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THE ESC PART OF THE EUROPEAN MUSIC BUSINESS OF OUR DAYS...

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The Eurovision Song Contest has a long and shiny history and has evolved a lot since its first virgin "on-air tv-show" back in 1956. The 'ceremony' still goes on since, the countries participating increase year by the year, some decide to join and some others to walk away, EBU updates the 'rules and regulations' from time to time, the show must go on, and the main reason for the existence of ESC is still valid: the testing of the limits of live television broadcast technology. However, along side the broadcasting technology evolution, there lies a show, a music feast, a professional event of the European show biz, there lies the music itself and the fans...

Some chose to say that the ESC is not as it used to be. Some say the concept has changed, the show has changed, the music has changed... Some say its all about the show and not about the music any more. Some declare their change of heart, since the contest is 'no longer a cultural music event' but a commercial TV-show. Well, it depends on how you look at things, on where you chose to turn your focus on, and at the end of the day it comes down to how you 'listen' and what you want to 'listen' to...

It is very much true that the contest has changed a lot over the years... I would say It's evolved! Today we no longer hear the live orchestral sound on the night(s) of the show, since the requirement of it was dropped in 1999. We no longer expect to hear the different languages of each nation/country as we did before, since there is an open choice of languages used since 1999. We have no way of knowing the style of each entry-song, or expect a specific sound based on the music culture of the participants, since the genre of music has been changing lately, introducing songs of different backgrounds like pop, rock, folk, electronica, retro and so on... Instead we are expected to vote using a phone: via calling or sms-ing. For the fans of the show, its a regular thing to go on-line and check on the polls and the bets a few weeks before the big night(s), even gamble with money, by voting for the final results each one expects. During the actual show, we are keen on exchanging opinions among ourselves, not only concerning the musical aspect of the songs, but also on the show itself, on the hosts, their ability to present the live contest, their clothes, their everything. Most of us have an opinion for the stage design, the lighting of the songs, the camera angle of the live broadcast, the sound... It's all moving away from the music, but then again, isn't this what music and a music show is all about today?

The contest, in my humble opinion, is only following the trends and 'rules' of the Music Business of our times. The vision is equally important for a TV-show, as the music itself is. After all, it is a TV-show under the title "EuroVISION Song Contest" (ESC). Why not 'dress' the songs with a stage organization, artistic costumes, dancing moves. Its all about our ears and our eyes! Its a european (and not only) show based on music, with a considerable budget for each year's organizing country, a source of publicity for artists taking part in a '3-minute moment of spotlight', a chance for song-writers, performers, singers, dancers, stage-directors, light directors, managers and artistic promoters to work and show what they've got. Does it sound like a simple thing to you? Teams are being formed especially for promoting the song of each participant, groups are being organized for supporting each promotional and production team, companies are sponsoring artists, live tours are being programmed for each entry, before and after the contest. Singles and Albums in a CD or DVD format are being released, Web-pages are being built on the net, e-stores and auctions are increasing sales of artistic products, and its all being made for a single '3-minute' appearance in the contest. Don't you see? This is a story of a business

called 'show'. A story not far different from the 'Music Business' itself, necessary for someone to become popular, to become a star; and starts glow for a while... some last longer and some less.



The ESC has become part of today's lifestyle. It's a reality. Why deny it? If you think about it, a music career today is not only about music itself. This existed back in Beethoven's and Mozart's time, and before... This existed before Edison ever invented the phonograph, before the origin of the Music Business itself... back then people could only listen to music. It was not possible to 'save' it in any medium. It was not possible to reproduce a performance. Music was only a matter of a live session, a matter of time passing. Today music is so much more! Sure It's about the song itself, the form, the chords, the melody, the voice, the interpretation, the arrangement (used to be called orchestration). But today it's also about the level of production, the sound design, the booklet of the CD/DVD case, the artistic image, the artistic personality projected, the video-clips accompanying any music work. Often it's also about the money, the cost, the profits, where it's being spent or invested and by whom... Music is a lot of things today; perhaps the definition of the word is being re-considered. In my eyes, music today is a sum of three elements: first its the

music itself, in its traditional essence; secondly it's the technology wrapping the production, and last but not least, its the business aspect of it, it's the promotional strategies applied to it, the marketing guide-lines, the business that makes music a product!

Having said that, one can now see more clearly why the ESC is evolving, developing and changing. One can realize that there are a number of aspects and concerns, that round-up to the fact that the Eurovision Song Contest is a modern and up-to-date production for a live TV-show, reflecting on our today's reality. It's a music event in the essence of the term 'music' in our times.

Make no mistake, with a 'closer eye', it is crystal clear that it is still ALL ABOUT THE MUSIC... After all, it's a live music performance! No matter what promotional strategies and marketing techniques are being applied, no matter what the 'business world' has to say, it all comes down to the live performance of those 3 minutes on stage, in front of cameras, being watched by something around 100 - 600 million people internationally. No matter how the artists sound in the studio recording, how they look in the promotional pictures, or how their public image is formed, they still have to show what they've got on stage!

For the people who can 'see' and 'hear', the live show is a moment of truth, and a very artistic procedure... and the powerful and worthy songs always stay in history!

Till the next contest, enjoy some of my favorite performers (1990-2008) singing LIVE:

Danijela 1998
Dulce Pontes 1991
Edyta Gorniak 1994
Sestre 2006
Esther Hart 2003
Lisa Andreas 2004
Rufus 2003
Mando 2003
Niamh Kavanagh 1993
Amina 1991
Rita Guerra 2003
Mia Martini 1992
Kasia Kowalska 1996
Elina Konstantopoulou 1995

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