

dudepoints

presents

EURO VISION 2024

part deux

IT'S THE MALMÖST

EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello everyone:

Welcome to Dudepoints' guide to Eurovision 2024: Part Two. I am writing this from inside the Eurovision Press Centre with the benefit of ibuprofen, caffeine, and some recovery drink from Espresso House. Let me just cut to the headline: The Israeli contestant is performing in this semifinal, and I won't be covering that entry in my zine. Earlier this year, I did a blog post outlining my reasons for this choice, but I'll do a small explanation here: Eurovision is not a competition of governments, but of broadcasters. KAN is the broadcaster of the Israeli government.

According to Eurovision rules, all entries are supposed to be apolitical. (For the purposes of brevity, we will take this at face value, even though the personal is political, and many of the statements about gender and sexuality and identity made in this year's competition are small-p political.)

KAN, however, has politicized their entry, submitting songs which were at first overtly political, and changed only after intervention from the Israeli government. As a broadcaster, they have also moved beyond reporting the news around the Gaza conflict; in December, one of their news presenters signed a bomb to be used in Gaza while filming a video report with Israeli soldiers. To me, these incidents seem to be in violation of EBU rules, and should result in suspension, just as previous violations have resulted in the suspensions of Russia, Belarus, and Georgia.

Let me be clear - I do not object to the presence of Israel in Eurovision. I have covered their entries before, and I hope to again. I am American, and I know what it means to have a government that takes actions with which you disagree.

Now that I've explained that, let me get back to the experience of the week.

There are protests around Israeli participation, both large and small. Watermelons are painted on shop windows, and The Person I Live With spent three hours at the train station instead of at the show last night because of 'trespassers on the track.' It was an incredibly effective way of disrupting the show (but also incredibly dangerous! Please, kids, stay away from live train tracks!)

But at the same time, Eurovision remains a place of radical acceptance. This week, I have been among crowds of strangers, and never felt alone. I have been able to strike up conversations with people and make new friends instantly. And among the people with whom I have been reunited from previous Eurovisions, we comment at how much we enjoy being in a place where a person can just be themselves - queer, disabled, loud, enthusiastic about their niche hobby. To use a metaphor from the autism world, I don't need to mask who I am here, deep in the Eurovision bubble.

Anyway, tonight's show is a crackerjack time. I hope that the message Joost Klein delivers at the end of his song resonates as much with you as it did with me. As always, if you like this zine, please donate to Medical Aid for Palestinians by scanning the QR code below.

*To
Dude*



All photos here are (c) EBU, with live photographers credited where we have names. Any errors are mine! Please forgive me!!

ARTIST CATEGORIES

class of Eurovision 2024

POP GIRLIES

Cyprus - Silia Kapsis
Georgia - Nutsa
Malta - Sara Bonnici
Austria - Kaleen

WITCHES AND BITCHES

Ireland - Bambie Thug
Slovenia - Raiven
Czechia - Aiko
Spain - Nebulossa
San Marino - Megara
Poland - Luna
Ukraine - Alyona Alyona
& Jerry Heil
Norway - Gate

BELTERS

Serbia - Teya Dora
Portugal - Iolanda
France - Slimane
Switzerland - Nemo
Denmark - Sand
Latvia - Dons

BACK FOR MORE

(and gone for now)

Iceland - Hera Björk
Natalie Barbu - In the Middle

WEIRD LITTLE DUDES

Croatia - Baby Lasanga
Finland - Windows95man
Estonia - 5MIINUST ft Puuluup
Netherlands - Joost Klein

TWINKS

Belgium - Mustii
United Kingdom - Olly Alexander
Lithuania - Silvester Belt
Sweden - Marcus & Martinus

ETHNOBOPPERS

Greece - Marina Satti
Armenia - Ladaniva
Italy - Angelina Mango
Australia - Electric Fields

I GUESS?

Albania - Besa
Germany - Isaak
Luxembourg - Tali
Azerbaijan - Fahree

ARTIST INTERVIEWS

This year, as a bonus, we have some artist interviews! We talked to some of the artists at a few of the pre-parties, and recorded some podcasts for ESC Insight. The interviews are now all released - you can find them here (or on any of the places you usually listen to podcasts):



SEMIFINAL TWO

Okay, so I've sat through Semifinal 1. There was a lot of Benjamin Ingrosso. Why should I sit through Semifinal 2? Is Sweden going to give me a lot of Felix Sandman?

If only! But no. Semi 1 was the Eurovision semi. Semi 2 is the Sweden semi. Writers Edward af Sillén and Daniel Réhn have amped up the humour from semifinal 1, and tonight is all about the host country poking fun of itself and its neighbours.

Wait, do you mean there's no music outside of the Eurovision acts?

Oh no! There is a fantastic karaoke interval, and if you stay through the credit sequence (which many people have not), you'll get a chance to hear Herreys, who are celebrating the 40th anniversary of their Eurovision win for Sweden, singing about their Golden Shoes. But tonight's show is so good I almost forgot Herreys were there! And that's because the second interval is a song about how Sweden loves to win Eurovision and I don't want to say anything else so as not to spoil the surprises. Just don't miss it!

So it sounds like all the fun is happening during the intervals?

No! I didn't say that! Tonight is, in a way, the party night. We have 3.5 girl bops which provide high energy dance moments (and, in the case of Malta, some "Did she really do that?" choreography).

But there are some singing and dancing moments, courtesy of Armenia (pictured below) and Estonia, and then Joost closes it all out with a party track before giving the entire arena the feels.

Don't worry, though - France, Belgium, Switzerland, and Norway all provide dramatic moments to simply watch the television agape and in awe.



SONG 1: MALTA

We have multiple girlbops this year and honestly, Sarah Bonnici's Loop is the best of the lot. The lyrics are nonsensical, yes, but still catchy as all get out. The ooh-ooh-ooh of loop is extremely catchy, and there's at least some internal consistency with the nonsense, like the references to sweet foods (honey, cinnamon).

That's the first paragraph of this review that I wrote post-revamp, post-pre-party and prior to seeing the performance. And now that I've actually seen the show, I want to yell this from the roof of Malmö Arena (hoists megaphone): Sarah Bonnici's Loop is not only this year's best girl bop, it is up there in the pantheon of classic girl bops alongside Eleni Foureira's Fuego and Chanel's SloMo. Sarah Bonnici is dancing blindfolded. She is dancing (and singing) while held aloft by her dancers. She even does a literal gosh-darn LOOP as part of her choreography.

Then, just as I was about to say, 'Come on, Sarah - this is the Eurovision SONG Contest, not the Eurovision DANCE Contest' she slows things down, picks up the mic, and stands alone on the stage to deliver a virtuoso vocal performance.

I was gooped by this Loop.

Originally, I feared that people would forget this song by the time voting started, since she's opening the show, but with a performance this spectacular, I needn't have worried.



a conversation with

Dude: Can you talk about some of the changes that are in the song with the revamp?

SB: There aren't major changes. A few changes in the lyrics to make them obviously more understandable for the audience and a few changes in the hook. But other than that, you know, in essence it is still the same song as the national selection. We're trying to give the best possible product on that stage in Malmo, so just minor tweaks to make the product better.

Dude: It definitely punches it up. It's a great song but it just makes it boom. You've got some definite dance breaks in there. How are you prepping for that?

SB: For Malmo, yes, it obviously takes a lot of training. I changed my vocal coach. I do breathing exercises to make sure that I can have enough, you know, breath to sustain a Eurovision performance. I also trained with my choreographer and my dancer. It's running on the treadmill and singing. So it's a lot of things that, you know, work hand in hand together to make sure that I'd be able to do everything on the stage.

Dude: What's it going to mean for you to represent Malta at Eurovision on that world stage?

SB: It honestly means so much. I've I've been a Eurovision fan since ever since I can remember. I used to, with cousins, put up shows where we would dance and sing Eurovision songs. So Eurovision has always been a dream. In Malta, it is actually really, really big for our small teams. So it means the world to me.

Dude: What were some of the songs you used to perform with your cousins when you did these shows?

SB: I have a few videos as well! I have a video of this one. It was called [sings] *Vampires are alive*. My cousins were all wearing normal clothes and I was trying to look like a vampire so it looks really funny. I have another video with **sings some Scooch** But my favourite one to perform was *My Number One*. So, yes, I have a few videos at home and those are some of the songs I used to perform.

Dude: How are you juggling your accountancy career with your music career?

SB: I made the decision to take a break from accountancy, so I'm no longer practicing the profession. I love accountancy but yeah, you need to choose sometimes in life and music. Music is my passion.

Sarah Bonnici

SONG 2: ALBANIA

Besa won Albania's Festival i Kenges with a version of this song. I should qualify 'version', because it's been so heavily revamped, it's like listening to Uku Suviste's version of Blackbird and thinking 'Yeah, that's just like how the Beatles did it.' (This is a bit of a Eurovision deep cut, but if you don't know what I'm referring to, DON'T LOOK IT UP.) Besa took a good song with all the elements of why we love Albanian entries - bombastic female vocals, even more bombastic female lewks, and undeniable drama in a language that we don't speak - and turned it into a generic yeehaw-ish song with an unintelligible message. Zemren N'Dore - the Albanian original - was a beautiful song about obsessive passion, with lyrics comparing one's love to poison in sugar, but Titan is a mildly enthusiastic empowerment anthem. If Besa truly were a Titan in disguise, she should be eating a child on stage, but instead, she's singing about getting over a breakup. The only thing I'm looking forward to with this performance is waiting to see what Besa wears. She won Festival i Kenges in an ill-fitting corseted tribute to the Statue of Liberty, with a top that was a wardrobe malfunction waiting to happen, and a skirt that was so long, Besa tripped while performing (in platform heels, no less! Just hem the darn thing!) So even though the song may be mid, the performance is likely to be full of tension.



SONG 3: GREECE

Greece, I am so worried about you!
And I really need to work on my writing skills.

I forget that I'm supposed to be introducing you to all of these amazing songs in this year's Eurovision. And let me be clear - Greece is phenomenal. Eurovision often gets a bad rap for sending songs that are about 10 years behind the times, but that is very much not that case with Marina Satti's banger. I have seen multiple comparisons to both Laurie Anderson and Rosalia, but what I can tell you is that Marina Satti takes the traditional conventions of a song structure, chops them up, puts them in a blender, then throws that blender out of the window and cackles heartily. She is Conan Osiris with a sense of humor.

In a just world, Marina Satti would qualify in a heartbeat. But I worry that people will not get her staging! She's got a performance that carries on the theme of her music video, in that she's deconstructing the notion of livestreaming by having the camera people do the first part of the performance in a single unbroken shot, with response emojis emerging from the bottom of the screen. But the actual performance itself reads as a typical girl bop dance. So combining a song which can come off as choppy and a bit disjointed on first listen, along with a performance that may not read as the parody that it is ... well, this is why I am worried for My Girl Marina! Please, Europe, prove me wrong. You got avant garde Slovenia - get avant garde Greece as well!



SONG 4: SWITZERLAND

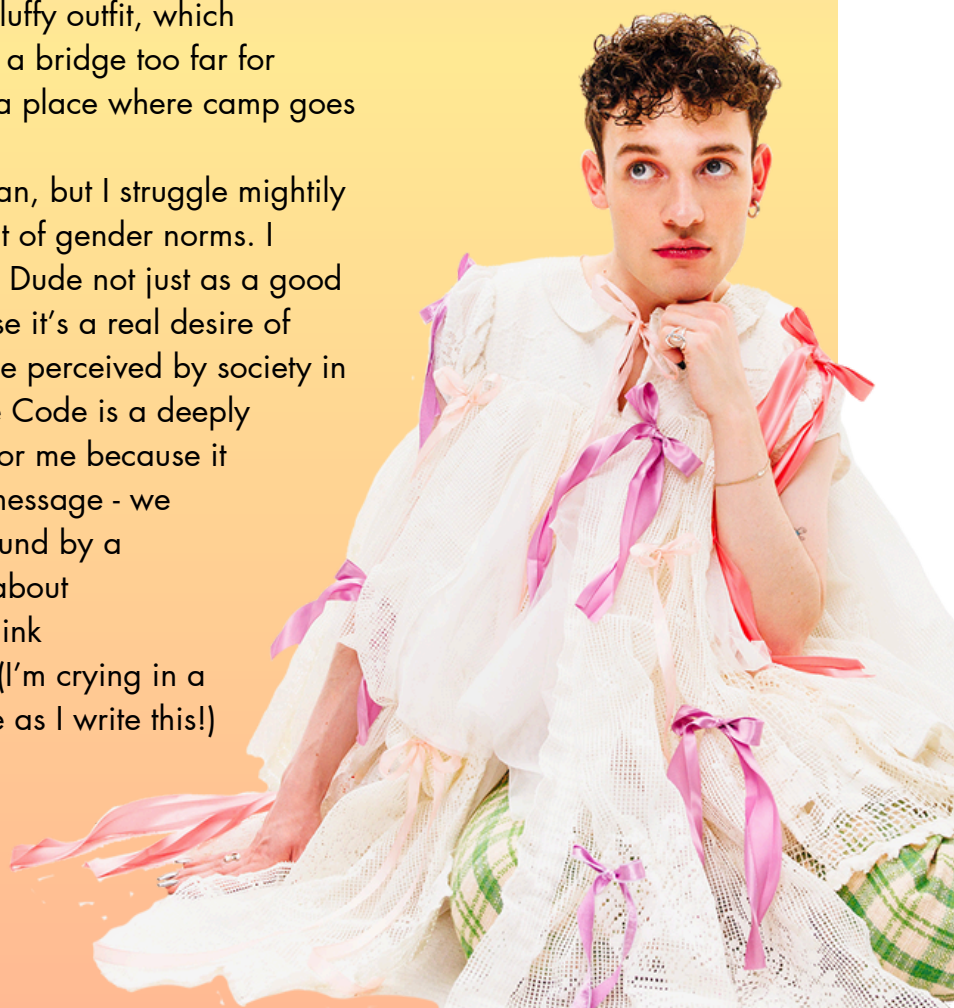
When I watch Nemo perform, one question comes to my mind: HOW? HOW do you write a compelling banger about being nonbinary? They've managed to translate a raging debate about people's right to exist and live into an easily comprehensible metaphor using computer code.

HOW do you manage to cram so many genres into three minutes? There's popera, drum and bass, Bond theme, and probably some other stuff that I'm missing in there? And also HOW do you manage to look so good while doing it? One of my joys in the lead up to Eurovision was watching people lose their minds over Nemo's gorgeous pink fluffy outfit, which apparently was a bridge too far for EUROVISION, a place where camp goes to camp it up.

I am a cis woman, but I struggle mightily with the concept of gender norms. I chose the name Dude not just as a good pun, but because it's a real desire of how I want to be perceived by society in general. So The Code is a deeply personal song for me because it has a feminist message - we shouldn't be bound by a gender binary about how to act or think or dress or be. (I'm crying in a shopping centre as I write this!)

Honestly, the only reason I don't want The Code to win is because a week in Switzerland would bankrupt me. Even Nemo had to hitchhike their way to Malmo!

Okay - final paragraph on show day to add that I've seen this live twice now and when Nemo's final operatic bit comes in, as they are soaring on a turntable, I get goosebumps. It is such a triumphant moment - this assertion of their identity to hundreds of millions around the world - that they've already won Eurovision, trophy or no.



SONG 5: CZECHIA

Aiko is channeling rage and anger and 1990s girl power and I should love this. You should love this. It's powerful and catchy and it's got a great moment where Aiko lets her voice go.

So why am I lukewarm on it? Well, it's because it's been revamped. After an anarchic live performance at the Czechia live final, which was full of punk energy, Aiko pulled her punches with an addition to the song. It should be about putting herself on a pedestal; instead, it pivots into an argument with an unseen boyfriend. As TLC would say, "I don't want no scrubs!"

Especially not in a song where a woman is claiming her essential power and taking no shit from anyone.

We will see if what shows up on stage is a woman who is still processing her emotions (who will be represented by the dancers appearing Aiko) or whether we see a woman fully in control of herself. I hope it is the latter.

And now that I've seen this live, and I'm writing this on show day, I can tell you that I'm still lukewarm, and it's all my fault. I thought Aiko had written a feminist banger, and what she had written was a rock song about loving yourself. It's not her fault that what I heard wasn't what she delivered. But the 90s rock vibe that so many people love about this song - and to be clear, that I also like about this song - is also what is making me very angry. I lived through the 1990s and early 2000s in bands, and I was hoping we had moved past the era where we women were invited to the party, but it was still a man's game. Consciously or not, that's present in Aiko's performance. She's surrounded by women as backup dancers (who represent her emotions) but the screens above her - the people actually creating the music to which she vocalises - are all men. And the catalyst for her realisation and her song - is a man, who takes up precious time on the Eurovision stage appearing in her argument. I realise this all may sound like nitpicks, but I want Aiko to be the protagonist of her own life in this moment on the Eurovision stage, and not ceding even a single second of it to a man who annoyed her in the first place!



a conversation with

Dude: Hello Aiko! Can you tell us a little bit about the message of your song?

Aiko: Pedestal is all about empowering people, and loving yourself, and just knowing yourself more and putting yourself first. Because even if you're in a happy and fulfilled relationship, you should still really put yourself first because at the end of the day, you just have yourself.

Dude: At the Czech National Final I absolutely adored your song because it had such a strong kind of feminist energy running from it. What are your inspirations for the music you make?

Aiko: I do really like rock music so Black Honey, Bring Me the Horizon. Aurora is one of the big ones, the band Ungles. So these are the ones.

Dude: You've recently done a revamp of Pedestal. Can you talk about some of the changes and why you brought them into the song?

Aiko: I mean, we did look into filling for 30 seconds but we didn't really want to just like, extend the song. We were like, okay, let's go into the studio, try something out. If it works, if it actually deepens the message of the song, if it actually brings everything up. Let's do it. Let's implement it. If not, no worries. That's okay. And I feel like adding the fight scene, actually it did add to the storyline, it kind of brought some of the anger.

Dude: Will we be seeing some of that anger on stage?

Aiko: Of course, I can't tell you too much, but it's very conceptual.

Dude: One of the reasons a lot of us love this song is because you're a woman who's not afraid to be visibly angry.

Aiko: I mean, I do think that it's important to show your emotions and to be able to express anger as well. I don't know how you feel about it but like I when I feel angry, everybody knows that I'm angry. Rightfully so!

Dude: You're currently based in Brighton?

Aiko: Not currently, because I had to move to Prague to rehearse.

Dude: Will you be moving back to Brighton?

Aiko: You never know. I have no idea what's going to be happening after Eurovision. Hopefully, yes, because I do really love Brighton!

Aiko



SONG 6: FRANCE

It's a Eurovision, and France is going to send the Franciest song they can think of. (I didn't say French because I believe the notion of something being French and something being the Franciest are different, and one only needs look at France's recent Eurovision entries to see what I mean.)

France has recently been racking up the wins at Junior Eurovision, and yet they haven't won proper grown-up Eurovision since 1977. So this year, they have brought out the big guns. They are sending Slimane, a huge pop star in France, with a chanson about love that is sure to be catnip for the juries.

And yes, Slimane will deliver a technically perfect performance. But the problem with *Mon Amour* is that there's not much amour in it. Watching Slimane is like watching a masterclass in how to sing, but not in how to perform. In the pre-parties, Slimane has been doing a neat little trick where he'll step about three feet back from the microphone and continue singing, to prove how powerful his voice is. It's fun to watch, and it gets a round of applause every time, but it adds nothing to the actual story of the song. I don't ever get the sense that he's a man in the throes of passion, ready to fall apart because he has lost his love. I do get the sense that he is a man who can taste a Eurovision victory, and feels like he has something to prove to his country.

And in a way, that's really disappointing. The whole point of France's chanson tradition is the storytelling - the emotion poured into the love and the loss. Without the story, there's nothing there except a very, very good voice.

Show Day edit: France fixed it! They fixed everything I criticized them about! Slimane gives an intimate performance that connects with the audience and still shows off his vocal tricks. I think this takes the jury!



SONG 7: AUSTRIA



We Will Rave does exactly what it says on the tin. It's a tiny woman bopping around with a bunch of scantily clad male models singing about how she's mending her heartbreak through dance. It's a 1990s throwback of a dance tune. I absolutely love it while I'm listening to it, and I have no strong desire to listen to it again when it's done.

The most interesting thing about this performance is the person giving it. Kaleen has been involved in various roles with Eurovision for the past few years, rising from stand-in to choreographer to creative director for acts. Now she's the artist, and I am less excited about this song (which is fun!) than to see what she's going to do with Eurovision after Eurovision. Executive producer of a show, a la Christer Björkman? Or Executive Director of the EBU, a la Martin Osterdahl? Now THAT is what I would like to see!

In the arena, this song goes OFF. Somehow, Kaleen takes the cotton-candy colours of Eurovision 2024 and turns the whole arena into a dank warehouse circa 1999 for three minutes. Every single person in the arena was raving, regardless of dancing ability.

Now, whether this translates to the television - because Eurovision is first and foremost a television show, not a concert - remains to be seen. There are some impressive dance moves, and Kaleen's silvery metallic bodysuit looks beautiful on camera, but nothing really captures the scope of those lasers echoing through the expanse of the arena.

SONG 8: DENMARK

If there's one thing you need to know about Denmark's performance this year's it's sand sand sand sand sand sand sand sand. Sand sand sand sand SAND SAAAAAAAAAAAAAND sand sand sand sand sand sand sand sand SAND sand sand sand. Sand, sand sand sand sand, sand sand sand. Sand sand sand. Sand sand SAND! Sand sand sand sand sand sand: sand, sand, and sand. I personally sand sand sand sand sand sand. You'll find that some Eurofans sand sand sand sand sand sand sand sand sand, but others will vehemently SAND sand sand sand sand sand. Some will even claim that it's slipping through their hands and SAND SAAAAAAAAAND. SAAAA-AA-AA-AA-AA-AA-AA-AA-AA-AA-ND. In fact, Saba has a really prescient point when she states SAND and SAND and SAND and SAAAAND and then goes on to say sand sand sand sand sand sand. Denmark hasn't sent anything this sandy since they sent a guy singing about a Viking boat and that was more SALT than SAAAAAAAAAAAAAND because that ship was about the open shores and not grains of slippery, gritty SAAAAAAAAAAAAAND just being flung in one's face from a woman who carries sand in her pockets SAND SAND SAND



SONG 8: DENMARK

Okay, now that I've gotten that out of my system (I am SO sleep deprived y'all), let me give you the real skinny on Denmark's song.

The reason I made that joke to begin with is because the chorus - SAND SAAAAND - is the best thing about the song. Saba belts it out, and throws Sand all over the stage, and generally makes a mess that the stagehands are going to have to try to clean up before Armenia comes on the stage.

But other than that, Denmark's song could be - through no fault of Saba, I should add - called BLAND BLAAAAAND. It was written by Swedish songwriters, and it sounds

like a Melfest B-side. Half the song is full of breakup metaphors, while the other half of the song is full of beach metaphors, and it sounds like the two songwriters met up during a week when they were going through two very different life experiences, and then just tried to jam together a song. Wow, it DOES NOT WORK.

Again, this is nothing against Saba, who sells the hell out of this song with some fantastic vocals. But considering that the customs official at Copenhagen Airport had no idea what the Danish entry was (it's a long story), I doubt that there's enough heft behind it to have the world supporting it.



SONG 9: ARMENIA

First of all, if you are watching this at home, I need you to put your drinks and snacks down and get up off the couch. Jako is the shortest of the Eurovision entries, at 2:30, and you are going to want to be dancing for every single second of it.

There are very few lyrics to this song before it goes into the las and li-la-lahs, of which there are many. But what comes before the full-out party (not that the song itself isn't a full-out party) is a story about a girl who doesn't behave like she's expected to. Once again, it's a banger about defying gender norms! Except this one is sung in Armenian, so most viewers won't notice at all. And that's a real shame, because the setting of the video makes it clear that Ladaniva is, in particular, trying to make it clear that all young women,

even those in rural villages, should be able to be treated like people who have autonomy over their own lives, doing what they want to do, and not what they are told to do by society or tradition or their parents.

In Eurovision land, we often use a shorthand where we say - "this is like this" which isn't always helpful for people who don't obsessively follow the contest. But me say that in a year when Moldova - the land traditionally known for bringing the crowd pleasing party bangers - sends Natalia Barbu - Armenia is picking up the slack. This is the Trenetul of Eurovision 2024, the song that will make everyone happy. I mean, it's got chickens and trumpets spinning on the giant screen in the background, for goodness sake!



SONG 10: LATVIA

I am sitting here typing this in a boiler suit that is a lovely shade of International Yves Klein Blue (Google it! You'll see it in multiple acts this year!). To some people, this jumpsuit makes me look like a plumber, but in Malmo this week, it is Accidental Dons Cosplay.

Dons has a great sense of style - obviously, if we're dressing like each other, although his outfits tend to be sleeveless to show off his impressive guns.

Dons also has a great voice - soulful and full of emotion.

What Dons does not have is a great song. Hollow is a man ballad that's full of pain and a bit of a bummer. In a semifinal full of girl bops, it should provide a moment of contrast, a chance to breathe and pause after all the dancing. Instead, it's just a bit of a bummer. And the staging makes it even worse. Dons is singing from a giant ring - because it's HOLLOW, you SEE - but it's making me think that this is a divorced man who is singing about how a breakup has left him hollow. And then I feel really bad because Dons DID go through a breakup, and wrote a song and an album about it, and entered it into Eurovision - but that was back in 2015 and he lost in his national final to a catchy tune about baking cakes.

Anyway, I don't want to be an armchair psychiatrist, because social media Dons is a hilarious human being who seems well adjusted. Maybe Dons has perfected the art of channelling all of his past traumas into his music, so that he lives an entirely peaceful life outside of his work AND gets rich off of the proceeds of his stadium gigs. (Yes, he regularly plays stadium gigs in Latvia, singing his Latvian dad rock.) But just because Dons has managed to find the secret to balance, that doesn't mean the rest of us need to encourage him by voting him through to the Eurovision final on Saturday night.



a conversation with

Dude: You released a version of Hollow in September of last year. In Latvian. What was the title of that song?

Dons: Do you want to try to pronounce it?

Dude: I don't! I've seen it. But the title is:

Dons: Lauzto šķēpu karaļvalsts and that translates in English to

Dude: Kingdom of Broken Spears! Which is so metal! Why did you change it to Hollow?

Dons: Hollow was actually the original version, and then I did a version in Latvian because in Latvia, I sing in my own language.

Dude: You've actually entered Supernova (the Latvian National Final) twice before and one of your previous entries was in Latvian. You've sung in Latvian; you've released albums in Latvian. What's the difference in your languages? Do you feel you can express yourself more fully in Latvian?

Dons: We have to cherish our own culture. We are very small country next to the Baltic Sea and we have beautiful language and you know you can ask somebody to cherish your culture but you can do something yourself, right? So I do sing in my own language as much as I can.

Dude: You've ridden the Trans-Siberian Express, you've ridden trains in India. You've talked about your meditative experiences. Can you talk about how train rides influence you and influence your music?

Dons: Well, I like the idea of movement, always not even just like physical, okay? So you can travel but movement towards something. That fulfills me! That's why probably trains.

Dude: Your music is really intense and moody. Your social media personality is 100% goofy. Can you talk about why there is a difference?

Dons: Yeah, I mean, if I'm telling Hollow's story I'm dead serious, right? Because it's a serious story about my experiences and I want to live through it again, so I can't joke about them. Sometimes, there are stories you don't joke about. But on the other hand, why not have fun? Who knows how many days, or months, or years we have left? Let's have fun. Let's laugh. Right?

Dons



SONG 11: SPAIN

Okay, let's start with a basic recitation of the facts: Nebulossa is an electronic duo made up of middle-aged Spanish couple Mery Bas and Mark Dasousa. Their song, Zorra, is a synth-inflected banger that was a viral sensation in Spain earlier this year, and will have the arena crowd chanting 'Zorra Zorra Zorra' along with Mery and Mark.

Now that I've gotten that brief description out of the way, I can incoherently gush over this song. Nebulossa have managed to create a message song that absolutely, 100 percent reads and feels like a party song. Zorra - which can be translated from the Spanish as something between 'vixen' or 'bitch' - is about the criticism that women face for just existing. It is written from Mery's own experience as a woman of middle age, who has been criticised for what she wears and what she does.

The choices she makes, which hurt absolutely no one, are considered fair game for comment simply because of two things: her gender and her age. As a woman of a certain age myself, this message resonates!

The staging of Zorra is sure to provoke some reactions from the crowd, who will inevitably recoil at the sight of men in thongs, with bare butts on full display on stage. (And oh my, the camera will lovingly display those bare butts at several points. We're looking respectfully!)

But the use of two very campy and flamboyant male dancers is deliberate on behalf of Nebulossa. They are making the deliberate point that if these were women supporting a fully clothed man, no one would blink an eye. There is a double standard in what we consider suitable for broadcast, and in their sumptuous red velvet and gold and black lace, Nebulossa are politely saying, "No, thank you" to those terms. Call them whatever you want. Nebulossa know who and what they are and they don't give a toss what you think.



SONG 12: SAN MARINO

If you are not familiar with the work of Megara, I would encourage you to look up their song Arcadia, which they entered in last year's Benidorm Fest, trying to represent Spain in Eurovision. They did not win, but it was a fantastic song. The existence of Arcadia may explain why I have been so disappointed in 11:11, because it is the lesser song, and yet the one that most people will now associate with Megara.

Fortunately, the studio version of 11:11 is redeemed by some absolutely wonderful staging. San Marino are hungry for a qualification, and have thrown everything at this entry. The visuals are gorgeous, with Megara's trademark pink and black colour scheme popping off the screen. And the whole aesthetic is goth-lite - kind of like Hot Topic goth (if you are an American reader). It will be familiar to anyone who has seen Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. But just because something is familiar - one might even say heavily, heavily, heavily borrowed - it doesn't mean it's not good. I was particularly impressed by the transformation of the lop-eared bunny rabbits into the glow-in-the-dark skeletons. And unlike other staging that we've seen this year, San Marino is full, but not overstuffed.

Everything holds our attention for about thirty seconds before moving on to something else that's new and interesting. Is it as shocking as Bambie Thug? No. But it doesn't need to be. It just needs to qualify for the final. That's enough of a win for San Marino.

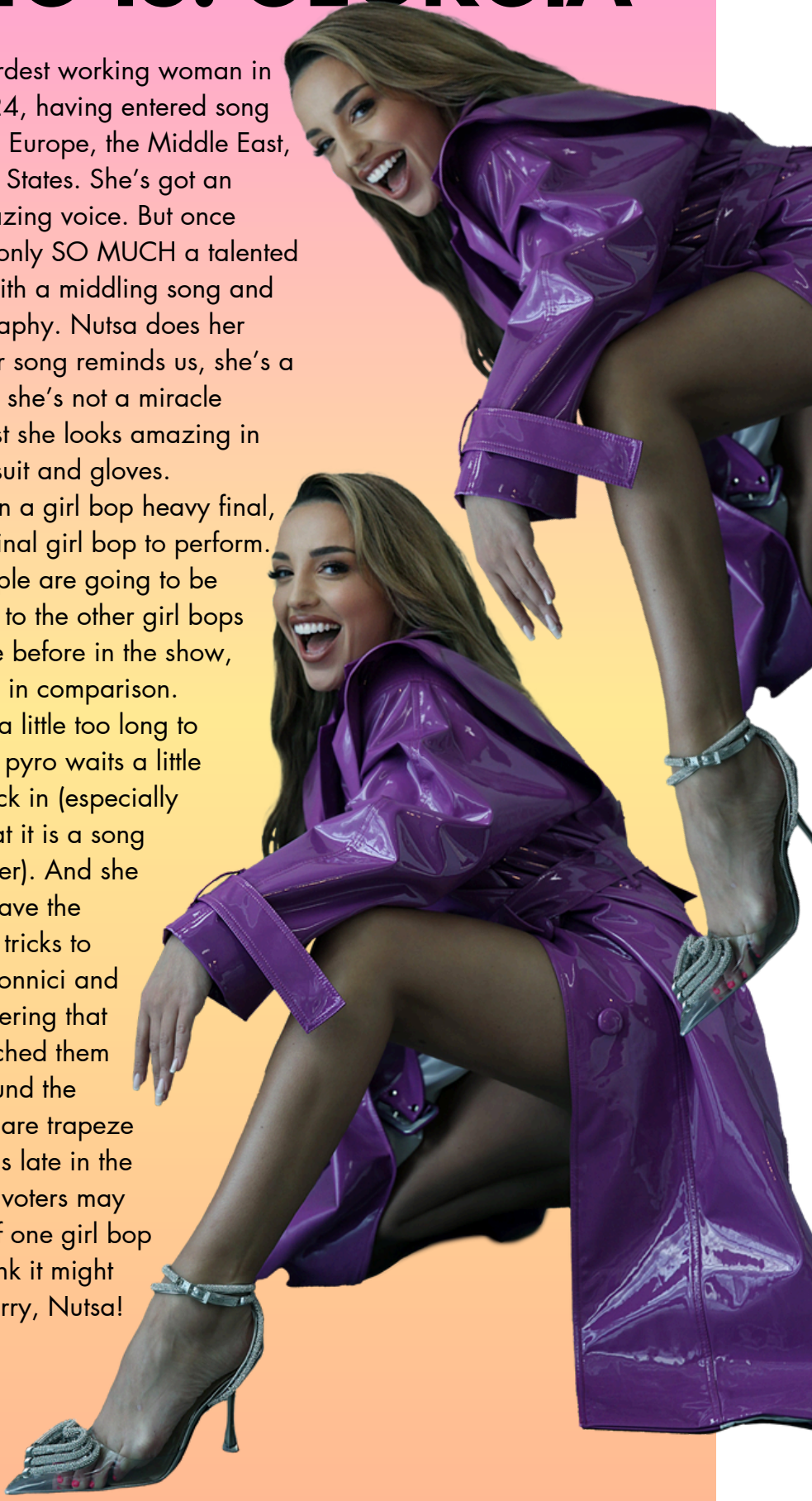


SONG 13: GEORGIA

Butsa is the hardest working woman in Eurovision 2024, having entered song competitions in Europe, the Middle East, and the United States. She's got an absolutely amazing voice. But once again, there's only SO MUCH a talented artist can do with a middling song and okay choreography. Nutsa does her best, but as her song reminds us, she's a firefighter, and she's not a miracle worker. At least she looks amazing in her gold bodysuit and gloves.

Poor Nutsa is in a girl bop heavy final, and she's the final girl bop to perform. Naturally, people are going to be comparing her to the other girl bops that have come before in the show, and she suffers in comparison.

Her song take a little too long to get going. Her pyro waits a little too long too kick in (especially considering that it is a song called Firefighter). And she doesn't quite have the choreographic tricks to match Sarah Bonnici and Kaleen, considering that we've just watched them be thrown around the stage like they are trapeze artists. Since it's late in the running order, voters may disagree, but if one girl bop has to go, I think it might be this one. Sorry, Nutsa!



SONG 14: BELGIUM



There are a lot of legitimate criticisms of Mustii's song. It's somehow incredibly repetitive and yet feels like it ends abruptly and should have another few choruses tacked on to the end of it. It's slow to build and only gets going in the final minute. And yet, when Mustii is on stage, I am eating up his performance like a waffle drenched in golden syrup - or gold-flecked golden syrup.

You see, Mustii is not only a singer, but an actor, and a presenter on Belgium's *Drag Race*, so if there is anything he knows how to do, it is bring the drama. And when he is on the Eurovision stage, he is the drama.

A lot of his staging replicates his music video setup, where he's got that inexplicable circle of microphones set up, like he's come to Eurovision not to perform, but to hold a press conference. (No, I have no idea what he wants to announce before the party is over - someone needs to get more ice?)

But once he steps out from behind the circle, and lets the wind machine take over, the song takes off. With his shirt flying open, gold mesh sparkling under the lights, dry ice rolling around his shins, Mustii can indulge his best Bond theme fantasy, and all of us are swept along with him.

None of this would be possible had Mustii not worked to improve his vocals, which have been shaky throughout the pre-party season, but which are absolute note perfect here. I can't wait to see this again live in the arena, because it is sure to qualify.

SONG 15: ESTONIA

My plea to you this year: Vote for Estonia.

Estonia has one of my favourite music scenes, period. I just happened to discover it through the Eurovision Song Contest because the programmers of Eesti Laul, Estonia's National Final, are not afraid of scouring the nation's music scene to put forward acts for Eurovision. It has earned a reputation as the 'weird' national final, because there is always going to be something - grindcore, goth, garage rock, indie, hyperpop, J-pop - that you're not going to see in any other contest. And we, as Eurofans, love to see it in Eesti Laul, but Estonians usually choose something safe and radio friendly, like Alike's ballad Bridges from 2023.

Except this year, the weird song won! It's a collaboration between the rap group 5MIIINUUST and the folk duo PUULUUP, who play the traditional and slightly atonal instruments the talharpa. They are performing a song entirely in Estonian titled: (nendest) narkootikumidest ei tea me (küll) midagi, which roughly translates to "we don't know anything about these drugs." So, to recap, Estonia is sending:

- 6 middle-aged men
- dressed all in black
- performing in a language no viewers will understand

I realise that none of this sounds very convincing, but Estonia has, hands down, the funniest lyrics of Eurovision 2024. It's a three minute saga about trying to convince the police that indeed, they know nothing about the drugs that may or may not be in the vicinity of where they are located, because they are too poor to use drugs, and have to rely on alcohol and (in the pre-Eurovision version) Lay's sour cream and onion potato chips for their entertainment. None of this is apparent on first listen, which is how many of you will be experiencing this tonight. So I am trying to spread the word about how funny the song is. Otherwise, the only thing that will get Estonia points is their viral TikTok Veisson dance, which may not be enough. HELP ESTONIA OUT, FOLKS!



SONG 16: ITALY

Italy chooses its Eurovision songs by not choosing a Eurovision song at all. Rather, they hold the Sanremo Festival, a weeklong endurance marathon of Italian songs and celebrity cameos, and surreal skits. This year, for example, John Travolta did the chicken dance and then promptly tried to get the footage scrubbed from the internet. At the end of that, the winner has the right of first refusal for Eurovision. And if you're wondering why Italy sends such great songs to Eurovision, it's largely because of this format. There were 30 songs competing at Sanremo, and at least ten of those songs would have been strong contenders at Eurovision.



The winner of Sanremo was Angelina Mango, with her tune 'La Noia', which translates to 'the Boredom.' Her song was co-written by Italian producer extraordinaire Dardust (who also wrote Mahmood's Soldi) and Italian rapper extraordinaire Madame, but it's definitely more of a Latin sound - the 'cumbia' that Angelina likes to dance to when she's bored.

And the song itself is certainly danceable. It's a catchy pop tune, and there's a lovely point two-thirds of the way through the song when Angelina has an a capella moment. It's a challenging song to sing as well, with rapid-fire lyrics that roll off the tongue.

So why do I seem a little lukewarm on it? Maybe it's because I watched the aforementioned Sanremo Festival, and fell in love with a few of the other ten songs that would have been good contenders in this year's Eurovision. Angelina Mango's song is fun, and it won an influential pre-Eurovision fan poll, but if it wins Eurovision, I'll be more delighted by the prospect of visiting Italy again for Italian food.

SONG 18: NORWAY

Norway is the home of black metal. Norway is also one of the places that's home to the folk music tradition of kulning - a type of singing that derives from calling cows. And if you combine metal and kulning, and sprinkle in a little Norse mythology about changing women into wolves that then go on bloody hunting sprees, well, you've got Ulveham. And if you think I'm joking about the bloody hunting spree, I'm not! The lyrics of this song have been adapted from a old folktale about a woman, beloved by many, who is turned into a wolf by a wicked stepmother. But instead of meeting a happy ending, as she would in a Hans Christian Andersen tale, she ends up killing and eating her brother. Welcome to the warm family entertainment that is Eurovision!

As someone who is a fan of the harder side of music, I realise that Ulveham may be challenging to those who find heavy metal to just be cacophony. But what Gåte do so wonderfully is slowly build the tension, with their crooning and their fiddling on their traditional Norwegia nyckelharpa. And then suddenly, they unleash the full fury of their guitars and drums and the shrieks of their lead singer. It is a sonic assault that seems like it has been brought down from the gods themselves. In their performances so far, Gåte have been pairing this with videos of natural phenomenon, like lightning and waterfalls running backwards, and I truly believe that Gåte can make these things happen solely with their performance. They are just that powerful!



SONG 19: NETHERLANDS

I need to confess something here. The first time I heard Europapa, I hated it. I was so excited about Joost Klein representing the Netherlands, and I was worried that he was just doing a parody of all the 1990s Eurovision songs that mentioned as many European countries as possible in the hopes of picking up votes from them. Many listens later, I want to note that I was wrong. I love Europapa, and I am writing this so that all of you who will likely only get the chance to hear it once don't make the same mistake I did!

In the song, Joost is mentioning a bunch of European countries, but it's not in the hopes of picking up their votes. (He would like your 12 points, though.) Rather, it's in the service of talking about how Europe has become so much closer - how his parent's childhood dream of traveling to all these places is now possible, thanks to the European Union and freedom of movement. At a time when the Netherlands is facing a resurgence of Geert Wilders and his far-right party - a party which does not support the EU - and when the far-right is also making gains in Germany and Italy, and countries like Hungary are actively disdaining the EU - it's refreshing to hear a TikTok/YouTube star like Joost writing an entire Eurovision song about what's great about the concept of 'Europe' as a broader identity.

Just after the song kicks into high gear with a bit of 1990s Dutch happy hardcore, it pivots to a more poignant moment. Joost reveals that both his parents have died, and the trips he is making now around Europe - fulfilling their dreams of a world without borders - cannot take away the sadness of their loss.

It's a beautiful way to pay tribute to his parents and the lessons that they instilled in him, while also treating the audience to an incredibly good time. I can't think of a better way to end the contest.

I have seen this performed twice live in the Eurovision context twice now, and it has made me cry both times. It is an emotional gut punch, and there is not another artist skilled enough to balance the pathos and parody that Joost does.



So what does it all mean?

In the introduction, I talked a little bit about the way that the Israel-Gaza conflict is impacting tonight's show on the ground. This conflict will likely be the first thing that's mentioned in any coverage of the contest that you see pre- or post-show tonight, but there are some things that I hope we don't lose - and that we shouldn't lose - in coverage of this year's Eurovision.

First of all, this is possibly the gayest Eurovision ever. You've probably seen that as a joke, particularly in reference to Olly Alexander's entry, but it is a year when we have multiple entrants who are openly LGBTQ+, writing songs with LGBTQ+ themes. Some of these are more obvious than others - Nemo and Olly Alexander, for example - but Saba is here singing a song about a breakup, and not having to pretend she's singing about a man (even though the lyrics can be interpreted for either gender.)

Secondly - and this is a theme that I've rarely seen covered anywhere - feminism and gender norms are covered in several songs. Artists are pushing back at what might be expected in their country, and while this may not be evident to the international audience, it carries an important message to those home audiences who are most likely to be impacted by those gender stereotypes.

Musically, I think Eurovision 2024 is the most exciting we've seen in a while.

There are challenging song structures that play with the concept of what can be done within three minutes, which we see in with Greece, Slovenia, and Belgium. But we also have groups like Estonia, which are bringing something wholly original and somewhat atonal that blows up the notion of what a Eurovision song must sound like. And from an autistic perspective, there are so many delightful songs this year that are full of sonic tricks in the production, my little neurodivergent brain fizzles with delight. Any claim that Eurovision songs are stuck about a decade in the past is blown to bits this year.

Finally, the reason I love this year's Eurovision is because of how unabashedly thirsty it is. Some of this is overt in the performances - Raiven's very tasteful and avant garde nudity, Zorra's tear-away stripper pants - but other elements of the Eurovision lust are more restrained. Slimane, for example, begins his performance reclining on stage, staring into the camera in a way that suggests he's waking up next to the viewer in bed. It's incredibly intimate, incredibly effective, and in about nine months, he's going to have to pay a lot of child support.

I am interested to hear what you think about Eurovision - join me this evening on Twitter at @dudepoints to discuss!

dudepoints

A million gajillion thanks to my quality controller: The Person I Live With, who is Eurovision adjacent, likes only five songs this year, and yet has some of the smartest opinions I know about this song contest.

IT'S THE MALMÖST

