

dudepoints

presents

**EUROVISION
2025**

**volevo
essere
un
TOPO**

first semifinal



EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello everyone:

Welcome to Dudepoints' guide to Eurovision 2025: First Semifinal.

Let me tell you what this guide is not. It is not a zine that will help you understand the odds or learn which songs are likely to win the contest. There is plenty of other coverage out there that will tell you that information. In fact, all you need to do is Google 'Eurovision betting odds' and you can find it out.

Rather, this zine (and its counterpart for Semifinal 2) is going to give you a sense of what you can expect from the three minutes of each song.

Honestly, in the year of our Lordi 2025, I don't really care who wins Eurovision. There are a lot of good songs this year, and I will be happy and heartbroken no matter what happens come the final on Saturday.

In fact, the Eurovision final is possibly the worst night of the whole Eurovision season. For the past six months, I've spent hundreds upon hundreds of hours listening to songs from across Europe - willingly and joyfully. I have fallen in love with artists that are new to me, and back in love with fan favourites. I have already suffered the loss of some of the best songs of 2025 losing in their National Finals, which will be the subject of a post-Eurovision project this year. (Fenksta's Extra, you will always be famous.)

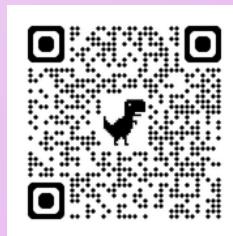
By the time we get to the actual event, it represents a moment of joy for the winner, but the closing off of multiple alternate realities that I've been plotting in my head since January.

Of course, the sense of loss I feel during Eurovision week is also offset by the joy of the rest of the world waking up to these songs. There's nothing I enjoy more than getting messages from friends who are blown away by some random Eurovision song that they are hearing for the first time. And that's part of the reason we all watch this contest - it's the pure dopamine hit that comes from connecting with something that we are seeing unfold on stage. Look, I am not going to pretend that everything that's appearing at Basel is a masterpiece. There are some songs this year that are, in my considered opinion, deeply mid. Others are pure pop candy dance bangers. But at a time when the world is falling apart, all of them provide a welcome and needed distraction that helps all of us to recharge.

Anyway, a few housekeeping notes: this zine is done with the editing help of The Person I Live With, who makes sure I don't have any egregious English spelling errors.

And if you enjoy this zine, or my blog, I hope that you might throw some coins toward the Albert Kennedy Trust, which provides support for LGBTQ+ youth who are at-risk for homelessness. (If you've been following the news here in the UK, you'll know that trans youth in particular are in need of support.) Thanks so much for reading!

*xoxo
Dude*



SEMIFINAL ONE *a brief overview*

Who is performing?

Semifinal one is not representative of Eurovision as a whole. There will be 19 acts performing this evening, but three of those are automatic qualifiers for the final - Spain, Italy, and Switzerland. Out of the other 16 acts, only two of them contain women. Basically, semifinal one is the sausage fest, and semifinal two is the lady power hour.

Did the EBU do this on purpose? I mean, it seems kind of retrograde to have a men's semi and a women's semi.

Yeah, we know. But that's the way the draw happened to fall this year. If the EBU was planning this, they definitely would not have done this.

So if the EBU didn't do this on purpose, why are you pointing it out? Not everything is about gender, you know.

Look, YOU'RE the one reading the zine by a feminist Eurovision blogger named Dude. What kind of analysis did you think you'd be getting here?

So I only enjoy pop girlies. Is it even worth tuning in?

It is *always* worth tuning in! And yes, there are no pop girlies in this semi. There are pop DIVAS who are working hard to entertain you. If you aren't yelling MOTHER after watching Justyna, have you even been using your eyeballs? She is the type of performer who will have you tweeting 'preheating my oven.' Oh, and if you like trashy pop songs, there are plenty of men serving those up in this semifinal.

I don't understand anything you wrote in that last paragraph. Is this Eurovision semi for me?

Yes! Eurovision is for everyone, not just people who overuse stereotypical queer Internet slang. There are songs in this semifinal which are guaranteed to melt hearts, and songs which are guaranteed to make you dance.

Are there any trends tonight?

You're going to hear a lot of Italian. And a lot of French. And a lot about cancer. And a lot of very young men doing dance breaks. And see women who could be any age between 25 and 65 do completely miraculous things in stiletto heels. And then Portugal will make everyone feel chill for three minutes. Oh, also, surprise! Vitruvian Man!

What about the interval show?

We are getting a celebration of Switzerland and Switzerland at Eurovision! I'm printing this before I actually see the whole thing in about three hours, but I am *guessing* it will feature Luca Hanni (who had the song She Got Me), the jury winner Gjon's Tears (who will hopefully be wearing some more of his fantastic blouses) and FOUR-TIME Eurovision participants Peter, Sue and Marc. (If Gjon's Tears does not appear, know that I am rocking out to him at Euroclub THIS EVENING before my eternal love Silvester Belt)

Wait, didn't Celine Dion win Eurovision representing Switzerland? What about her?

As Theo Evan will say later tonight: Shh. Just keep that thought to yourself for a couple more days!

ARTIST CATEGORIES

for the entire show

FOOD

Australia
Croatia
Estonia

WITCHES

Albania
Latvia
Poland

TROLLS

Australia
Estonia
Malta

BALKAN BALLADS

Montenegro
Serbia

YOUR STRAIGHT BROTHER WILL LIKE THIS

Armenia
Azerbaijan
Finland

FRENCH

Australia
France
Israel
The Netherlands
Switzerland

ITALIAN

Estonia
Italy
San Marino

GERMAN

Finland
Germany

TWINKS THAT DANCE

Croatia
Cyprus
Czechia
Norway

TWINKS THAT DON'T DANCE

Austria
Iceland

CANCER

France
Norway
Slovenia

MOTHERS

France
The Netherlands
Norway

FATHERS

Czechia

HOME

Portugal

SOMETHING MYSTERIOUS & SERIOUS

Albania
Lithuania

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 will be released throughout Eurovision week - you can find them here (or on any of the places you usually listen to podcasts): There's more on the podcast than what appears in the zine, so make sure to tune in.



SONG 1: ICELAND

First things first: Do not make a Jedward joke on social media when VAEB (pronounced 'vibe') take the stage. Yes, the similarity is there. We all see it. VAEB themselves have appeared in outfits that say 'Not Jedward.' While their appearance opening the first semifinal may be YOUR introduction to VAEB, the Jedward/VAEB discourse is already stale and shriveled in the Eurovision bubble, and any joke you can think of has been made by someone funnier than you - namely, Jedward and VAEB, who have met and been hyperactive together.

Anyway, the order in which Eurovision acts appear in a semifinal is down to a random draw that slots them in the first or second half. From that point, the producers are able to programme where they want the acts to appear.

Regardless of the merits of the song, having VAEB as semifinal openers is a no-brainer. The brothers are less a musical act and more like roving hype men. Most of their antics are confined to the internet, but on the Eurovision stage, they're going to burst forth with an enviable level of energy and dare the audience not to get involved.

And the Eurovision audience will get involved. If there is one thing that VAEB is not, it is ignorable. Their enthusiasm cancels out the mismatch of their shiny, space-age suits with the lyrics of their song, which describe the process of making a rowboat out of wood and then rowing it to Greenland - something emphasized in their music video by the brothers waving the flag for both Greenland and the Faroe Islands (neither of which they will be able to bring on stage under this year's new Eurovision flag policy.)

Look, I am not the target audience for VAEB. The marriage of shouting and folk and techno is not working for me here. But the kids who are excited about staying up late for Eurovision are going to love them. And the rest of us? Well, the rest of us should just go along with the VAEB. (And THAT'S how you do an Iceland joke this year!)



SONG 2: POLAND

Song 2 is usually known as the death slot at Eurovision. The songs that appear here are expected to fail to advance to the final.

Not for Justyna Steczkowska. This year, slot number 2 is slot number 2. Because if Death were to come for Justyna Steczkowska, she would square up to it in her stiletto heels and let forth an extended high note that would eventually cause Death to run bleeding from the ears.

Does that mean Justyna cannot sing? On the contrary - Justyna has an amazing vocal range, and is able to reach and hold high notes with ease, which she does multiple times in this song. In addition, Justyna can play the violin, dance, hang from straps on the ceiling, navigate life in stiletto heels, and look like she is 25 years old when she is actually 52 years old.

I am not being hyperbolic with that last one, by the way. Justyna represented Poland at Eurovision in 1995, when she was 23 years old, so we have footage of her back then. And she honestly does not look like she has aged a day. Pull up the YouTube clip for 'Sama'! Seriously!

But while Justyna may look the same age as she did the first time she competed in Eurovision, the contest itself has moved on. No longer is it just enough to stand at a mic and sway slightly while performing a song. Now an artist needs choreography and staging and costumes. And since Justyna is representing Poland, the country known for excess, we are getting all of that in spades.

Yes, the staging is busy. There is pyro. There is smoke. There is a man dressed as a pirate distracting all of us while Justyna dangles mid-air and a computer-generated dragon swirls behind her. But unlike the staging Poland often brings, the whole setting here matches the vibe of the song itself.

GAJA is a bit messy. It seems less a song and more of a showcase for Justyna's freakish lung capacity and banging bod. Which is only correct - Justyna Steczkowska is a queen. She has arrived on this stage having plundered the carcasses of her enemies (aka everyone else who competed in the Polish national final) and she is confident, victorious, and ready to feast upon their bones. GAJA is the song of a warrior triumphant, albeit a warrior who is familiar with hyaluronic acid.



SONG 3: SLOVENIA

If Song 2 is the death slot, Klemen is turning Song 3 into the almost-death slot, because his song is about his wife who had cancer, and almost died, but in the end she didn't!

If I seem to be glib about a really painful experience that Klemen and his wife, Slovenian actor Mojca Fatur, went through, it's because I'm matching the tone of the song itself.

Klemen is a comedian and noted impressionist who has hosted the Slovenian National Final before. So when he announced he would be entering the competition, we all hoped he would be coming with one of his parody songs.

Instead, he showed up with a song about his wife's cancer, and in the middle of the song, does a complicated dance move that means he is performing the song upside down, suspended from a rigging.



The crowd applauds, but it just seems like a weird stunt in the middle of what is supposed to be a heartfelt ballad.

And that leads me to the problem with the song - the whole thing is not about cancer (a theme we will return to several times in this contest), but about how Klemen is somehow an extra-special good boy who deserves our attention. (Please note that other, less heartless people in the Eurovision community seem deeply moved by this song.)

Both Klemen and his wife refer to the type of cancer she had - myelodysplastic syndrome - as incurable. And yeah, it's not a great cancer to get. I know because my mother had it. But there are multiple treatments out there.

I don't know and I don't want to know the medical specifics of her case. But it seems like a missed opportunity to be using the Eurovision journey to talk about cancer in general, and the importance of early detection and treatment and screening and all the other things that I feel like have become the general template for a celebrity talking about cancer. Instead, we have Klemen's wife out there talking about how she 'self healed' herself (which, to be clear, is not a recognized cancer treatment!)

I am glad Klemen and his wife seem to be doing better but wow, I hope this song does not make it to the final. And if you're planning your pee breaks, now might be a good time for one.

SONG 4: ESTONIA

Okay, if you already know who Tommy Cash is - and by that I mean if you knew who he was prior to this year's Eurovision - continuing reading here. If not, go to the next column.

Wow. Yeah. None of us expected the follow up from Untz Untz to be a playful song about coffee. None of us expected the most controversial thing about a Tommy Cash song to be a stereotypical reference to the Mafia. None of us thought that Tommy Cash, a man who released a 'Fuck the EBU' track with Joost, would be one of the least controversial artists in Eurovision 2025.

But you know what? Tommy Cash looks like he's having fun. He's palling around with Alessandro Cattelan in Italy. He's interrupting interviews with Remember Monday. He's playing along with all the dumb fan press (of which I include myself.)

Sure, Tommy Cash might have something up his sleeve during the live show, but it is really difficult to get things past the EBU, who do last minute checks to make sure artists aren't smuggling things on stage.

Is it possible that the master troll Tommy Cash is pulling the biggest prank of all by taking Eurovision seriously?

If so, I hope he's having fun. I know I'm enjoying this new, goofball, smiling version of Tommy Cash.

Never heard of Tommy Cash? Keep reading! He is a known prankster of no particular musical style. It's better to think of him as a performance artist who satirises our hypercapitalist, globalist, connected culture, while also focusing on getting his coin from that same culture. Cash is the type of guy who has done collaborations with both couture fashion houses and Pornhub (ask me about it later; don't Google it!)

Espresso Macchiato surprised a lot of us when it came out, because it's lighthearted and goofy and dumb, and, aside from engaging in some stereotypes about Italians, not that controversial. (Italians, for their part, have embraced the song, with Cash topping the viral charts in the country.)

Anyway, Espresso Macchiato is about coffee, because Tommy Cash figured that everyone loves coffee. And you know what? He's correct. I drink three or more coffees a day, and every time I have one, this song is in my head.

Espresso Macchiato also has the smartest lyric of the entire contest: "Life is like spaghetti: It's hard until you make it." Of course, this profundity is then followed up with: "No stresso, no stresso, it's gonna be espresso!" And I realize that I watch Eurovision for moments just like this: an Estonian man telling me to drink more coffee.

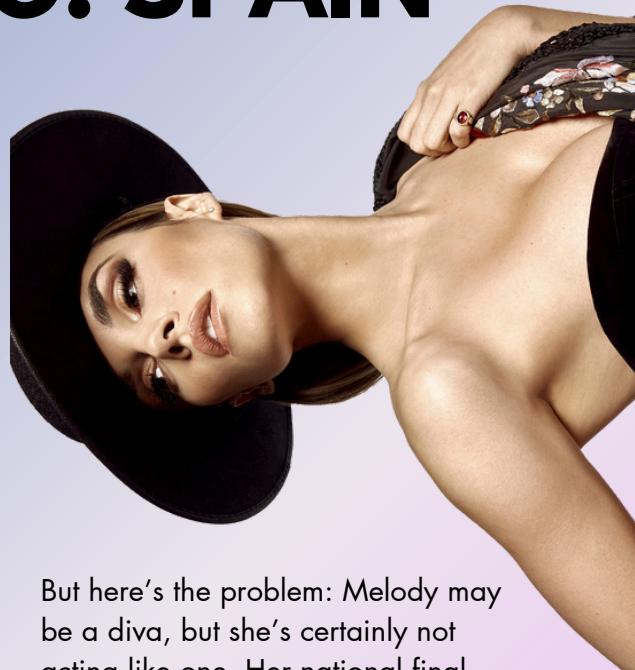


NEXT SONG: SPAIN

A quick editorial note: I'm calling this 'next song' rather than "song 5" because it's a Big 5 automatic qualifier and you can't actually vote for it this evening. And maybe that's a good thing!

Melody from Spain is bringing the song *ESA DIVA* (her caps, not mine), which is, as expected, about being a diva. Melody's definition of diva is fairly expansive, ranging from the star in the dressing room to the "mother who wakes up early." I bet some of you reading this are, by that definition, a diva, and congratulations (maybe)?

One thing is for sure - Melody sees herself as a diva. And she has certainly racked up the experience in show business, having released her debut album at the age of 10. She's now 34, although she has a bit of an ageless diva look around her, because she dresses like she's much older than she is.



But here's the problem: Melody may be a diva, but she's certainly not acting like one. Her national final performance was full of frenetic activity, with multiple costume reveals, set changes, and hairography. Something new happened every twenty seconds or so, to the point where no one in the audience actually needed to concentrate on the song. As someone with a short attention span, I appreciated it, but I left without remembering what *ESA DIVA* sounded like at all.

That's not the work of a diva; that's the work of someone who feels the need to feed the crowd; someone who is worried her presence alone is not enough to win us over.

Since the national final, the song has been revamped (for the worse). It's unclear how much of the staging will remain. I hope that when Melody comes to perform, she will be secure enough in her talent to not hide it behind a bunch of gimmicks on stage.

SONG 5: UKRAINE

Ukraine has a very deep bench, musically, but at Eurovision, I think it's become known for its pop girlies or its ethnic tinged performances. Whatever it is, it works - Ukraine has qualified for the final every single year that they have entered Eurovision, and they've won the whole contest three times. So it's a bit of a surprise that Ukraine is sending Ziferblat, a band that plays upbeat pop.

They weren't the particular favourite to win their national final, but they put on an incredibly compelling performance that convinced me (and others watching) that they were in the middle of a garden, despite being stuck underground, due to the ongoing war with Russia. I feel like this underdog status is following them into Eurovision, where they are seriously underrated. (I saw them live in Amsterdam and they blew me away.)

Their Eurovision entry, *Bird of Pray*, seems to owe more to British invasion bands than any Eastern European musical traditions, despite being performed partially in Ukrainian.

But after listening to the excellent album *Of Us* that Ziferblat dropped this week, I realize why they may not be immediately connecting with audiences. The most obvious influence on Ziferblat is J-Pop - the bright sounds, the major chords, the harmonies. That's not a sound that many Eurofans are listening to outside of the odd anime, and it can be a bit maximalist and in your face.

But for me, once the initial jangly guitars and vocals of *Bird of Pray* get out of the way, the song is like a sonic slap in the face. The guitars could be used to guide a marching army; the vocals move between chants and plaintive pleas that burst forth like a klaxon from the lead singer Daniil.

Is the song political? Yes, but not necessarily in a way that you'd notice. It's a song that's ostensibly about a bird, but it's really about Ziferblat's wish for their culture to be remembered outside of the borders of Ukraine. Hopefully, this song and their participation at Eurovision will help with that ultimate aim.



SONG 6: SWEDEN

KAJ - which stands for Kevin, Axel and Jakob, the group's members - pulled off a surprise win at Melodifestivalen, the Swedish National Final. No one expected a Swedish-speaking Finnish comedy trio with a song about the joys of sauna to beat the slick pop songs churned out at Melfest, especially one by Eurovision winner Måns Zelmerlow.

And it's easy to see the appeal of the song. KAJ have a serious look that makes us giggle - it's three guys in suits who are earnestly extolling the virtues of the sauna. The song itself is catchy, with the 'bara bada bastu' chorus getting stuck in one's head. And yes, as is mandatory in the TikTok world we now live in, there is an associated goofy dance.

If you haven't yet witnessed the joys of Bara Bada Bastu, prepare to be absolutely delighted. It will give you a big silly grin and leave you feeling optimistic about the world.

As for me, a person who was thrilled when Bara Bada Bastu won Melfest, I will enjoy seeing KAJ on stage at Eurovision. But something about the song has changed for me, through no fault of KAJ.

If they win, it is technically a win for Sweden, but it will also be seen as a win for Finland. In fact, the President of Finland supports the band and has said he wants them to win. He is just one person, but it makes me sad that



he's ignoring the representative of his own country - an outspoken queer woman with a song about women's pleasure - for a fun, less challenging song about guys enjoying a sauna.

An individual band is not responsible for larger trends that happen around them. But the way that their success has pushed aside Erika Vikman is something that needs to be studied. I think Finland is lucky to have two great acts, and I wish it could celebrate them both equally.

SONG 7: PORTUGAL

Portugal is always a joy to have in Eurovision. I don't speak Portuguese, so I wouldn't know what they were saying if I didn't obsessively research this stuff. But even without language skills, the country manages to produce a series of artists that bring a defined sense of place to the contest.

NAPA, the band representing Portugal at the contest this year, is no different. Their song is Deslocado, and listening to it - without knowing anything about the lyrics - transports me away from my flat in London to a space in Portugal. It takes me to a spot where I am sitting on a sunny terrace, staring at the Tagus River, and feeling all my worries melt away with every backing "ahhhh" layered in this song.

Of course, as with most Portuguese Eurovision-adjacent songs, Deslocado's relaxing melody masks a bittersweet message.

NAPA are a band from the island of Madeira, an island they needed to leave for jobs and educational opportunities they could only find in mainland Portugal. While the song expresses moments of joy about the experience of returning home to the blue sea and garden to be found on the island, it also expresses the pain about having to live one's life among the concrete of the city, in a place where one never truly belongs.

It is an experience mirrored across Europe as people search for opportunities away from their homes. And it is an experience that will resonate with many people across Europe - if the message in the lyrics can make it across the language barrier. If not, I just hope people enjoy the sweet harmonies and chill vibes.



a conversation with

NOTE TO READERS: There are multiple members of NAPA who are answering questions here, but we're listing them all as NAPA because I am unprofessional and have not yet learned to tell them apart.

N: Our name is NAPA. We are representing Portugal with the song Deslocado.

Dude: So your song is about the island of Madeira?

N: In a way. Yes. And in a way, no. We wrote a song about leaving the island when we were 18 to study in Lisbon. But the song talks about the general feeling of longing for home. So that's why a lot of people in Portugal identified with the song. And that's the message we want to bring to Eurovision to because there are a lot of people in Europe that can also relate to this message.

Dude: We were kind of struck by it because there was another song in this year's Festival da Canção by the Capital of Bulgaria [Ed: that's the name of an act] about not being able to afford a house. And it seemed like there's a lot of songs about longing for home, or for a place to call home in the Portuguese national final.

N: I think it's something that's relatable throughout Europe. Like every big city is having those problems with housing and the prices going up. Young people that are starting their work life and their family life not being able to afford to buy a place to start life. I guess we feel it a little bit more in Portugal just because the way politics in life goes there.

N: Our song talks about moving to somewhere in order to get more opportunities. And that's also a very European thing. We grow up, we move out of our home for various reasons, maybe love, maybe work, maybe you're forced to, so it's about being in another place. Embracing that place. But it's not home. It's never gonna be home.

Dude: One thing that I really noticed when you were performing at FdC was your stage outfits. Can you talk a little bit about who designed them?

N: Constança Entrudo is our friend. We talked with her about the style that we bring to the sound. She picked up these outfits for us and it has the theme of the sea in the outfit. It made sense to bring something close to home.

Dude: Why does Portugal always bring such chill songs to Eurovision?

N: We try to bring our language or music, our language to share it with the rest of Europe, and usually, those type of chill songs are very adequate to transmit messages. And I think in some ways, it's easier to have a chill song that brings a message. If we were speaking the Portuguese from Madeira island, nobody would understand - not even the Portuguese! So, we have to adapt a little.

You can find NAPA on Instagram as os_napa, on TikTok as @_napa_napa, and on YouTube as @napanapanapa.

The group will be releasing a new single the week after Eurovision!

NAPA

SONG 8: NORWAY

I only need one reason to enjoy the song Lighter by Kyle Alessandro, and that is because if, in the middle of the performance, one forgets what country it's from, Kyle reminds us with the shouted lyric "Nor-way! Nor-way!"

(It's actually "No way! No way!" but that's not what the crowd will be yelling as they sing along in the arena.)

Anyway, Lighter is a song involving medieval imagery and armor and discussion of a breakup with a golden girl and burning things to the ground. What it is not obviously about is cancer, but this is the second in this year's cancer trilogy.

Kyle Alessandro was inspired to write this song after his mother got sick with cancer, and she discussed the concept of being one's own lighter - serving as the inspiration for oneself. His mother is doing much better, thankfully, and you can decide how much you want to take Lighter as a song that is a metaphor for fighting cancer or not.

After listening to this song many, many times, I'm not attempting to fit it into any type of cancer narrative and am just taking it for what it is - a pop boy showcasing his best singing and dancing skills in a song that sounds vaguely Scandinavian, in that polished pop style that Scandis do so well.

As a song, I find Lighter enjoyable, although not the most compelling of this year's multitude of dance-pop offerings.

What is worth admiring about Lighter is the competence of Kyle Alessandro's performance. He is a polished pop professional, despite being only 19 years old. In his last band, Umami Tsumami, he was clearly influenced by K-Pop, and is bringing that training to his performance here. The man had a wisdom tooth removal operation after his first rehearsal and it barely made a dent in his promotion and preparation.

Alessandro knows how to put on an entertaining show. I hope he comes back to the Norwegian national final with a more compelling song.



a conversation with

Dude: My first question is: did you put the lyric 'No Way No Way' in the song so that we can all shout 'Norway Norway' in the arena?

KA: Maybe! Maybe, potentially, maybe? Yes? Maybe? Leaning towards yes!

Dude: So can you talk about the title of your song and how it relates to your mom and her experience with cancer?

KA: Okay, yes, so my song for Eurovision representing Norway is called Lighter. Throughout her cancer treatment, she told me to never lose my light. That really inspired me to make a song like about hope and finding yourself, staying true to yourself, just not losing motivation. When she told it to me, it was like, also, a time where it was the lowest part of that cancer treatment because they told her she had six months left.

I was super scared to lose my mum and I told her that I was scared. I didn't want to lose her and she said, 'You have to never lose your light.' And then it clicked for me. She said she was always going to be there with me either way, if I just remain with my light, everything is going to be fine. So yeah, that's how it correlates to my title of the song.

Dude: How is your mom doing?

KA: She's cancer free but still recuperating from fatigue. After all the treatment, the body is tired. We don't know if she's coming to Basel, but we hope so.

Dude: So in your song you're dressed up in armor, but you're not the only contestant this year who's using armor. What do you think? There's this kind of mediaeval/knight/armor trend?

KA: There's a medieval revival happening right now. I'm very into fashion and I love fashion. I've been like scouting and trying to predict what 2025 is gonna bring to the table and there's gonna be this mediaeval Revival... You're gonna see that vibe a lot. I'm gonna be the only one with armor at Eurovision. So yeah, Parg [the contestant from Armenia] is wearing something else.

Dude: Parg is wearing MCU-inspired Winter Soldier?

KA: He's connecting to his roots and that's going to be beautiful. I've seen the costume already. And he's seen mine where I am actually upgrading my armor. So I'm gonna have even more armor.

Dude: So you're 19, the youngest contestant. How are you protecting your mental health?

KA: Yeah, I'm just trying to take breaks whenever I can, and just try to rest in between - in Norwegian we say in between the Schlog which means in between the hits, which means rest when you can. As my mother has told me to do and my mother is very very she's she's you have to do this. If not, you get la chancla [the slipper].

You can find Kyle at:
@ballessandro on TikTok and
@kyle.alessandro on Instagram

Kyle Alessandro

SONG 9: BELGIUM

Red Sebastian is representing Belgium and yes, he did take his stage name from the crab in the Little Mermaid. If you now have "Under the Sea" stuck in your head, please know Red Sebastian sounds nothing like that. Instead, Red Sebastian is one of this year's pop boys, bringing a huge dance beat for all of us.

Strobe Lights is one of those songs that makes me wish Eurovision was more than a contest where most people hear the song once. It is a song that is difficult to wrap one's head around during a single listen.



The issue with Strobe Lights is that there's no immediate hook for people to grab onto, no chorus that's an easy sing-along. That's not a requirement for Eurovision. Many ballads from big voiced divas don't have hooks for the crowd either. But Strobe Lights is slightly weird in that it's a dance song with a diva vocal performance bolted on top. (Side note: One of Red Sebastian's voice teachers is Belgian National Treasure and Good Daddy in a Hat Gustaph.)

Strobe Lights is a dance song where the backing track features a gradual build before the tension is resolved with a drop. But the vocals of Red Sebastian are basically doing the same thing - building from a husky purr at the beginning to some impressive high notes throughout the song.

All of this is technically impressive, but very hard to replicate when screaming the lyrics on the dance floor. As a result, a lot of people feel a slight disconnect from this song.

I, however, can't help but admire the chutzpah of a singer who wants to create an ode to their love of the club experience so much that they themselves act as the build and the drop of a rave song. It is an audacious move, and I hope that people will recognize the obvious talent layered on top of the driving beat.

NEXT SONG: ITALY

Italy is next, and it's one of the Big 5, so it's not a song you can vote for this evening, but it is a song you can vote for on Saturday. (Please do!)

The song is Lucio Corsi's *Volevo Essere Un Duro*, and it's one of the best songs in the contest this year, but I worry that the fact that it's in Italian will mean that the public at larger will be immune to its charms, even though there will be subtitles on stage.

The title of Lucio Corsi's song translates to "I wanted to be a tough guy." Corsi is a string bean of a fella who embraces the androgynous glam rock stylings of David Bowie. His duet partner of choice is a puppet mouse, and his Sanremo stage outfit had 'Andy' written on the sole of one shoe in a reference to the film *Toy Story*. It's clear that Lucio Corsi is very much not a tough guy. Some might question if Lucio Corsi even wants to be an adult. (I don't either, Lucio.)

In a world where the news is telling me there is a masculinity crisis, and where the Tate Brothers are in the headlines, and where there are plenty of podcasts that put forth a model of masculinity that sets out very restrictive rules for men to follow, Lucio Corsi is setting forth a new model of masculinity. He has tried living in a world where men are tough and ready to beat people up at a moment's notice, but found that world impossible to navigate because he's nothing more than 'a white belt in judo/instead of a star, just a sneeze.'

By the end of his song, Corsi has concluded that instead of trying to be tough and getting beaten up, it's probably best for him to just embrace his gentle nature and just be Lucio.

Of course, none of this is apparent if people don't speak Italian. In that case, Lucio's performance might just look like a guy dressed like David Bowie sitting behind a piano performing a ballad. Which is a cute performance, but lacking the punch that the lyrics give it.

Arrrgh. I can't be objective about this song. It's great and underrated and please just be patient with Lucio - by the end of the song you'll be in love.



SONG 10: AZERBAIJAN

This year, Azerbaijan is sending the band Mamagama with the song Run With U, and if I were being rude, I'd say "No thanks, I'd rather walk."

But I don't want to be rude! People have different musical tastes, and Mamagama are just not my cup of tea.

They will be the cup of tea of many people, because they have a very mid-2010s radio friendly sound. When I hear them, I think of Maroon 5, and then I remember that I don't ever want to think of Maroon 5. So it's not Mamagama's fault that they remind me of one of my least favourite bands.



Lyrically, there's nothing special about Run With U. It's a standard love song. There's nothing surprising or shocking in the lyrics. I wouldn't go so far as to say they've been written by AI, but they were certainly written by someone who has spent a lot of time listening to other songs like this.

The most interesting thing about Mamagama is that they feel like a band that should be performing at afternoon industry events in California, rather than playing Eurovision for Azerbaijan. They're not bad, they're just predictable, without anything surprising or new coming from their song or their sound, even with the Azerbaijani stringed instrument they've added into the mix.

I hope they have a nice time at Eurovision! But if you need a pee break, this might be a good time to have one.

SONG 11: SAN MARINO

Look, I know it is confusing, but the country of San Marino is sending a song to Eurovision this year called Tutta L'Italia or All of Italy.

Let me explain - there's a DJ called Gabry Ponte, who you might know best as being part of the Eiffel 65 hit Blue (Ba Da Be Ba Da Ba). He wrote a song called Tutta L'Italia for Sanremo, the annual festival of Italian music that has a secondary purpose as an unofficial national final for the country. Tutta L'Italia was not accepted into this contest, but the song's hook was used as the interstitial music before advertisements. As a result, everyone watching Sanremo became Tutta L'Italia-pilled over the week.

Because the organizers of the San Marinese national final also watch Sanremo, they too became enamored

by this song, and invited Gabry Ponte into their competition. (Describing the ways in which a person can qualify for the National Final of San Marino would require a dissertation length screed, so you'll just have to trust me when I say that Gabry qualified.) When the grand final for San Marino happened, Ponte competed, and won, and a dance banger about Italy was chosen to represent San Marino.

With all that explained - how is the actual song? It's incredibly catchy, for sure. I am certain I will hear the chorus 'Tutta L'Italia Tutta L'Italia Tutta L'Italia' on my deathbed.

The issue is the staging. Although the song is credited to Gabry Ponte, he's the DJ. Eurovision is a song contest that relies on live singing. So Ponte - the named act - has been standing on stage pressing some buttons and waving his arms - while two masked, unnamed singers do the actual performing. (The singers are rumoured to be Andrea Bonomo and Edwyn Roberts, who co-wrote the song.)

For a song that's full of so much life and spirit, having all of Italy represented by two masked guys and Gabry Ponte and some screensaver images of the Colosseum? It feels low-budget and seems to suck all the energy out of the song. Tutta L'Italia is a weird case where the song exists better on your stereo than on the Eurovision stage.



SONG 12: ALBANIA

There are many reasons I am a Eurovision fan, but if someone were to ask me why I am a Eurovision fan in 2025, I would simply point to Shkodra Elektronike, the act representing Albania this year, and say "THEM."

Before December 2024, I had no idea who Shkodra Elektronike were. I did not know of the existence of Kolë Laca and Beatriçe Gjergji. But when this duo performed their song *Zjerm* (which means Fire) at the Albanian national final, I fell in love. Everything about it was unexpected - Beatrice's dancing, Kolë's menacing synth hitting, the unexpected spoken word. Even the little shout of "hopa" about 30 seconds into the song filled me with joy.

I was delighted when it won the national final against a song which was a more generic English-language dance pop track. But I also figured that it was the beginning of a long Eurovision season, and my interest in *Zjerm* would fall by the wayside as new songs came along.



Yeah. I was wrong about that. I am obsessed with *Zjerm*. I keep coming back to its handclaps and shndrits and aman misereres. Every time I hear it, with the swirling strings giving way to the mysterious proclamation of *Zjerm*, I get a little dopamine hit.

I liked *Zjerm* so much that I found myself digging into Shkodra Elektronike's back catalog, and falling in love with dance tracks like *Turtulleshe*. The highlight of the pre-party season, when we all travel around Europe to get a preview of the Eurovision acts, was watching Shkodra Elektronike perform two very long unreleased trance dance tracks in a warehouse in Manchester. It was an experience that feeds the soul.

I realize that none of this is telling you anything objective about the song *Zjerm* or the band Shkodra Elektronike, and, quite frankly, I have lost my ability to be objective about them. I love this duo so much for bringing something avant-garde to Eurovision, and I will be heartbroken if they do not qualify for the final.

But if my unrestrained praise isn't enough to convince you to give this act a chance, consider that these are two Albanian immigrants to Italy who are working to keep the cultural heritage of Shkodra alive. Celebrating them means celebrating all the people across Europe that are the guardians of local cultural traditions.

SONG 13: NETHERLANDS

Let's get one thing straight before you hear Claude's C'Est La Vie. If you listen to this song and think, 'Wow, I can understand all the French in this and I don't speak French,' it's by design. Not because the Netherlands is pandering for French votes, but because the song is written from the perspective of a man recounting the lessons he learned from his mother when he was just a young boy.

And no, the Netherlands is not sending a song in French to pander for votes since French is one of the official languages of Switzerland. Rather, the song is performed by Claude, who immigrated to the Netherlands from the Congo. He is now a pop star in his adopted country, despite performing most of his songs in French.

I would also note that it seems impossible to take a bad picture of Claude. Every still photo and performance I have seen of this man he comes away looking like he is absolutely glowing. HOW? (Rich people and stylists and dermatology, yes; it was a rhetorical question.)

Anyway, Claude's song is simple. It's a confection of a tune celebrating life and its ups and downs, reflected by the swirling melodies of the chanson behind him. With this, Claude shows that a Eurovision song doesn't need to be spectacular or showy. The key ingredient here is the authenticity - this song is Claude's story.

What worries me a bit about this song is the staging - Claude is a fantastic dancer, as showcased in the video for this song, as well as his first live performance on a Dutch television show. But the snippets we've seen (and yes, I know we shouldn't judge the performance on snippets) give over valuable stage space to three violinists who, as we all know, aren't even playing their instruments live.

Given that Claude's dance performances have been so beloved, it seems a real shame to de-emphasise them in the final staging in order to give prominence to three people who will just stand there.

I hope that despite this move which makes the song more static, Claude's obvious charisma will shine through. He deserves a high placement, if for no other reason than to make his mother proud.



SONG 14: CROATIA

Marko Bošnjak is a performer who is wise beyond his years - he's only 21. He almost won the Croatian national final back in 2022 with the heartfelt Balkan ballad *Moli Za Nas*. He's fought back against homophobic abuse he's received in Croatia for being an openly LGBTQ+ artist - and he's spoken out against the UK government's policies towards trans people at the Eurovision Turquoise Carpet.

Bošnjak is taking the opportunity of Eurovision to promote Croatia and its culture, and he should be lauded for being an excellent ambassador for his country. I can't wait to see him return to Eurovision.

"Return to Eurovision," you ask? "But isn't he in Eurovision this year?"



Friends, it brings me no joy at all to report that Marko Bošnjak, an absolute delight of a human being, a singer with a wonderful voice, a person with an enviable fashion sense, has brought a confused melange of a song to this year's Eurovision.

It's called *Poison Cake*, and it was written by four people, and it seems like each of them each had a different approach to the song and then tried to smash them all together into a single song without any consideration for how they might fit. As a result, we go from the tonal shift of a plinky-plonky children's tune to the harsh tones of a Nine Inch Nails-style techno goth to a ballad-y style verse.

It's easy to see what Bošnjak's influences are, and that's part of the problem. The identifiable parts never quite cohere into a whole song.

In a way, Bošnjak reminds me a bit of a baby Luke Black, pulling from disparate bits of popular culture, but just without the guidance to craft it into something that is less rough and atonal and whiplash-y. He is only 21, and deserves the time to play around in the musical scene a bit to find his own style that matches his clear talent.

In the meantime, please know that there's a charming and talented artist behind the three minutes that you see on stage. If Eurovision were a personality contest, he would win.

a conversation with

MB: My name is Marko. I am representing Croatia this year with my song Poison Cake and I send you all a lot of love and poison.

Dude: Do you bake at all?

MB: I bake, but not in that sense.

Dude: You cook.

MB: I did some baking in Amsterdam, but I don't really do baking in general.

Dude: So we come from the UK, the land of the murder mystery. If you were going to poison a cake, what poison would you use?

MB: I really have to research a bit about extra poison because I was always answering in a very metaphorical sense like a spoon of revenge, a dash of death, you know. But now I really think I need to think of my poison of choice and I think it could be rat poison. I don't know if that would work.

Dude: This was your second time in Dora after 2022 and the beautiful Balkan ballad Moli Za Nas. Poison Cake represents a shift in style.

MB: Yeah I wouldn't necessarily call it a shift in style. It's more of just me expressing another part of myself that was always there.

People are used to me singing ballads, and I genuinely enjoy doing that.

MB: But I also have this whole other part of me that cannot be satisfied by just standing on the stage and singing a very emotional song. I want to do something crazy because I am a little bit crazy, so it's only natural for me to follow my intuition and what I feel is right in the moment. I think that these like shifts are completely natural because I'm 21. I'm young, I'm definitely looking what works best for me, but I don't want to limit myself in any way shape or form.

Dude: How much of that is because you co-wrote Poison Cake?

MB: Poison Cake was much more fun to make, to be honest. It's goofy and it still has a message and it still has like these emotions, but they are just on a different spectrum. Poison Cake is just about frustration, about anger, about like the balancing in the universe, about one wanting Karma to do someone the way that they deserve it... this is not something that's so easy to connect with, because it talks about something dark. We all have to admit to ourselves, firstly, that we feel these things.

Find Marko at [@markobosnjaak](https://www.instagram.com/markobosnjaak) on Instagram and TikTok

Marko Bošnijak

NEXT SONG: SWITZERLAND

Switzerland won Eurovision last year, so in addition to hosting the party, they also get an automatic pass to Saturday's final. And what has Zöe Më brought to the contest? It's a lovely little French chanson titled *Voyage* which, upon first listen, seems to consist largely of the phrase "Faire un voyage, voyage/Faire un voyage avec toi," which translates to "I want to go on a journey with you." That's a really sweet phrase in a really sweet song, right?

WELL. The phrase is really sweet, but the rest of the song is not, despite Më's winsome voice. The lyrics seem to describe a really dysfunctional relationship, in which Më is trapped with someone who is both obsessive and indifferent. She sings about how this person eats her up with their gaze, but also how they suffocate her and cut her. Despite all of this, Më vows that she will remain by the side of this person - the journey is the metaphorical one that they will take together in their relationship as a couple.

I get that this might sound romantic. It's a pledge of undying love. But from the outside, the red flags are flying, girl - and I'm not talking about the flag of Switzerland. Më's lyrics (which she co-wrote with two other songwriters) seem to play into the harmful trope that mental health problems can be fixed with the love of a good woman. The melancholy referred to in the song isn't going to be solved with a *voyage*; it's going to be solved with therapy and medication. Më has a role to play as a supportive partner, but the notion that women can love their partners to health often ends up putting the woman at physical risk and making her feel inadequate when her love isn't working. So please remember: Eurovision is NOT a replacement for therapy!



SONG 15: CYPRUS

Shh is a dumb name for a song, but Shh is a dumb song. And despite that, Shh is the song I am most excited to see on the Eurovision stage this year.

This song is sung by Theo Evan, although I am not sure if I should be telling you his name, because the lyrics of his song explicitly state: "If you know my name, then keep it a secret." Personally, I think this is a bit dramatic, because Theo Evan and his song are definitely things I do not want to keep a secret!

Cyprus is known for sending dance bangers with lyrics that use somewhat tortured metaphors - "you got me pelican fly-fly-flyin" for example - and Shh is a stellar example of the genre. The dance beat is throbbing all the way through as Theo Evan sings verses and choruses that have no discernable

link to each other. The song starts out with Evan claiming that he's got golden locks (he is a brunet) and just gets more ridiculous from there, with lines about heaven and hell and following bloodstreams and maintaining a secret identity and none of it matters because Theo Evan can perform the hell out of it.

Evan's voice is good, moving from a near-whisper in the beginning to belting out some of the more challenging notes, but what makes this song so much fun to watch is Theo Evan's performance. This man - a Berklee School of Music graduate and actor who has appeared in the HBO drama Euphoria - does not appear to know that he is performing a dance banger at Eurovision. Rather, Evan approaches Shh with the seriousness usually reserved for an Ibsen drama.

A photograph of Theo Evan, a young man with dark, wavy hair, wearing a white tank top. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious, intense expression. His right hand is raised to his mouth, with his index finger touching his lips, forming a 'shh' gesture. The background is a solid light pink.

I have watched multiple videos of Evan performing Shh, both recorded and live, and in each one, he maintains a deeply pained expression, as if he actually is suspended between heaven and hell. And while his dance moves are impressive, nothing beats Evan throwing his arms about with abandon to indicate the depth of his feeling. Once you notice this armography, you will be mesmerized.

As if all that weren't enough, Theo Evan has suddenly decided that his song is inspired by the Vitruvian Man. Yes, the DaVinci one! Don't ask why. Just enjoy the gift that's unfolding before your eyes.

a conversation with

Because we've got some extra space to fill, you get a BONUS interview! Here's a conversation with Eurovision legend **Linda Martin**, who won the 1992 Eurovision Song Contest for Ireland with "Why Me?" Martin also came in second at the 1984 Eurovision Song Contest with the song "Terminal 3." She is a true legend of the Eurovision community, and performed at this year's *Manchagen Eurovision Festival*.

Dude: First of all, are you doing okay? Because you came in with a cast on your leg.

LM: I'm doing brilliantly but I fell. There's building work going on and I fell and I fractured my kneecap. And that was on Paddy's Day, and the brace is going to be on for another two or three weeks, so there's nothing I can do about it. Because that's a rigid brace, so I can't bend and I can't do other things and it's doing my head in!

Dude: So you have a reputation for being common-sense and outspoken.

LM: Yeah, sometimes. I should keep my gob shut for most of the time, but... But I just don't. I just don't believe telling people lies and building them up to be something. If somebody said to me "What should I do? Give me advice." I say: Just enjoy everything... There's no point in saying to them like, oh well, I see star quality in you.

You're going to be a superstar. You know, I don't do any of that stuff.

Dude: One of the most enjoyable things for many of us was watching your cover of *Tattoo* on *Eurosong*. [Ed. note: The Irish National Final had three former Eurovision winners - Linda, Eimear Quinn, and Niamh Kavanagh performing this cover.] It was phenomenal and completely unexpected. Are there any other unexpected Eurovision songs that you'd think you'd like to cover?

LM: Oh, you put me on the spot here because I have so many favorites. But no...but that was a real pleasure to do, a privilege. I know the girls very well - in fact, Niamh was here yesterday - and we're great friends, but we don't often get to work together... Took a bit of work now to get the song right, but I think we did it justice. RTE were delighted anyway.

Dude: KAJ is here this weekend. They are heavy favorites this year in the competition.

LM: Is this the three blokes?

Dude: It's the three blokes with the song about the sauna.

LM: Right. You see, I haven't had time to basically sit and listen to songs this year. I know what Emmy sounds like, but I couldn't sing it because I just haven't had the time or the dedication. So I'm a little bit oblivious to who's doing well or who is doing anything. But good luck to them if it's a good song. Well, fair play to them.

Linda Martin

Dude: If they win, though...

LM: Ohhh, we don't want to talk about that, now!

Dude: Okay.

LM: Noooo. Cause Ireland are reigning supreme at the minute, and if Sweden wins (pauses) I don't like the sound of that.

Dude: Right.

LM: But I keep saying to people, you know, Ireland won with ballads. And I think the only way for us to do well again is to come back to doing the ballads. You know, we can't compete with the uptempo songs that the Europeans can do. We just aren't there. So I just think we should be sensible. Start writing the gorgeous songs again, get somebody really, really good to sing it and present the song. Try again. Keep on trying.

Dude: Would you ever go back?

LM: (sighs) Listen, the chances are I wouldn't win it again. But I want Johnny to write a duet. [Ed. note: Johnny is Johnny Logan, who wrote both of Martin's Eurovision songs, as well as two of his own Eurovision winning songs.] And if he did - and if he didn't ask me to sing it with him, well, I'd kill him. It's as simple as that. I'd just stab him.

Dude: Where can we find you outside of Eurovision?

LM: Just under two years ago. I built a dog sanctuary. And that's what I do in my spare time. I just adore animals and I love it.

LM: It's running very, very well. We cry when the dogs are gone to their new homes. And we cry - the condition they come in sometimes! And it's just, I love it.

Dude: So has Ireland's song this year made you cry?

LM: No, I don't think I would like to know too much about that dog in space now. It wouldn't appeal to me at all.

You can find out more about Linda Martin's dog sanctuary by visiting [@dublindoghub](https://www.instagram.com/dublindoghub) on Instagram.



GJERGJI • LACA



THE
2JERMINATORS

SHKODRA ELEKTRONIKE • EUROVISION 2025

SHNDRIT, SHNDRIT, SHNDRIT...

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