:Re, also known as Elena Tonra's second studio album "Save As." The album released on Oct. 30.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ELENA TONRA ON FACEBOOK

The soft, echoing singing voice of Elena Tonra is most associated with the English dream pop trio Daughter. For over 15 years, Tonra has fronted the band as its lead vocalist and guitarist in a handful of melancholic releases.

In comparison, Tonra's solo work, released under the name Ex:Re, is less explored. Outside a breakup inspired self-titled record in 2018, Tonra's output has predominantly stayed within Daughter — until now.

After almost eight years of absence, Tonra returned as Ex:Re with the release of "Save As," released on Friday, Oct. 30. Where Tonra's writing focused on feeling the absence of love in her debut, she gets even more internal on her sophomore endeavor, where she reflects on identity and its ephemerality.

The jangly opener "Radio Station" centers on a constantly shifting persona that lacks grounding. The chorus unravels with the mantra, "I am a changin' radio station / I'm suddenly another, suddenly another," where Tonra glides through the dissociative words more smoothly than the pining verses.

The track is almost unexpectedly loud, with a deluge of synths and organ pulsating throughout the verses. The passionately drawling vocals in these moments present Tonra trying to hone in on physical spaces to compensate for the confusing mental one she's trapped in.

The third track "Am I Even Real?" complements the feelings of the opener. The repetition of the title throughout is shockingly catchy, with Tonra's vocals dominating everything else in the mix. She calls out to a romantic partner, questioning whether they "wanna leave me now?" The question introduces a sense of self-consciousness and fear of letting go that informs the conflicted sense of self.

Things get the most desolate and lonely on the proceeding "Two Chords." Led by the ominous thrum of two piano chords, the track functions as a cycle of affirmations that, at best, tries to avoid excessive negativity.

Tonra's layered main vocals and overlayed backing vocals fixate on how "There's no one there, the doors are closed, the lights are checked, the plants are dead" along with a self-plea to not "assume the worst or the best." The punchy drums elevate the otherwise simple structure from a drowsy lull into weighty movement.

Tonra doesn't move the needle much with the title track, which sticks with slower progression picked up by a slamming snare drum. But the drift of her backing vocals adds plenty of texture, turning an otherwise underwhelming track into a lulling dreamy hit.

The general art pop ambiance shifts to a folk feel on "Wasp," consisting entirely of acoustic guitar. The direct narrative captures the experience of catching and releasing a wasp and what that reveals to the speaker. What begins as consolation from knowing " the rage I had portrayed in them / Was just a grief misunderstood," evolves in the last refrain, becoming the realization that "the rage I have contained / Is just a grief misunderstood."

"Wasp" portrays a quiet, caring moment that reflects a growing clarity and optimism that was sought after toward the album's beginning. The growth in positivity flows perfectly into the proceeding "Language of Love," a reverb-heavy track that captures the immensity of loving someone wholly. The words blend into one another without strict structure, ending with the echoing thought of "How can we know / How deeply this flows back in time? / Your soul and mine."

The closer "Healing (Slow)" concludes the quiet movement toward a sense of solace. The guitars, drums and synths feel muffled with a sense of reverence as Tonra reflects on the things said and unsaid while processing loss. But despite the audible weight of loss, everything settles optimistically with a commitment to "let the elements subside, calm my grieving mind / I Have my mother by my side, and we are healing."

In only 33 minutes, Tonra's "Save As" spotlights a beautiful, mature transformation through intense self-reflection. Whether through the chaotic disorientation of the unexpectedly loud first half or the quieter ruminations and revelations in the second, her words always land, and the sound is never boring.

Rating: 3.75/5

SUBOG Weekly Events:

October 19th – November 8th

November 4th – GTA VI Trivia @ 7:00 pm in the Student Union Theatre

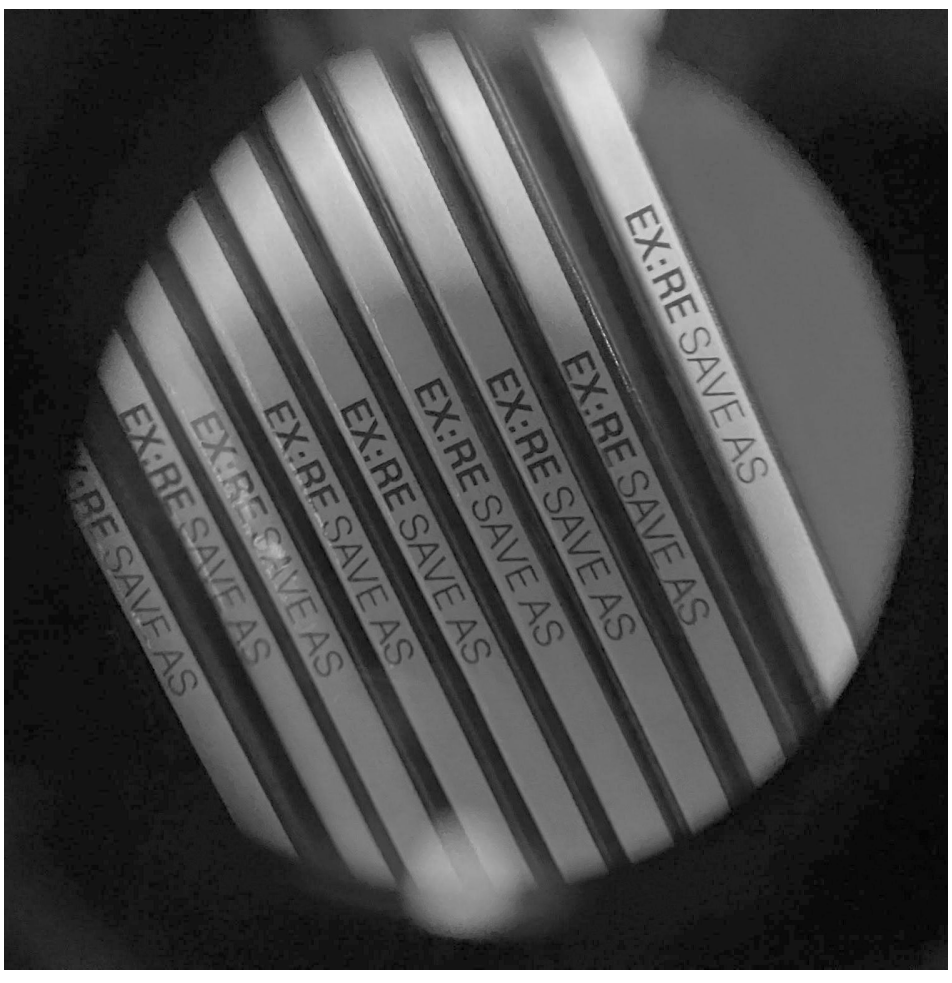
November 5th – Coffee House @ 4:30 pm at the Benton Museum

November 6th – Jersey Day @ 6:00 pm in SU 325

November 7th – Harvest Fest @ 12:00 pm on the Student Union Mall

November 8th – Amazing Race @ 11:00 am across campus

Any questions? Email subog@uconn.edu events!



Copies of Ex:Re's new album, "Save As." The album released on Oct. 30.

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