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Finnish Singer Aino Venna Plays Moscow

By Sergei Chernov

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The first single off Venna's debut album, "Suzette," became an instant hit and gained huge popularity in Helsinki.

St. Petersburg — Aino Venna, an up-and-coming singer-songwriter from Finland, sings in English and French, blending folk, chanson, torch songs and pop.

Venna, who released her debut album "Marlene" in late October, had success with the album's first single "Suzette," which was named the "Summer Hit" by Radio Helsinki.

Venna will perform in Moscow on Wednesday — alongside Big Wave Riders and Tundramatiks — as part of the "News from Helsinki" project organized by Music Finland.

In St. Petersburg, Venna will perform with her band, which features double bass, guitars, percussion and ukulele.

Born in Helsinki, Venna spent five years in Turku studying film at the Arts Academy at Turku

University of Applied Sciences.

"The music came along a bit later," Venna told The Moscow Times by phone ahead of the concert.

"I have been composing and writing songs from a very early age. I decided to study film because I was too shy to perform my songs, and I thought that making films was more introvert work."

Venna said that at the end of her studies, she suddenly found that her passion for music was outweighing her interest in film, and music started to take up much more of her time.

"I did a bit of TV work after I graduated, but then I realized that I really wanted to focus on music, so that's what I am doing right now," she said. "I have directed our music videos, so that is my way of making films."

Venna, whose first musical instrument was a cello, said her interest in music originates from her childhood in Helsinki.

"My father listened to a great deal of music, and he used to play guitar when I was very little, and I was into music from a very early age," she said.

"He used to listen to everything, but musically it was like old style, like blues and jazz, Ray Charles and Edith Piaf, old chansons. It was [everything] from Pavarotti to the Beatles. He had a very large appetite for music."

Venna said her influences are international, but admitted that the Finnish music tradition could be felt in her songs.

"I think a certain melancholy, simplicity, like we have in our traditional songs in Finland — you can see some influences from that in our music," she said.

"[The songs] are very minimalistic in a way, I think it's very Finnish to have this kind of certain frankness."

One of her earliest music memories was of her father confiscating a tape by Finnish singer-songwriter Juice Leskinen from her and giving her an Elvis tape.

"I used to listen to this Finnish musician, singer-songwriter Juice Leskinen; his songs were a bit provocative, and my parents took his tape from me and gave me an Elvis one," she said.

"I used to sing in public, on trains, buses or trams when we were traveling to school or to visit someone. I used to sing all the time, so I think my parents got a bit embarrassed of my interpretations of Juice Leskinen, so Elvis was nicer."

"His early recordings were more provocative and more against the government, and they had some punk tones. I think that was the part that my parents didn't like. They used to listen to that music themselves, but they didn't want me to listen to it, or sing it in public!"

She calls Dietrich and French singer Edith Piaf, to whom she paid homage in "Waltz to Paris,"

her idols.

"The first time I heard [Piaf] sing, I understood that something very important was happening. I didn't understand the words but it sounded like she was singing like it was the last moment in life," Venna wrote in her autobiography.

"She and Marlene Dietrich are my idols because they had the courage to change the female role of their times. I named our first album after Marlene because of respect for this great artist, woman and a great speaker of peace."

"Piaf and Dietrich are inspiration to our music but we are not trying to imitate them or reproduce their works. They inspire us like a beautiful landscape, a good book, movie or a cello concerto."

The success of "Suzette," a catchy tune in French, came as a surprise to Venna.

"It's about a girl, she is not a very nice girl, she is singing that you should leave me, I'm not good for you. I'm with other boys, I [run around] with girls who are criminals," she said.

"If I smile, I'll never smile for you, so you should leave me. It's very simple, it's like old-style street songs that they have in Paris, it's really repeating the same thing. She sings 'Pourquoi tu ne me quittes pas' — 'Why don't you leave me?'"

Venna will perform in the "News From Helsinki" project. 8 p.m. on Wed. Shestnadtsat Tonn. 6 Presnensky Val. Metro Ulitsa 1905 Goda. 253-5300/0530, www.16tons.ru

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