

Elin, Swedish Voice & Brazilian Soul

Contributed by Ernest Barteldes
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This versatile multilingual vocalist was born in Sweden, but you would never know it by listening to her. Elin's style has a strong Brazilian influence even when she is belting out standards like Gershwin's "Fascinating Rhythm" or her own compositions, as heard on her debut CD, *Lazy Afternoon* (Blue Toucan Music).

By listening to her disc, one notices that Brazil seems to have a special place in her heart, as she takes on tunes like Ary Barroso's "Aquarela do Brasil" and Jobim's "Bonita." Even originals have a certain touch that reflect the music that she fell in love with early in her teens.

On this interview, conducted via e-mail as she prepared for a concert in The Arturo Sandoval Jazz Club in Miami, Elin talked about her beginnings, her career and her musical identity.

Your disc contains a lot of different influences, ranging from Brazilian to contemporary jazz. How do you see yourself as a vocalist?

It's pretty hard for me to categorize myself as a vocalist, as I think it's hard for many musicians to categorize their own sound. I can tell you this: I'm very influenced by Brazilian music and singers, as well as jazz vocalists and pop vocalists. I tend to perform quite a mix of Brazilian classics and other Brazilian songs that are known to Brazilians, but more obscure to American audiences.

Also, my love for American standards leads me to include many of those in my sets (and recordings). And lately, my shows tend to include my originals (some of which are on my album) and also songs from other countries, such as Italy, France, Sweden and Germany. So I guess I see myself as a vocalist who likes to sing beautiful songs in as many languages as possible. My approach tends to be jazzy, soulful and above all funky & rhythmic.

Tell us about your period in Brazil...

I was 15, on summer break from school in Sweden, and I was bored so I started rummaging through my parents record collection... I'd been studying music and instruments since I was 7, and was getting ready to start a music high school that fall to study classical music with clarinet as my principal instrument and piano as my secondary.

Well, that fateful summer day changed my destiny... I pulled out one LP only from the whole bunch and chose to play it for no particular reason whatsoever. But as soon as it started, time stood still. I had never heard anything like that before, but in some very strange way, I felt as though I'd been waiting my entire life to hear it... I was transfixed.

It was João Gilberto and Antônio Carlos Jobim. Some of the most incredible sounds I'd ever heard. I assumed it was jazz, and although I'd never liked the sounds of jazz before, I decided right there and then that I was going to be a jazz singer!

It was as if I knew my destiny right there and then was to become a singer of this music. So that was that. I immediately started studying jazz in any ways that I could, without realizing it wasn't exactly the same type of music.

It took a good 7 years before I finally made my first trip to Brazil and got back into the music that first put me on the "vocalist" path. Since then, I've been back to Brazil another 5 times and I try to go as often as possible, just to get another shot of that authenticity. You could say I'm obsessed with Brazilian music.

You speak many languages... how did that come to happen?

I was born and raised in Sweden, but my parents spoke English to each other and to us kids, so Swedish and English are my native tongues. When I was 12 my family spent a year in Costa Rica, which is where I learned Spanish. Upon our return to Sweden I started studying French and German in school and traveling through Europe, which solidified those languages.

At age 21 I was in an American college and decided to take Italian and also Portuguese so I could officially learn the language that I'd been singing in phonetically. That led me to my first trip to Brazil where I actually took a 6-week Portuguese course for credit. I maintain my languages mostly through conversing with many international friends and also learning new songs in those languages, and of course, traveling.

How have audiences received your disc, so far? What is the reaction when they see that you can sing in so many languages?

So far my CD has been very well received everywhere. In NYC the main jazz station, WBGO, gave it a lot of air play and built me a whole new following. I've had similar response from many jazz stations across the US. And also many requests from jazz stations around the world for copies of my CD.

I think, in general, people are intrigued by a person who speaks many languages. These days there are many people who are multilingual or at least enjoy listening to other languages, so I think it's fun for them to hear songs in a variety of languages and certainly it embraces and attracts the ethnicities who speak the languages I sing in.

How do you make your musical choices, and how did the music in Lazy Afternoon come together?

Well, again, I tend to pick lots of Brazilian songs, but I also pick songs from the American repertoire that inspire or intrigue me. And songs that have a central message or theme that I believe in are also important in my repertoire, such as "Feeling Good" or "Brother Can You Spare a Dime."

Then I always look to the city I'll be performing in to gauge what types of songs I think the locals will identify with. When it comes to other languages or cultures, I look for songs that are well-known in those countries or circles so as to connect with as many people as possible.

In *Lazy Afternoon*, the choice was up to me and the owner of the label who also co-produced the album. We knew it was going to be very Brazilian but we had to make it palatable to the American audience, so we chose some beautiful American tunes and did many of them as bossas or sambas, then added the Brazilian songs and my originals. We just needed to make sure that there would be a coherence to the album as a whole.

After this release, what do you see ahead in your career? Is there a new CD in the works?

Well, at the moment, I'm still just spreading the word about my first album by performing in as many countries and US cities as possible, both in clubs and festivals. So far later this year I'll be at the Peru International Jazz Festival, then several shows in Massachusetts and the Boston area, NYC of course, and Europe, Japan, the West Coast and the Midwest. I haven't started working on my next album yet, but I am starting to think about what should be on it.

The music business is going into an unexpected direction,.. how do you see this, and how does it affect you?

Who knows exactly what's going on and what it's going to lead to? For me, it makes me think that what I'm concentrating on at the moment is the most important thing: I'm doing live shows. I'm traveling all over to get the word out about my album and about who I am as an artist. There will always be a demand for live music, so I'm trying to stay tapped into that and do whatever is necessary to travel to places far and near where people want to hear this kind of music.

That's my goal at the moment. Along the way, I know there will be an opportunity to record what I'm performing, and I will welcome that chance when it comes along. Until then, I'm just focusing on making music and performing it as often as I can in as many places as possible. The word will spread. And I will continue to be happy making music and bringing people together.

For more information, visit <http://www.elinmusic.com>

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