

ELLA BERGSTRÖM.....AKA. LOKOMOTIV



I'd best describe Ella Bergström as the Swedish birth child of Björk meets Aurora. But any sort of comparison to similar sounding Nordic musicians would be an understatement— simply because I'm yet to hear a young artist as sonically diverse and robust as Ella.

Going by the stage name 'Lokomotiv,' Ella is a 24 year-old musician, living in Gothenburg, Sweden. Perhaps the most captivating aspect of her music is the way she so cleverly plays with **contrasts**.

Although, by definition, contrasts infer a binary of sorts, those within Ella's music appear **contingent and symbiotic**. Like Yin and Yang, they work together to form a perfectly fluid musical relationship, bringing to surface intricate melodic qualities, **panoramic in style and resonance**.

A dynamic blend of electronic and classical music, Ella's songs embody the natural, earthy qualities of her surrounding Swedish landscape; tinkling, wind chime sounds emulate the sun sparkling against an ocean of water, only to then be juxtaposed with the dark distant bases and heavier instrumentals— like clouds rolling in; beating like a heart; brewing before a storm— drawing you deeper, further, beneath the sparkling surface.

Layered sounds grow and grow until, almost always, a tempered, controlled climax occurs, providing a stage for Ella to demonstrate the **durability and maturity of her strong, accented vocals**. Encapsulating the pulse of our emotions, Ella's music manages to reverberate the physicality and intensity of the human condition.

Ella— You know, I'm so nervous.

Eva- For this interview?

Ella— Yeah. I've been thinking this whole morning; "I'm gonna tell her everything that's not relevant!"

Eva- Haha, I'm *also* really nervous... I actually have a glass of wine next to me right now.

Ella— Oh... I have wine at home as well... [she looks to her left, towards her kitchen]. *Maybe* we should both drink wine together! Oh my god, okay, I'm gonna get wine.

Through the Skype web-camera, I follow Ella into her kitchen with her laptop, which she places on the kitchen bench-top. From her torso up, she wears a silk lilac shirt, decorated with oriental-like floral patterns. Beneath it she wears a cropped velvet turtleneck. Her hair is long and

blonde, darker at the roots— so different from the fiery, multicoloured pink-to blue-to-purple gradient she had it dyed when I saw her last. As she pours the red wine into a glass teacup, I notice a small female 'Venus' symbol tattooed onto her left wrist.

Ella- But you know, I'm an adult now, so I only drink because it's *good*... just kidding.

She smiles at herself, as she walks from the kitchen back to her light-filled bedroom. The last time I saw Ella was in 2017 in Malmö with her band, KATTHEM. Now we're both sitting in front of our computers on Skype— myself in Melbourne, and Ella in Gothenburg—drinking wine together.

Ella- But I've actually started to like wine now... *for real*.

Eva— Same, I used to hate it!

Ella- Me too. I drank it anyway. But you know... I like the taste of memories.

That is, perhaps, the greatest thing I learned about Ella following this interview— that she can turn anything, literally *anything*, into something beautiful, something poetic. **Her sensibility to the world around her is uncanny**; like a wide-eyed child, she views everything with a positive energy and an artistic eye, allowing her to delve deeper into the complexities and subtleties of human life, eventually returning to the surface with a perspective that is untouched and unfiltered; so full of fertility, growth and understanding, and laced with an extensive amount of curiosity.

For weeks after the interview, I kept returning to this thought— to this personality trait of hers— and was continuously struck by it, very much attracted to it, as if I'd learned some great lesson in life.

Eva- I wanted to begin by asking you about your song Destruction. Could you explain what it is about and how you began creating it?

Ella- I wrote Destruction about four years ago. The song was kind of about a power imbalance in a relationship. And I wrote about it from the other perspective; like what happened to me. I guess what is a bit freaky about this song is that when I wrote it, I suppose that was the point when I started to realise things about the relationship I was in, but I didn't really want to realise those things. It wasn't until about, maybe a year later, that I was able to finally accept those things I had written.

Eva- Do you always find yourself writing down more personal thoughts, poems, or lyrics, then translating them into melodies and songs?

Ella- Actually, I write everything at the same time—almost always I sit at the piano and write the song in like an hour, or half an hour. But that's just like the skeleton, and then I'll produce it later. So the melody and the lyrics often come together. I feel like that's really important. . . like, I feel like I can hear that in my own songs; the *melody of the words*. . . if you know what I mean? They have to work well with the song melody. I want it all to be very *fluid*.

Eva- You mentioned your half-hour writing process. Would you say it's pretty cathartic in that way? That within that short time span, you might feel a sense of release when you finish writing a song?

Ella- Well actually, that's like a realisation I got this month. *I think I'm searching for those 'kicks' . . . emotional kicks. And that can also be a bit destructive in some ways.* And that also made me realise why I had problems trying to continue on with a song. I have so many songs, maybe about 50 unfinished songs, that I have just lying around. But I don't have the guts to just go ahead and finish it, or produce it, or do something more with it. And now I've realised why— because *I'm looking for those 'kicks.'* I get afraid of losing that emotional connection to the song, so I always just move forward and make a new song instead.

Despite Ella's fear of losing that initial emotional connection within her work, she seems to have worked out the perfect artistic algorithm to continuously reignite that emotional kick she so cautiously aims to maintain in production. Her melodies are entwined in a very specific way, so that they're constantly birthing new paths and avenues to follow. With every listen,



one comes across a new sound, a new feeling, a new detail to explore, so that eventually each listen *feels* like the first.

Eva- Destruction includes lyrics like “you are mine, I will never be yours” and you talk about how you “blew a kiss and got nothing back.” With these lyrics in mind, what would you say is your perception or idea of love? Would you say it’s somewhat obsessive or romanticised?

Ella- I don’t know if I would say my picture of love is *romanticised*, but I get very stuck in it. And I get addicted to those feelings. But that’s also something I realised recently; like, if I would sit on a bench in the snow, minus ten degrees outside, together with someone I like, and we’ve had a *good* conversation, *I could sit there until I freeze to death*. If the other person doesn’t say “ok, you know, we should go in,” I could sit there until I *fucking die*. Because I’m never, *I’m never* the person that will say first, “ok, we should go in,” because I just ignore those other feelings. I’m so, like, in that moment. . . and it can be wonderful, but it’s also very destructive. *For a long time I thought that it was worth it to offer that pain*— often I feel like it’s worth it to get those kicks. But in the long run, it’s not.

Another important thing I realised quite recently is that all these emotions, they’re still inside of me. Even if I connect them with a person, *that person* is not the one who makes me feel that way. *It’s me who makes me feel the way I do*. And I can do that *with* or *without* that person. I can still cry when I see dust in the sunlight. . . even if I don’t have that person next to me to make me feel all these other good things in life.

Eva- Would you say getting “stuck” in love is an important part of your writing process? Or something that perhaps gives fuel to your creativity?

Ella- Maybe love does, in a way. But *I also have a big amount of love for the world*. Because I’m a very positive person, I guess. Like, I even love ugly and nasty things. . . *everything that makes me feel*. And I feel like everything around me makes me feel. . . and I guess that that’s love in a way.

I’m reminded of Björk’s ‘All is Full of Love,’ in which she sings; “*You’ll be given love, you’ll be taken care of / Twist your head around, it’s all around you / All is full of love, all around you*”. This elevation of love beyond romance positions it as a more personal venture— an all-encompassing, ongoing search. In her search for love Ella seems to pursue all that is beautiful, maintaining a childlike innocence and sense of intrigue. The preservation of these unaffected qualities is something really authentic; a feeling satiated with so much vulnerability and pleasure to the point where you become envious of it.

Ella- I think the thing that gives fuel to the process is that it’s more a form of therapy for myself.

And maybe a way to figure out ‘what am I trying to tell myself?’ Sometimes I feel like my songwriting is the healthiest version of me. *It’s very important for me to be transparent*— to see both the good sides and the ugly sides. And maybe also in some ways, manifest myself, *my whole self*.

Eva- Do ever you find the creative process to be difficult? Does it come in waves?

Ella- I feel like that’s one of my stronger sides, because there’s so much to experience. I really love when you get this weird feeling in your body and you don’t know. . . like you haven’t felt it before. . . and you can’t connect it to what it is. . . like it’s neither bad or good, it’s just a *very strong emotion*. And so then I want to try put words on it. I guess *it’s a bit of an experiment sometimes*. Like, my biggest dream is to take this feeling [she motions towards her heart] and describe it and make someone else feel it.

Eva- Is that very difficult? I always find that to be one of the most difficult things to do. . . because a memory could come from something like a sound, or a smell. And so then trying to write about it becomes really difficult because you feel like you can only really use that particular smell or that sound to replicate it. . .

Ella- Yeah! It’s like you try to translate it, but in the transition details will fall away and the person that receives it won’t experience the same thing. And I guess that’s why for many people what music you listen to can also be very private, in a way. Sometimes I feel like if I find a really good song, it can be a great way to connect with people. But sometimes, if I don’t know a person, and I have this new song that means very much to me, or like I’m still in that ‘space,’ I’m not sure that I would share it with that person. . . because I don’t trust that person to feel the same way as I do, and I don’t want to break that spell. *I’m also very nostalgic*. So I love the feeling of a forgotten memory, or something that’s very distant. I can’t control it, it has already happened. It’s just so distant, like an echo. . . and I find that so beautiful.

Eva- I wanted to go back to what you said about your love for all things “beautiful and nasty.” This perspective kind of reminds me of David Lynch. In ‘Catching the Big Fish’ he talks about the beauty he finds in dead creatures, in blood, in typically ‘ugly’ things. But, he’s interested in visually depicting these things to demonstrate their beauty.

Ella- Yeah, *the contrasts between the ugly and the beautiful are important*. Most people find a dead bird on the road to be a bit gross, maybe. . . or like trash or something. But I guess I like the contrast between *nature and the things that don’t ‘belong’ there*. But they still do, and there’s always a connection between [these] things, and I think that’s beautiful.

Eva- I guess that’s a very poetic view on the world though. . .

Ella– Yeah, but **I guess that's how you survive**, like you *have to* [view it this way]. Even if you're a realist. Like, for example, the most beautiful thing I know right now is this factory here in Gothenburg. I don't know what factory it is, it just feels so mysterious. I always take the boat over the river, and I get to watch it. I just wonder what happens inside it... like what are they making? And with all the pipes that are going around it... and there's smoke everywhere. Even if it's destroying the nature, it's still like the most beautiful thing I know. And I always imagine what it would look like when nature takes it back....

As Ella talks about this factory in Gothenburg, I notice a certain excitement rising in her body—as if entranced, her eyes widen and she looks away from the laptop camera, imagining the factory in her mind. Her smile broadens, and her hands move in every which direction as she describes the selective beauty of the old factory.

Gothenburg is a city in Sweden that is infamous for its shipping port and industrial landscape. Factories, pipes, and large industrial cranes line the sky, forming the backdrop to a city surrounded by an ocean of water which eventually becomes the North Sea— establishing a liquid divide between Sweden and Denmark. **Echoed in her surrounding landscapes are the contrasts that Ella talks so fondly about**— between two countries, between nature and things that don't belong there, and, in the ebbs and flows of the tide, between return and departure. These contrasts all work in **a unison of modulating grace**, combining and synthesising to reveal their innermost beauty.

Ella– **This idea of contrasts, that is also how I feel like / am**; like how I work as a person, my personality. Humans are very complex, and sometimes that's also like a struggle, or a battle for me. I'm very calm and up in my head a lot of the time, maybe a sweet person, I guess. But I can also be very like, *vulgar*, and sometimes I have this need to just explode on someone and start a conflict. And sometimes I feel like I'm swinging between those persons so much. But that is what makes me, *me*.

Eva– Sonically, I feel as though your music reflects the emotion and intensity of your lyrics— the sounds and melodies are very earthy, intricate, magical and intense. Is this intentional? How do you come about finding the sounds that best illustrate the immediacy of your emotions?

Ella– I feel that I have a hard time to know exactly... like some people know how they want their music to sound. I guess I hear it in my head beforehand, but usually it's more experimental; when I hear the sound I'm like, "ok this is the right one." It's a hard question though. Because **I feel like it just becomes, it just happens**. And it's the same thing as I said before, that's just what I find beautiful.

In a similar way that nature never asks permission for anything, so does Ella's music. Produced and created in the privacy of her own room, it harvests an aesthetic that is **unapologetically large and brash, yet all the while nuanced and complex**— an aesthetic that prides the fluidity of naturalness and slow becoming.

To some extent, as with nature, it's not our role to try and control extremes. What instigates the creation of a song for Ella is something deeper, something closer to the human condition, where purer, more primitive emotions lurk. The density and extremes of Ella's music evolve from an innate feeling, a knowing relation to sound.

Ella– Also, I guess it's the things I listen to. I come from a very classical background. For the majority of my life I've played classical piano and classical violin, and I used to sing in a choir when I was young. So I guess what I'm aiming for, and what I'm working on right now, is to mix this very traditional and 'nature-close' sound, and take it, and then like rip it and destroy it.

With our wine glasses empty, Ella and I near the end of our Skype call. I ask her what's on the horizon for her music. Currently undertaking a bachelor degree at Gothenburg's Högskolan för scen och musik means that Lokomotiv is an ongoing, slower solo process for Ella. She likes to take time to figure stuff out— to be in control of everything. And while things may seem small and initial in their growth, Ella's ambitions appear larger;

Ella– What I really want to do is play with the symphony orchestra, like hundreds of synths... but that's for the future... nothing I can do right now...

Find Ella Bergström's music on Soundcloud and Spotify under the name Lokomotiv, and follow her on Facebook at @lokomotiv.