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Interview: Tanis (Part 1)



Interviewer: Rui Pascoal Date: 27 December 2015

It's on the occasion of the release of her pop single *Ce n'est pas moi* (It's Not Me) that we approached this reserved but multitalented young musician!



Belonging to multiple cultures and thanks to her singular yet sober universe, Tanis achieves a refreshing musical style. We suggest you take her at her own words.

Zero Yen (ZY): Hello Tanis! When and how did you become a singer?

Tanis: As long as I can remember, music has been part of my life. My father loved having musical instruments around the house in the hope that his children would learn- something he didn't have the chance to do in his own youth. So from an

early age I set about playing with a piano (rather than actually playing piano!) but, little by little, this fed my desire to learn how to really play. Starting out, I learned how to play melodies simply by listening along and attempting to reproduce what I was hearing with my keyboard; I'd try again and again up until I succeeded. And the more I did this, the easier it became. I was extremely timid and had a lot of trouble expressing my feelings. In a way, music was my only way of expressing my emotions and really communicating them.

On bad days I'd find myself sitting in front of the piano where I'd just play and sing everything that passed through my mind all day long. When I was eleven, my father came home one day and, overhearing me play, asked me what was this lovely song that I was playing. I responded that it was just something I had in my head and he told me I should write it down so as not to forget it. It was with this encouragement that I started to write my first melodies and songs. Of course, I still had everything to learn but this is what motivated me to begin.

ZY: Who came up with the title *Ce n'est pas moi*? Was it a little bit you?

Tanis: *Ce n'est pas moi* (It's Not Me) is, contrary to the title, very much a part of me! I wrote this song as I write all my pieces, at a time when something intensely personal, an event or feeling, motivates me to do so. *Ce n'est pas moi* explains that just because I can't tell someone how I feel doesn't mean that those feelings don't exist, it's just that talking about them out loud, even about love; it's not me.

ZY: And why did you choose this title?

Tanis: It's both the chorus of the song as well as the main sentiment of the piece. As you'll see the music video is pretty sober and refined, with lots of whites, elegance and purity.

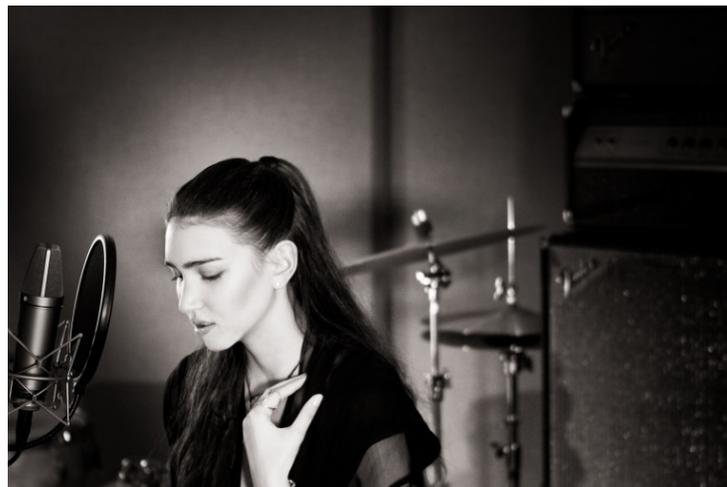


ZY: Did you choose everything and is it a little in your image?

Tanis: Yes, I'm the one that chose that universe of pure white as the title shares the same spirit. However, other choices (such as the angles, movements, etc...) were of course the work of the director.

ZY: Do you prefer working in a studio or singing live?

Tanis: I really don't have a preference as I find both to be completely different experiences. In the studio I compose and write, but I also self-produce my music and songs, so I have to pay attention to every element like the instrumentation, the effects, the mixing, its not just singing. Performing live is wholly different as everything is organised ahead of time and my job is to deliver for my audience, by conveying to them the emotions I felt when writing each song.



ZY: And why did you choose to write songs in both French and English?

Tanis: I was born in France and I am French, but I've spent the majority of my life far from it, moving from one country to the next. I was educated in a completely bilingual way, my father would only speak to us in French at home, whilst my mother would speak to us in English. As a result of this I think, dream, and write in both languages without really running into any barriers.

ZY: Have you ever thought about releasing an album entirely in Chinese?

Tanis: I have thought about writing songs in Chinese, yes, but to go from there to writing an entire album is perhaps a bit ambitious; Although just talking about it make me want to do it!

ZY: Can you tell us a little more about your album *Blackout*, and any future songs to come? What do you have in store for us, what are your favorite titles and why?

Tanis: I think that *Blackout* has a lot to offer; at least I hope it does! I'd say that *Ce n'est pas moi* is without question the simplest and sweetest song of the album. This opus contains one of my favorite songs *Child In The Empty Forest*, which symbolises the loneliness we can experience when we don't feel like everyone else. To the opposite extreme, it also contains a far more upbeat song, *Drive* that expresses the desire to go and live a free and happy life, far from the constraints of society.

ZY: Why *Blackout*, how did you come up with this title?

Tanis: *Blackout* is actually the title of one of my songs. I chose it as the title for my first album as well because my songs express something that's at the same time somber yet pure; Like the purity of the night, of nothingness.

In a blackout there's no electricity, no light, nothing to distract us from our inner lives; so in it we can better understand who we are and what we feel. That's without a doubt what my album conveys.

ZY: Your multicultural life has clearly had an influence on your music. The sounds you explore combines this pluriculture with Western traditions. What are your musical influences?

Tanis: As I've said, I love music and I always have my ears and heart open to the sounds and music of all origins, as I never know where inspiration may come from, where it may take me and what I could learn from them. I'm a big fan of bands like *Bon Iver* and *Coldplay*. Their work has such a wealth of emotion and sound! I've always admired what they do. When it comes to which cultural inspirations I might have, it's clear that I like associating Western pop traditions with instruments, sounds and rhythms that are more rare and ethnic. I always strive to integrate a certain variety of sounds into my music, under the condition that they lend themselves to it and that the result please me!

ZY: Your lyrics speak of love, but also of searching for oneself in a vast and troubling world. Are you one to cogitate a lot about yourself and the future of our planet and the need to build a better world?

Tanis: Who wouldn't want a better world? One of my songs, *Losing My Mind*, talks about our planet, of poverty and of things that disturb me enough to practically drive me mad.

ZY: How did you become a pianist, guitarist and percussionist?

Tanis: I started playing the piano at age 5, and essentially learned to play by ear. Naturally, as I grew older, I had to learn to read and write music and the more I studied the more I wanted to know how to really express myself through music; So I began to explore other instruments. We had an old, classic guitar at home and playing it just came naturally. I started studying percussion because, for a composer, it's so essential to understand and feel rhythm and I felt the best way for me was to learn to play it myself. I firmly intend to never stop learning how to play other instruments, as it is essential for a composer to understand as many instruments and sounds as possible.



ZY: In England, in America, and for five years in China you've studied theatre and music. You've also graduated from the prestigious and highly selective Steinhardt University in New York with a specialty in film score. How difficult was it to carve this path through your pluricultural side?

Tanis: As I've lived in many different countries since my birth, I got into the habit of adapting to more or less all situations and cultures. It goes without saying that in the beginning there were a few small moments of culture shock, but in general I learnt how to integrate into different cultures and adapt my lifestyle according to where I was. In New York I had no problems integrating as it's a totally international city where it's easy to stay very independent. The fact that it is such a melting pot of cultures and personalities of all kinds helped me feel at home straight away in the big city.

At my university my studies in Musical Composition and Film Score covered a variety of subjects like music theory, history of music, as well as digital production, instrumentation and recording technology. These classes were very thorough and concise, designed to make sure that we ultimately become accomplished musicians with an exceptional background in musical culture.

ZY: What is your workflow like when you sing? Is it the same each time you record a song?

Tanis: I don't always work in the same way. Each one of my songs was written and composed in the way that suits it best, which is essential because, as I work alone, I'm my own inspiration. I don't like forcing an idea as often it means that my heart isn't in it and that in the end I'll lose all the work I put into it. When an idea does emerge it can come from anywhere. If I'm not close to a piano or my studio, I'll write it down on paper so as not to forget it and then I'll use that as my launch pad.

ZY: Of your activities do you prefer composing, writing, orchestrating, arrangement or singing?

Tanis: Honestly it's very difficult to choose one activity over the others as each part is inextricably linked and each rely on the other. Composing is of course my base, without it there's no use in orchestrating, writing lyrics or even singing- at least for me. Of course from time to time I'll sit down at the piano and sing other artist songs, for no other reason than my own pleasure; it's refreshing!



ZY: Like your father, you are a multifaceted artist and quite discreet. What do you prefer between your pursuits as a photographer, musician, and upcoming actress?

Tanis: Music has always been my great passion. Even if I go on to do something else later in my life, I am sure that it'll stay close to the heart of my world. My music

is very visual; because that's how I feel it. Without a doubt due to my experience as a photographer and because I also write film scores, so when I write a song I always see images and already start imagining how the music video will look. Sometimes I have to put myself in a different mood or in the skin of someone else, either real or imaginary, and find within me the emotions necessary to choose the right words and music for my songs; a little like how an actress would get into character. Ultimately, I'd say that music is the backbone of my artistic life and that what I do as a photographer and actress interacts with and complements all that I do in the field of music.

ZY: Unlike some artists with parents of fame, you openly acknowledge your relationship with father Jean Chalopin, the talented French creator of the company DIC in the 80's (which produced international cartoons like Ulysse 31, Inspector Gadget, The Mysterious Cities of Gold, The Care Bears...) What are his animated and other works that you have most loved as a child and why?

Tanis: I am who I am. I never saw the need to hide that my father is Jean Chalopin as it's a fact that that's who my father is. I have always admired his success and when I hear about his life experiences and what he's been through it give me the courage to struggle for what I love and that is something I'd never renounce.

Of my father's shows, my two favorites are *The Mysterious Cities of Gold* and *The Bots Master*. I love the adventures and stories of *The Mysterious Cities of Gold* because, as a child, they made me dream of exploring the cities of the Incas alongside *Esteban and Zia*. I discovered *The Bots Master* a little later on but what I really adored was the music, the action, the humor and how it came together with 3D scenes that I found truly incredible! It was the first time I'd seen 3D sequences on television, you had to wear those special glasses and, at the time, I thought it was the coolest thing in the world.

ZY: Adoring music himself your father populated the house you grew up in with many musical instruments. Did this have some part in directing your choices?

Tanis: I'd say that having instruments around the house was clearly a good way to give me the desire to learn. But I think that my motivation and inspiration came primarily from the fact that, even before I could play piano, I spent the better part of my time listening to my father's extremely eclectic CD collection. But in the end I think that I would've found myself drawn to music regardless.