

THE SWISS MIX



Andra Borlo channels an ethereal avant pop fueled by woodwind and strings —and the voice of an edgy enchantress; Eliane strums acoustic guitar, her voice wafting over latin percussion with the knowing silky precision of a bossanova princess. They are both Swiss, both New Yorkers, both working musicians with an impressive array of collaborators spanning the realms of rock and jazz. When they join forces it's a Swiss Mix called Swiss Miss where an adventurous brouhaha of Swiss folk tunes come unraveled into a mélange of blues, reggae, jazz—and who knows what else? We caught up with Eliane one half of the Misses after they got back from doing a tour of Arizona and California...

How did you two find each other?

We met here in New York, I was in a bar and someone dragged Andra over "you're Swiss--you've got to meet Eliane—" Then we found out we had a mutual friend also, (Meret, the drummer from Shrine for The

Black Madonna)--so the three of us hung out. I told Andra about how I had arranged some Swiss folk songs for the Wilhelm Tell Festival in New Glarus (organized by Swiss Roots). She has a lot of initiative and energy — we were hired to do the Festival and it was really a good match because there is always so much organizing to do, booking the gigs ourselves, writing letters, press—everything that needs to be done. It was really a relief not to do it all by myself—that's how we started working together.

Tell me about the music

Basically it came out the way I like it. I like Brazilian music and I like latin music and I guess it's just Eliane-ish—the way I would also write my music. Some people like it and some people not so much—so far we've really had a great response. In Switzerland the audience ranged from senior citizens to teenagers and they all had fun.

Some songs I already knew from growing up--I knew them 'naturally' and kind of thought I could do something with that--I also did a little bit of research and found very beautiful melodies in Swiss traditional music some even from the middle ages. A lot of them, however, were too patriotic or too 'oompa oompa'—Switzerland is not really a country where you find rhythm in traditional music, however we have these awesome instruments like the alphorn or the hackbrett and its really interesting sounding stuff —and we have yodelling in these natural scales, and some of these melodies are so beautiful...

[Gantertal.mp3](#)

So I pretty much went with what spoke to me and also what was lyrically funny. There were a bunch of fun lovesongs. I took them and tried to see what I could do with the melodies... It was not always easy, because (like most folksongs) a lot of these songs have just three chords, so it was challenging at times to do something more elaborate. For example Ramseiers is a song about these guys out in the field and after working the fields they have to mow the lawn. I never knew what to do with this song -- then it came to me 'it's all about grass!' so I made it a reggae song...

[Ramseiers.mp3](#)

Another song called 'Stets I Truure' which means "always sad"— I turned it into a sort of a blues song because somehow the melody and the lyrics just asked for it. Often while listening back and forth, the rhythm just comes to it and that's how it developed. I was under time pressure because I had to put together a whole repertoire for the festival, which sometimes is not bad -- you have to work.

[Stets I Truure.mp3](#)

What's your own individual music like?

My stuff is sort of 'singer/songwriter' its very much latin/brazilian influenced it also has of course jazz and blues in it.

[Let Me Explain.mp3](#)

Andra is what she calls "alternative pop"—which is these very beautiful arrangements with oboe, piano and cello

[Lullaby.mp3](#)





Eliane performs



Andra Borlo on stage, solo

Was your childhood musical?

My parents weren't musicians--nor is anyone in my family. I didn't consciously grow up with music but my dad had a very nice voice and he and my mom would always sing with us, but very eclectically—like campfire songs. But my mom made sure that we learnt an instrument. My sister started playing guitar so we had a guitar at home and I started playing guitar pretty much. I'd have played piano if there was a piano around. I guess I was exposed to every type of music. My sister and brother are older and they would listen to all the 70s type stuff, Pink Floyd to Bob Marley, to Abba to whatever Swiss rock music... or European stuff. My dad had jazz music; we had one LP with Billie Holiday on one side and Ella Fitzgerald on the other side. We had one LP with Louis Armstrong and one with Elvis—I didn't perceive it as jazz music--I just knew that was music. So growing up, I listened to all kinds of stuff and as a teenager I'd go through a hippie phase—with the whole Woodstock album, hard rock, punk anything you know...

When I was seventeen I had a wonderful guitar teacher, he turned me on to Paco de Lucia. And this CD with Paco and Al diMeola and John McLaughlin turned me onto 70's jazz rock and from that to Miles Davis and from that I discovered Jazz sort of backwards. And I always loved Brazilian music.

So how is it to be a working musician in New York?

Oh it's awful! You have to be crazy to be a working musician in New York. The good thing is that there is always the possibility of working with awesome musicians. And there are so many that, for example, tomorrow I have to play and I don't even have my band together, but I'm not even worried because I know that I can call up someone —someone's going to be available and they're going to be awesome! So that's the great part, it's a joy to play with musicians here because it just sounds great. But then the not so great part is that you run into bad conditions—because there are so many. It's really hard, especially if you do original music, then you have circumstances like a club gives you a spot, if you're lucky you can play somewhere but

then you have to bring all your people, do all the PR and even give the club money to play there—so usually I end up paying my band and making no money or even losing money... I balance it out between cocktail receptions and lounges where I break even--so I can actually afford to play my original music! Being a musician in NY also helps you to play in other places, it still gives you a good reputation.

What sort of reception did you get while you were on tour?

It was very funny, people kept asking what are you singing? What language is that? Where are you from? In Swiss communities sometimes it was risky, you know a lot of those elderly people know these songs and we've played around with them—and it could be "what are you girls doing with these songs?" but they were really open. And if you think of it, someone who leaves their country to live in another— and stays there, well it speaks to their character. There's somewhat of an adventurous spirit, a certain kind of "expat character" so to speak...

We had mostly a warm reception--though in LA it was suggested we adapt to a more "LA" style-- whatever that's supposed to be... I suppose they meant playing covers to get the crowd more warmed up--but that's not what we came for...



Do you ever play covers?

On my own, sure, but as Swiss Miss we play the rearranged folk tunes and then to stretch the repertoire we play Andra's or my original material. So it's also a platform to feature us as individual artists.

Are your folk songs mainly Swiss German?

So far yes—but for the CD we're recording right now I wanted it to be more "universally Swiss" so I looked into French and so far I have one French song, one Italian and one Rumantsch . But I'd like to do more of these, I just haven't had the time to research yet...

Our CD is coming out in Fall this year and it's featuring a whole bunch of female Swiss singers with ages

ranging from early twenties to late sixties from different parts of Switzerland.

We have a yodel queen, an opera star, a soul-singer, a rocker, a jazz singer. Some of them are really famous in Switzerland, and all come from all over Switzerland, like Ticino or the Rumantsch speaking parts. They are pretty diverse too: Nubya for example has Swiss-Nigerian Roots; Jamie Wong-Li is Swiss-Chinese; Emel is Swiss-Turkish—so it's different ages, different backgrounds, different languages, different styles—and Swiss music that's not exactly Swiss music—it should be quite interesting.

When is this happening?

We started recording in Woodstock. I laid down the rhythm section and then we're going back to Switzerland to Dex Music in Basel and we'll record the singers there and add in instruments like the alphorn and the hackbrett .

Can you yodel?

No—I trained so hard (in my singing lessons) to get rid of that break in the voice and you need that for yodelling. So I'd have to retrain to get it back. I haven't found a teacher for that yet, but I will learn! It's another project...

For more information about Swiss Miss please visit:

<http://myspace.com/swissmisses>

<http://andraborlo.com>

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