

# SYKAMORE

## *Pinto*

“Writing these songs put me through an emotional wringer,” says breakout Nashville newcomer Sykamore. “I was living in a new town and working with new people and going through all this change and self-discovery at the time. Looking back now, I can hear an entire chapter of my life in the music.”

‘Pinto,’ Sykamore’s exhilarating full-length debut, marks more than just a chapter, though. Recorded in Nashville with producer Michael Knox (Jason Aldean, Kelly Clarkson), the album represents both a beginning and an end, the culmination of a remarkable journey and the start of an even more promising one. The songs here are equal parts country and pop, mixing intimate reflection and empathetic storytelling with instantly memorable hooks and sing-along choruses that capture the emotional rollercoaster of youth and young love. The arrangements are eclectic and infectious to match, drawing on everything from George Strait to George Michael as they practically reach out and beg you to hit the highway with the volume up and the windows down. The result is a record all about honesty and vulnerability, about the strength and freedom we can unlock by embracing our truest selves, delivered by an artist who’s learned everything she knows from a lifetime of listening.

“Even before I started performing, music was always a means of escape for me,” says Sykamore. “When I was a kid, I came across this big box of cassette tapes in the basement that had all this amazing stuff like Michael Jackson and Elton John in it. It was like stepping into Narnia. I discovered all of these magical worlds to get lost in.”

As much as she fell for classic rock and 80’s pop, Sykamore always considered herself a country girl at heart. Born Jordan Ostrom in a small town outside of Calgary, Alberta, how could she not?

“All those clichés you hear in country songs, I lived them,” she laughs. “My parents met on the rodeo circuit, and I was raised on a cattle ranch. Country was the music of my people, and that laid the groundwork for me when I started writing my own songs.”

It didn’t take long for those songs to start garnering some serious attention in Canada. In 2014, Sykamore won the ATB All-Albertan Song Writing Contest, and the following year, she was nominated for prestigious CCMA Discovery Award. Soon, she had her music featured on national television and was sharing bills with the likes of Miranda Lambert and Josh Ritter. Sykamore’s biggest break, however, didn’t come onstage, but rather online, when songwriting heavyweight Rhett Akins came across her music on Twitter.

“I read her name, I was curious,” Akins said in an interview. “I saw her face, I was intrigued. I heard her voice, I was done.”

At Akins’ invitation, Sykamore joined the roster of Home Team Publishing (which Akins founded along with his son, country star Thomas Rhett, his manager, Virginia Davis, and Roc Nation/Warner Chappell) and relocated to Nashville in 2018. There, she released her first EP, ‘Self + Medicine,’ which garnered more than a million streams on Spotify and helped land her both a record deal and a spot in CMT’s coveted “Next Women

of Country” class for 2020. Nashville, it seemed, was embracing Sykamore in a big way, but privately, she wondered if she was doing the right thing.

“After the EP came out, I had this crisis of identity,” she confesses. “I grew up loving so many different genres that I just didn’t know where I fit in. The more I tried to write other kinds of music, though, the more country everything ended up coming out. It turned out to be the best way for me to realize that I was right where I belonged.”

When it came time to record ‘Pinto,’ Sykamore didn’t shy away from dressing those country songs up in ecstatic pop production. Over the course of three separate sessions at Nashville’s Treasure Isle studio, she cut basic tracks live with a full band lineup that mixed 80’s synthesizers with muscular electric guitar and larger-than-life drums. It was a sound Sykamore had in her head ever since she wrote the album’s title track, a soaring earworm that spins a used car into a clever metaphor for new love.

“The Pinto always fascinated me because it was such a disaster of a car,” she laughs. “It had a reputation for exploding and being easily flammable, and I couldn’t help but draw a connection between that and a lot of young relationships, which are so hot and heavy and combustible.”

That mixture of humor and heart is a fixture in Sykamore’s writing, which lives for sly wordplay and subtle winks. The tongue-in-cheek “Local Singles” raises a glass to the unattached, while the stripped-down “California King” cuts a self-absorbed egotist down to size, and the dreamy “Record High” is an ode to the power of music itself.

“My whole life, listening to music has been catharsis and therapy for me,” Sykamore says. “I wanted to write a fun thank you to music for being a support system that was always there when I needed it.”

Playful as the record is, it’s also a showcase for Sykamore’s boldly honest self-reflection. The mesmerizing “Where To Find Me” looks at the darkness that can consume us and the loved ones who can save us from it, while the piano-led “Out Of Luck” questions if we ever get a second chance at true love, and the Fleetwood Mac-esque “Go Easy On Me,” which Sykamore penned with songwriting icon Liz Rose (Taylor Swift, Carrie Underwood), lays all its cards down on the table for an ex who’s already moved on.

“There’s this unspoken rule that women can’t let their guard down,” says Sykamore, “but that’s just not realistic. I let my guard down all the time, and I wanted this record to show that vulnerability, to show that it’s okay to be yourself and share that with the world. I took Sykamore as my stage name because it’s a tree that’s tenacious and strong and has roots that ground it any weather, and that’s how I want my music to make people feel.”

It’s ultimately that embrace of self that defines ‘Pinto.’ It’s an album unafraid to live in the moment, to take the hurt with the happiness, to appreciate who you are in all your flawed, mixed-up beauty. The record may be a chapter in Sykamore’s life, but her story’s only just begun.