

Heidi Elva
Loop interview with Lucy Kippist

See: <http://www.myspace.com/heidielva>

Ever wanted to escape into a daydream? Bathed in ambience, Heidi Elva's music can take you on a journey through your own mind. Here she speaks to Loop about the pictures, experiences, senses and voices that help to create her distinctive, ethereal sound.

Loop: What first struck me about you was the musicality of your name -it's so delicate, what's your background?

I'm from New Zealand originally but the name sounds very Germanic. My father liked the name Heidi and my grandmother's name is Elva.

Loop: You are both a vocalist and a harpist. At what age did you become interested in music?

From really, really early on. I think I was always musical. I grew up in a church and so from day one I was doing communal music making. I started playing a musical instrument for the first time when I was probably six. That was the violin and I moved through lots of different instruments to eventually come to the harp.

Loop: Who taught you how to play the harp?

I taught myself. I've only been playing this particular harp for almost 3 years. I got it in January 2005.

Loop: What drew you to the harp? What interested you about playing it?

Well, I was studying at uni and I guess I was asking myself what made me unique, what was my musical philosophy, what drove me to play music and I realised that I was really interested in the dream state. The idea of being induced into place of being able to daydream and just escape for a while. Then I picked up this little, tiny harp called a Karrutha, it is from Brazil and it has steel strings. I was playing it to my friend and he found that he was lost within it. I decided to look for a bigger harp and eventually found this beautiful harp maker in Grafton. I can understand now why I came to the harp from all of the years of playing the way that I did and all the different instruments I went through to bring me to the point of being an harpist.

Loop: Your music has been (aptly) compared to the delicate design of a Japanese jewellery box-lilting, lyrical and ethereal. Can you explain how you developed this sound?

It's just sort of found itself the sound. I had no intention when I first started playing the harp of it becoming the way that it has. It has just sort of developed a lot through recording and playing live Brian (Campeau) has played a big part in helping me develop my recorded sound. I think it is different live to what you hear from the recordings.

Loop: In what sense is it different?

When I play live I use a looping unit and an effects pedal and that helps me to create the different layers and sometimes I play the flute or have guests perform with me. But, with the recorded, that is all just sort of layers you can lay down. Live I use samples from my mobile phone but recorded I use my mini-disc samples. I haven't been able to match the two together. I think I am a separate musician for both.

Loop: Maybe it is not such an important thing to have them be the same. I mean live music is just that -an experience and it could be good to define them differently.

Yeah and sometimes I guess if you are a rock band, you want to capture the essence of the energy you create on stage, recorded. But I think they are two separate things for me and I think this is apparently so. They are still very ambient, they have got the same sort of vibe but they are different.

Loop: You have supported Inga Liljestrom -do you think it is fair to say that there are some comparable moods in your music, to some of her work?

Yeah I would. We both seem to lean toward the darker side of music, it's not light. It's not heavy but it is darker.

Loop: Who would you describe as your influences?

Ah, there are so many that I am influenced by. I would say my main influences are Juana Molina (Argentina), Francoiz Breut (French). I just love female voices. I love voices that don't go over the top, that use it as an instrument and they just allow it to flow.

Loop: There is slide show playing continuously on your myspace
(<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile>)

[&friendID=105056384](#)) that reels through a series of beautiful and almost fragile images. You have given it the title 'Influences' -can you explain a little more about what these images represent for you?

I am influenced by all of the sensory but felt it represented me more to use the visual rather than to say, I like old movies..

Loop: Who do you imagine your audience is?

It's interesting actually. It has crossed a few different boundaries I don't expect metal heads are going to be listening to my music but I think anyone who likes to daydream would like my music and anyone who likes something a bit different. But I don't have a specific idea because there are some people who I meet and I think, wow, you like my music I just never would have thought.

Loop: When you are putting your music together does the lyric or the music come first?

It can happen either way or at the same time. I don't have a particular method. At the moment I have been playing heaps of harp and not much singing at all. Actually I've been singing into the back of my harp so I can create these little ambient layers with that and that becomes a bit dubby. I haven't written a song with words for a while.

Loop: Atmosphere must be important to you because I have read many of your gigs are candlelit -what do you think this brings to the experience of your music?

Ah yes, "you may find her in a candlelight room" -ideally that is how all my gigs should be (laughs). Yes I think atmosphere is really important, it is part of the whole sensory experience. You want to be able to go and sit and engage and listen and feel and be part of it. It doesn't really suit being played in a venue with lots of people talking because it makes it hard to get to that place.

Loop: What would you say are the biggest challenges of being a performance artist in Sydney?

It would be the lack of venues that would suit what I do.

Loop: How do you think that could be addressed?

Well you know they are trying to pass an act that means smaller venues don't have to pay larger licensing fees -so I'm really hoping that will go through and there will be lots of small, intimate venues for people to come and just listen. I mean there are so many amazing musicians that we don't get to hear.

Loop: What's next for you?

I have just finished recording an album called 'Trees', which is due to be released in February. And I have gigs in Melbourne over November and December. There is one in Sydney late December. For upcoming shows check out my myspace www.myspace.com/heidielva.

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