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The man behind the wheel



MICHEL LAYAZ
 "Louis Chevrolet"
 Book
 Translated into German
 by Yla M. von Dach.
 Verlag die Brotsuppe,
 Biel 2023. 168 pages,
 29.00 CHF

The first cars ever made at the turn of the 20th century were typically named after their inventors – men like Gottlieb Daimler, Carl Benz and Henry Ford. But in the case of watchmaker's son Louis Chevrolet, who was born in 1878 in La Chaux-de-Fonds and died in the car capital of the world, Detroit, in 1941, the man has always been overshadowed by the famous brand that took his name. Louis Chevrolet developed a taste for speed early on in life, inheriting the urge to be mobile from his parents, with whom he moved to Burgundy in 1887. He was attracted to the bicycle, on which he competed in amateur races as a young man. Unsurprisingly, Chevrolet was soon diverting his gaze to the nascent car industry across the pond. It came as no surprise when he eventually moved to the United States in 1900 to make his mark.

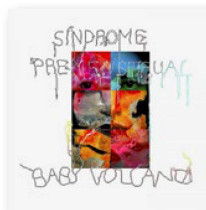
Michel Layaz has written a book on Chevrolet, in which he describes how ambitious mechanics and engineers set the tone for the automobile revolution. The audacious Louis Chevrolet, who stood a dashing 1.85 m tall, soon became one of the pioneers of this euphoric era. Chevrolet earned the nickname "the daredevil Frenchman" for his breakneck exploits as a racing driver, winning his first race in 1905. But "Chevrolet not only loved four-wheel machines", writes Layaz, "he also had an exceptional understanding of how they worked." Chevrolet played a keen role in developing the cars that he drove, renowned for engineering as much as racing.

Adored by the masses for his spectacular, near-reckless driving style, Chevrolet also enjoyed an excellent reputation as a designer, attracting the attention of exponents like Billy Durant, the founder of General Motors. He and Durant had a love-hate relationship. This culminated in 1914 with Chevrolet walking away from the company that both he and Durant had established, and, as Layaz explains, giving Durant exclusive rights to the Chevrolet name. "Hard to believe but true," notes the author.

Maybe herein lies the disconnect between Chevrolet the brand and Louis Chevrolet the person. Writing in short chapters, Layaz offers an unvarnished account of Louis Chevrolet's life, finally giving the man behind the wheel the attention he deserves.

BEAT MAZENAUER

Baby Volcano



LABEL RAPACE
 "Sindrome Premenstrual"
 2021

Jura is the birthplace of versatile artist Lorena Stadelmann, known by her stage name: Baby Volcano. There are no limits for this multifaceted musician, born to a father from Jura and a mother from Guatemala, a country studded with volcanoes. "They can create and destroy landscapes at the same time," enthuses the 27-year-old singer, who studied dance and performing arts in Argentina.

Lorena Stadelmann, who began her career as a performer, takes her inspiration from anything and everything. Her (very polished) music videos present a crazy, disturbing visual and musical blend of dancing, singing and even whimsical artwork. Baby Volcano's first opus, released in 2021, showed the originality of this now internationally renowned artist. Each song on "Sindrome Premenstrual" refers to a part of the human body. "Swiss Anxiety (Solar plexus)" thus refers to the solar plexus.

The song itself is about luxury hotels in Geneva and love with both genders. The music's mood is trippy and bruised. "I am chaotic and juicy and I like the symbol of the zombie kitten," the artist laughs in a short documentary about her by France 2. With her long black hair and the deep red lipstick she sometimes wears, the Jura native, who lives on a farm on the border between Jura and Solothurn, is a little reminiscent of Frida Kahlo. She even cites Chavela Vargas, a Mexican artist, as one of her sources of inspiration. Baby Volcano uses a mix of styles ranging from hip-hop, trap and electro to lyrical and Latin music.

The lyrics switch seamlessly from French into Spanish, where we can hear the characteristic "ch" of the Argentinian accent. The singer is comfortable in all repertoires, as shown in her slow and expansive cover of "Le Baiser", the beautifully nostalgic and sensual track originally by French artist Alain Souchon, where her murmured lyrics are accompanied by Jura musician and producer Louis Riondel. Baby Volcano is signed to nonprofit label Humus. She has toured in North America and is set to perform at a series of concerts in Europe this year. A second EP is on the cards for 2025.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Charles Linsmayer's literary column will return in the December edition

"Band of the Month" – Interview with Baby Volcano on Europavox, a media platform co-founded by the European Commission and aimed at music lovers; May 2023

