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POP NEWCOMER CULTTASTIC: “MY BRAIN IS ITS OWN CULT”



By Halley Bondy
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Culttastic is a dazzling new moniker in electropop. Hailing from Houston via Ukraine, the solo producer has dropped an ethereal noise cover of “Teach Me How To Dougie,” a single with both witch house and J-pop mixes, and a globe-spanning electronic mixtape.

The former gymnast/figure skater is now destined for a massive, very eclectic future on the MPC – so when she won our Artist of the Week competition, we had to ask: how did she get so damn culttastic?

Here’s what she had to say.

1. Where did the name Culttastic come from? Do you aspire to be a fantastic cult leader?

Culttastic is based on the words 'cult' and 'fantastic.' I used the word 'cult' to represent that my work is intensely attractive in an honest way, like a cult film. The word 'fantastic' has to do with producing mental images, a fantasy, an alternate reality. My brain is its own cult, thing-in-itself.

2. Do you incorporate your gymnastics/figure skating routine into your work as a musician?

I’m always trying to connect disparate components in order to produce something harmonious – like performing contortions during a DJ set. Now I’m trying to create that hybrid with my music through videos and images.

3. If you hadn’t been injured, would you continue to compete instead of doing music? Or would you be doing both?

Both are close to my heart. I do not sacrifice any of my passions for the sake of the others. Figure skating, rhythmic gymnastics and music tap into different parts of my mind to complete me as an artist. I also studied aerial hoop performance when I lived in Los Angeles. I really miss spinning on a hoop suspended in the air.

4. When and why did you leave Kiev?

My family immigrated when I was almost two years old. I grew up in Houston, speaking Russian at home.

5. Why Houston and Cambridge? How's the music scene there?

Houston has a tight community for niche electronic music in the Montrose area. I DJ there. My friends run a night called Haters Make Us Famous. I haven't noticed a music scene in Cambridge because I moved here to pursue a graduate degree. I'm currently learning video production. This semester I'm also studying psychology, focusing on the relationship between creativity and psychopathology.

6. What do you like about J-pop? Any favorite artists? How about K-pop?

Electronic music from Japan takes me to a very energetic, dreamy, magical place. Tomoko Kawase, Yasutaka Nakata and Tripple Nipples really inspire me. I hyperlink through online videos and read various blogs: The Burning Ear, Telephant and Kiyoshi Online are amazing. My friend Steven Clark introduces me to so much new music.

8. Do you believe that music is becoming increasingly global – meaning, that westerners are beginning to embrace pop music from other parts of the world?

While information is easily available through the Internet, I think people often continue to do what's easy and what is routine: visiting the same websites and listening to the same stations. I admire Timothy Leary, who spent his entire life conquering routine and traveling. I try to stay fun and erratic and inquisitive, which brings me to interesting music.

9. If you could be someone else for a day – a famous person – who would you be and why?

I would love to be Aldous Huxley for a day. I am curious to experience his insights and understanding of the world as my own. I also wouldn't mind being director of the CIA so I can learn all about the extraterrestrials. But just for a day, since most of all I want to always remain myself.

10. Who's awesomer – Janelle Monae or Hatsune Miku?

Janelle Monae is incredibly beautiful and talented. I don't think it's fair to compare Hatsune Miku to any human. Hatsune Miku is a beautiful statement about the modern pop star: performers are worshiped, even though their performances result from calculations that are prepared by designers, songwriters, choreographers, animators and programmers. I find comfort in knowing that she's an idea that's not meant to be "real," because nothing about the way that mainstream pop music is presented is real.

11. What's next for Culttastic?

I'm going to film and edit a music video for Nu Depth, Dylan Mulshine this weekend. As a separate project, we're also making an art installation of mazes, infinite mirrors and clowns. It will be an interactive adventure for viewers.

My older brother Alex is a brilliant musician, and he's the one who first encouraged me to start writing music. I'm excited to make a mixtape for his TuneDome blog that will premier on December 4 on LukeKelvin.com.

I'm working on a paradoxical album. Each song will have two versions, two moods, two perspectives. I can be serious and laugh at everything simultaneously. I can be mentally defocused and very sharp at once. That's how I created two polar opposite versions of "I'm the Night."

I am accepting offers to play shows and DJ sets at SXSW in Austin and Miami Music Week. I also have tentative plans to tour during fall of 2012.

Photo Credit: Alex Nguyen

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