

September 29, 2009

Hi Natasha-

Thanks for the nice words about the Svetlana article. This is an interview I did on the same day with Ani Lorak in Kiev. That place rocks. No doubt about it. Talk soon, Perri

Ani Lorak: Red-hot savoir faire!  
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September 8, 2009

I have done a good number of celebrity interviews over the last year or so for various newspapers and journals. Lots of times the chats we have are done combat guerilla-style because of the subject's erratic, often frantic work schedules. On many occasions I've been backstage at some theatre, while thin, naked, loquacious people are dashing around changing costumes while I'm trying to glean information from some star/name/uber person about their career achievements and current vacation plans. I've done interviews over the phone, by e-mail, in bathrooms, restaurant kitchens and once on an iced-over, freezing hotel balcony in Moscow. But my interview with Ani Lorak, Ukraine's super-sophisticated, high-octane, heart-attack-on-heels pop songstress was the best work assignment I've ever had the pleasure of conducting. No question about it.

After several talks with Valeria, Ani's digitally-efficient PR woman, I was instructed to meet Ukraine's number one pop star one afternoon this July at the posh Angel Lounge in Kiev's Palatsa Sportu district. Upon my entrance to the club I was escorted to the private back area where Ms. Lorak, who was packed into a salmon-cream colored cocktail evening dress, stiletto heels and fresh from the beauty salon was waiting for me. The always capable Valeria was by her side, and handed me a complimentary, autographed CD. I was enthusiastically beckoned to sit down at their table and told by both of them how nice it was to have me in their city. A better way to start an afternoon, any afternoon, I can't imagine. Most people remember Ani from her rib-cracking 2008 Eurovision performance of the hit song *Shady Lady*. She is a stunning brunette, with beautifully refined eastern European facial features who can flash around the stage in go-go boots like a young, determined, Speedy Gonzalez. For a delicately-framed woman, her voice, vocal tone color and sheer volume-capability can rival the best of Whitney Houston or Donna Summer in their prime. She sang a few notes of some pop ditty while we were sitting at our table and the coffee in our ceramic cups began undulating and forming concentric circles on the surface. When I asked her why Ukrainian women have done so well in the Eurovision song competition, Ani responded with a reference to the country's polemic historical background. "Everybody has tried to conquer Ukraine" she told me. "We have been at war with many countries over the centuries, much blood has been mixed, but my country has always had strong women, the mixing of these bloods just made us stronger."

On the subjects of concert touring and national identity, Ani holds strong to her Ukrainian ancestry. She toured ten cities in the Crimea in ten days during summer 2009. Any touring musician can tell you this is a suicidal schedule, as so many things can go desperately wrong during a traveling show's itinerary: people get sick, artistic temperaments flare-up, equipment inevitably gets lost or "borrowed for all eternity", old girlfriends mysteriously re-appear with interesting news from their gynecologists, etc. However Ani, with her unshakable self-confidence and style, simply accepted the challenge in stride and seemed sure that by brute personality, hard work and grim determination all would go smoothly.

The svelte super-modern, pop sensation told me, in no uncertain terms that she would not re-locate to America or UK if career opportunities arose for her outside of Kiev. "I don't want to change my passport," she told me, "it is very important to remember where you are from, and I really love my country." This response, I must admit, really caught me off guard during our chat. It's rare to meet someone in the music industry who isn't an instant, and I mean instant, sell-out for American/British airplay, global endorsements and, of course, the big, chunky, gravy-train cash flow.

Many hearts were broken this August 16<sup>th</sup> as Ani married a local Kiev business man who hails originally from Turkey. The lucky fellow's name is Murat Nalkagioglu, who moves in the travel/tourism sectors in the Ukraine. Business-wise, her single "Sun" has charted well in Russia and Ukraine and she is the new model and product face of Ukrainian designer Stella Shakhovskaya's fashion house.

Ani Lorak is not just a drop-dead gorgeous, here-today-gone-later-today phenomenon. Take my word on this one kid. She's a super-talented, self-confident and urbane force of nature. Red hot savoir faire never sounded so good on analog-recorded and digitally mastered CDs. Be sure we in Greece and the rest of Europe haven't heard the last of her.