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Autor:	Lehtinen, Marko
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What now for Nemo?

Switzerland's Nemo is the first non-binary act to win the Eurovision Song Contest. Is Nemo now set to become Europe's queer icon? And what are the Berlin-based singer's prospects for the global career that many have predicted?



MARKO LEHTINEN

Everyone is talking about Nemo. But Nemo has withdrawn from the lime-light for the time being. It would be interesting to catch up with Nemo – who identifies as non-binary – to ask them what they feel (the artist uses they/them pronouns). We would love to hear from them about their momentous win in Malmö. What are the implications for Nemo's career and life in general? And in particular, what does it mean to non-binary people in Europe? Is this a game-changer for gender identity? Is Nemo the queer community's answer to Greta Thunberg?

Nemo is currently unavailable for interviews. According to record com-

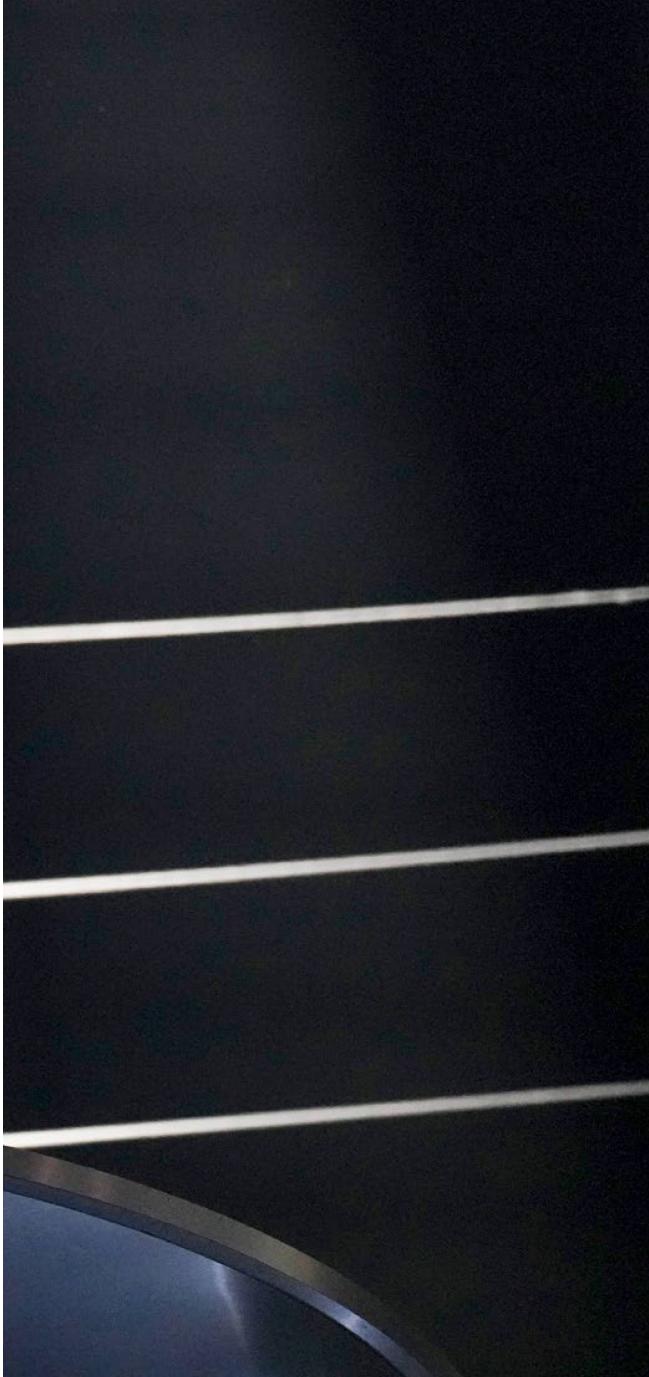
pany Universal Music, the artist is focusing solely on the "next creative process and forthcoming live performances" – and asks for a little patience. We completely understand. Anyone doing what Nemo has just done would need time to adjust and let the dust settle. Nemo is lying low in Berlin. Born 25 years ago in Biel, this year's Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) winner Nemo Mettler, known professionally as Nemo, has chosen the German capital as their adopted home.

As a child, Nemo learned to play the violin, piano and drums, and had extensive singing lessons. Their first major performance came in Biel at the age of ten, in the role of Papageno

Nemo sang and danced on a revolving disc for their performance at this year's Eurovision Song Contest. All part of Nemo's smooth and rounded Malmö experience.
Photos: Keystone

in a children's opera version of "The Magic Flute". Nemo got involved in musicals following this classical debut, appearing on stage at the age of 13 in "Ich war noch niemals in New York" – a German-language musical based on the songs of Udo Jürgens. But it was in hip-hop that Nemo found their true calling, winning four Swiss Music Awards after making their mark in 2017 with hit single "Du". Back then, Nemo was still known as a male artist. Nemo then left Switzerland and moved to Berlin, where they would eventually come out as non-binary exactly six months before ESC.

And what now for Nemo? After Malmö, the initial reaction among reporters was that the ESC winner is set



Another factor is that few past ESC winners have gone on to international stardom. There are prominent exceptions to this rule. Abba won the then Grand Prix Eurovision de la Chanson 50 years ago, representing Sweden, while a certain Canadian woman called Céline Dion flew the flag for Switzerland, winning in 1988. Otherwise, acts have tended to disappear as quickly as you can say “douze points”. Some have enjoyed domestic success, but no more than that. Furthermore, previous winners have often benefited from some sort of political or social groundswell – which never bodes well for an act’s musical prospects. Neither Israel in 1978 and 1979, nor Ukraine following the Russian invasion in 2022, won with the best song. Even Nemo’s spiritual predecessor in 2014, Austria’s bearded drag queen Conchita Wurst, will be remembered for raising awareness about discrimination based on sexuality. It is fair to ask whether Nemo would have won ESC if Nemo had identified as a man or a woman and the song had not specifically been

for a global career. But this is unlikely. “The Code” was certainly a good song – an original combination of drum ‘n’ bass, hip-hop, pop and classical showcasing of Nemo’s impressive singing voice in the chorus plus a very personal autobiographical message (“I went to hell and back, to find myself on track”). Yet it was also quite formulaic; the unmistakeable product of an experienced songwriting think-tank and hit factory consisting of Benjamin Alasu, Lasse Nyman and Linda Dale, trimmed from the outset into a suitable format. A song written by Nemo, but also slightly manufactured. We won’t be humming it like “Waterloo” in 50 years’ time.

The winning song is politically charged: Nemo identifies as non-binary.

about their coming out as a non-binary person.

Nemo is unlikely to have lasting international success. But will Nemo prove to be a linchpin for the queer community? Nemo’s victory has opened a heated debate about non-binary people in Switzerland. Since Malmö, the ESC winner has repeatedly called for the Swiss authorities to allow third-gender designations on official documents, turning this into a political matter. Plans are even afoot for Nemo to meet Federal Councillor Beat Jans. Politicians across the spectrum recently thrashed out the issue on the prime-time current affairs show “Arena”.

It would be interesting to know whether Nemo considers themself to be the queer community’s new icon. And whether Nemo wants to carry this mantle or just focus on music. Time – or maybe Nemo’s next interview – will tell.

Video: www.revue.link/nemo

