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“We Swiss are probably not born eccentrics”

Lovebugs have released their first album for four years, entitled “Land Ho!”. An interview with frontman Adrian Sieber about being Swiss in the pop music industry and international expectations.



INTERVIEW: MARKO LEHTINEN

“Swiss Review”: After a four-year break, Lovebugs – now a band made up of seasoned dads – have released their latest album.

Adrian Sieber: Yes, our drummer Simon Ramseier was the last of the five of us to become a father. He had a daughter a few months ago.

Why did the new album take so long to arrive?

“Land Ho!” was actually completed a year ago. There were certain parts of the tracks that we were not entirely happy with. So, we remixed the al-

bum, which we had recorded in Berlin, and took the opportunity to add four more tracks at home in Basel at the studio of our guitarist Thomas Rechberger.

You initially recorded at Funkhaus, a former radio studio in east Berlin. Why Berlin?

Our producer Marco Jäger lives there. He’s from Berne but moved to Berlin a few years ago.

But there are studios in Switzerland which are just as good as those in Berlin...

Absolutely, Funkhaus is a fantastic studio, but there are equally good facili-

ties in Switzerland, too. That has long been the case. Great artists like Queen, David Bowie and Deep Purple came to Switzerland decades ago. On the other hand, recording abroad can prove extremely inspiring for Swiss bands. Particularly when you’ve got a family, being able to get away for two weeks to focus entirely on music has great benefits. At home you have to take your children to nursery and get caught up in everyday life. Abroad you can immerse yourself completely in the music and explore new places and meet new people. That’s why we went to Berlin.

Adrian Sieber lives in Basel and has never considered moving abroad: “We were able to develop at our own pace as a band in Switzerland, and that’s why we are still here.”

Photo: Sony Music

“Land Ho!” will also go on sale outside Switzerland like most of Lovebugs’ previous albums. The band’s labels have always tried to establish it on the major markets but have never really succeeded. Why is that?

After we topped the Swiss charts several times and represented the nation at the Eurovision Song Contest, many people expected us to achieve an international breakthrough as the next logical step. As this did not really happen, people were soon saying that Lovebugs had “not made it” – despite us having thousands of loyal fans all over the world. I’ve always found such views annoying as you have to be realistic about your expectations. Switzerland is a very small nation with a tiny music industry. Launching an international career as a Swiss band remains extremely difficult – there are huge obstacles to overcome.

So, Swiss bands have a locational disadvantage.

Most definitely. If we had really been trying to achieve a breakthrough internationally, we would have needed to move to London or New York 20 years ago. Our career would probably then have taken a completely different path.

Does it feel like a missed opportunity?

No, we chose the right path. And to be quite honest we never seriously considered moving abroad. Our social scene was in Basel and we didn’t want to give that up. Our experience with German labels has not always been great. We got the impression that they wanted to make decisions about us without understanding our music, and the people we were dealing with were also constantly changing. So, we decided at an early stage that we would rather create something together with people who knew us in a familiar environment instead of focusing on abroad. We were able to develop at our

own pace in Switzerland, which is why we’re still here and have the same management 20 years on.

Were the trips to Germany a waste of time then?

No, of course not. The labels organised concerts and tours for us, and audiences loved us. We were seen as an international newcomer band in Germany and even featured in “Bravo”. We certainly enjoyed that.

Were you taken seriously as a Swiss band?

The Germans, of course, found us quite cute because we were from Switzerland, but admittedly we were a bit back then (he laughs). But we never felt that we were not taken seriously as musicians.



Lovebugs – a Basel success story

Lovebugs are one of Switzerland’s most successful pop bands. The quintet led by singer-songwriter Adrian Sieber formed in 1992 in Basel, but was originally a trio. Lovebugs quickly became one of the country’s most popular indie pop bands. They not only wrote great songs but also looked good, which explains why they were seen as a boy band in the early days. The group has released ten studio albums to date, three of which have topped the Swiss charts. Lovebugs attracted special attention in 2009 when they represented Switzerland in the Eurovision Song Contest with the song “The Highest Heights”. The new album “Land Ho!” was released on 7 October in Switzerland and abroad by Sony Music. (Image: Lovebugs at the Eurovision Song Contest, photo: Keystone) LEH

It’s not particularly hip for a pop band to come from Switzerland – in contrast to, say, Iceland or Denmark, which are also small countries.

That’s true and it’s annoying, but Switzerland has produced little in terms of pop music and that is our lot. But at least Lovebugs have always had an exotic appeal abroad.

Swiss pop bands are not seen as particularly audacious or distinctive.

We Swiss are probably not born eccentrics, and you need to be to stand out on the pop scene. We live in a neutral country in the heart of Europe and always want to please everyone. This mentality undeniably often rubs off, whereas the Icelandic, for example, produce idiosyncratic music amidst the forces of nature on their island on the periphery of the continent. We Swiss are also reluctant to take big gambles. We still want to graduate, work and earn money at the same time.

Switzerland is a prosperous country that offers many other opportunities besides music.

And that’s something I value greatly about our nation. I live in Basel – an international and very open city – which provides me with stability as well as financial and social security. Those are key factors. Personally, I don’t mind the Swiss mentality at all. I like the Swiss reserve.

“The Germans, of course, found us quite cute because we were from Switzerland.”