

Arina Phoenix - bio

Berlin-based Chuvash-Russian singer-songwriter Arina Popova's pure, unguarded vocals grace her feathery indie aesthetic - a kaleidoscope of colours spanning lightly arranged Alternative and Chamber Pop to a cool, sometimes eerie electronic breeze. Imagine the hands of Björk and Laura Mvula touching and the emerging sparks resonating in Arina's sound - a tone enriched with strings, woodwinds, and brass. Her songs explore universal themes but with a stream-of-consciousness quality; freedom, self-empowerment, human connection, and love - as well as feminism and the courage it takes to resist oppressive forces. Now stepping into a new era, she changes into Arina Phoenix - with a singular voice that lifts off into a sky full of hope, leaving behind the shed skins of the past.

Arina Popova's story of becoming **Arina Phoenix** is an outstanding one - it's a tale of how a Chuvash small-town girl became an internationally successful musician, against all odds. Born in Astrakhan, a port city near the Caspian Sea, and raised in a small town near Moscow in a music-loving yet troubled family, one of her first memories of music is deeply moving: *"I actually built my very first instrument myself - from vodka bottles. My father was an alcoholic and where we lived, a lot of people were truly lost, with no sense of a future. So what I did was fill those empty bottles with different levels of water. I would play by ear - everything I heard. I sang a lot with my mother, trying to harmonize with her voice, and I would improvise, playing to the frequencies of the humming vacuum cleaner as well as a lot of other industrial sounds, actually,"* Arina smiles.

Being able to escape into her creativity and imagination helps her face a traumatic childhood marked by her father's violent alcoholism and his eventual murder in a drunken fight. Her mother, a pediatrician, once saves a child's life and is given a piano by the grateful parents of the young patient. It becomes Arina's first instrument: *"I always wanted to go to music school,"* she remembers. *"But I had no instrument. Then finally, when I was seven, I had this piano and I could go to music school - to this day I'm very grateful to my mom for arranging this, for making it possible for me to access a musical education despite all the obstacles life presented at the time.*

I started getting lessons and classical training, but also, as a child, I really loved to play by ear - I heard an amazing melody and all I wanted to do was run back to class and try to play it from memory, immediately. I wanted to immerse myself immediately and completely into the notes - I literally wanted to touch, even grab them. I fell deeply in love with all those themes I heard and learned - these beautiful melodies from all the geniuses in music history," Arina remembers from her time at music school.

Music quickly becomes both her destiny and her direction. As a young adult, she moves to Moscow, earns a place at music college and immerses herself completely, taking every course available and adding extra lessons in production and piano, leaving no gap unfilled - finally, she has access to the world she had always longed for, and she is determined to wring every last drop from it. She graduates with distinction from both the music school and music college of the *Moscow State Schnittke Institute of Music*, furthering her studies in sound engineering. During this time, she goes out every evening to soak up whatever is on; clubs, rock nights, alternative gigs, classical concerts, and the conservatory - building a vast mental archive of inspiration for her own performances to draw on.

As a performer, Arina Popova gets her start as lead vocalist with the pop-rock outfit R.M.F., whose 2007 album *"Into"* is released on the renowned label *Ministry of Sound Germany*, now *Embassy of Music*. The record spawns two commercially successful singles: *"Forever Young"*, which charts on Russian radio, and *"Love Is Like a Flame"*, whose video goes into Europe-wide rotation on VIVA.

R.M.F. soon find themselves on the radar of indie-film directors and TV producers, leading to opportunities for writing scores and music for the screen. It's a perfect match for Arina's ever-growing creative curiosity, allowing her to blend her various artistic passions with her musical output. Since her early twenties, she has built a successful career composing for film, television, and commercials, with her work spanning award-winning documentaries and feature films across Russia and Europe.

"After finishing music college I went on to get an education in sound engineering which I would then put to work in television and audio-visual arts: While doing so I quickly became part of a music production company. We produced a lot of music for television, film and adverts. I was living in Moscow, still being very young. Around the same time, my friends and I formed this crazy Russian-German project 'R.M.F.' All of that actually happened in this quite dynamic era before Facebook - of course we had a MySpace page," she remembers fondly.

But not every memory sits so easily: *"All the others in the band were guys. The same goes for my duo and my work with composers, where I also partnered with male musicians. To me, back then it felt like I could only get recognition*

if I was doing projects with men - but then, still, people would just see me as the face, as the singer, not as a musician completely involved in the whole process; the credit mostly went to the guys while I was actually writing and composing my fair share - that stung sometimes."

In 2012, she moves to Israel in search of more artistic freedom and fresh inspiration. The new home strikes a chord, and Arina ends up spending a decade living and working there, forming the aforementioned indie-pop duo YUAR and releasing the critically acclaimed EP "Signal". Supported by her mesmerising appearance on *The Voice Israel* in 2014, YUAR become a name to watch. Arina's profile builds up quickly as buzz around the duo continues to grow, leading to international showcases that include *Tune in Tel Aviv* (2015/2016).

Since 2022, she has called Berlin home, prioritising the care of her young daughter, who was diagnosed with autism. Though continuing to work in music, she chose to pause performing and releasing work. Now she is finding her way back, crafting new and old songs, merging acoustic and electronic soundscapes. It is the moment of her becoming **Arina Phoenix**. The moniker is carefully chosen as it marks the rebirth of her artistic self - taking a stand for her creative independence and representing a woman's perspective in the world of music production.

The charismatic artist tilts her head when she thinks of the course of events - both personal and global - that had to happen to bring her to where she is now: *"So much has changed - in the last years especially. But it also strikes me when I compare my upbringing to the experiences of my daughter. At some point deep in winter, I visited a concert at the Berliner Philharmonic with her. That Philharmonic is one of the best in the world, and they played this beautiful piece by Prokofiev, with us sitting cozy in this luxurious venue, where red light was projected on the stage - it looked to me like those spots were swimming and floating through the auditorium in perfect harmony.*

Then I looked over to my mesmerised daughter and thought of my own first impression as a child hearing that very same music: I was just as captivated as she was, whereas the surroundings had been dramatically different - the recital took place in my music school, which was literally falling apart. A dilapidated building in a rural small town - I remember that when concerts took place in winter the hall regularly got flooded. I remember actually rats swimming around the grand piano. That's what I was thinking about when I gazed at the elegant red lights flooding the stage in Berlin: not everyone has access to such delicate experiences, and I am glad I can offer her these. But still, it was the power of music that drew me in from an early age, regardless of the surroundings - my first basic musical experiences made me want to dive deeper, made me want to play piano, sing in the choir, sing everywhere I would go and, most importantly, make my own music."

Currently, **Arina Phoenix** is working on a soon-to-be-released EP: *"The timing - that's a whole other thing. I mean, I'm starting something new in my forties. Not quite the classic artist trajectory. And especially women get labeled. I do think about that - but I want this to change and to be a part of that change. I own everything I do - all the music I write, the pictures I have taken of me as **Arina Phoenix**, my make-up, my story."* - "I don't want to be confined to any stereotypes - neither as a musician, nor as a mother or a woman," she adds.

A first glimpse into the sonic universe of **Arina Phoenix** is the release of "Daisies", a light and airy production she worked on with collaborators like Dmitriy Emelianov, an acclaimed Russian musician and producer who has worked with the legendary rock band DDT as well as the iconic Russian singer-songwriter Zemfira, who was an idol of Arina's teenage years and Berlin-based Dennis Keil as mixing and mastering engineer, who had been working with Kimbra – *"Who, by the way is another female producer and artist whose work I deeply admire,"* adds Arina. "Daisies" unites delicate electronic arrangements with warm saxophones like honey in the sun. A song that evokes a safe place, where light and shadow exist in natural harmony, manifesting empowerment, love, and peace.

The track has gone through a lot of stages, its origins dating back to Israel, where she started recording it with her husband. That the song was ready for the world to hear, she realized when playing it back in her studio in Charlottenburg in Berlin:

"When a song for me is finished, I actually have a physical sensation in my body - I can feel that the music is now in the right place. This goes for all of my songs. I feel it right here," she points to where the solar plexus is located, "and as for the drum parts in my compositions, I always 'listen' to them and 'check them' with my whole body — the rhythm has to create a certain physical sensation. All the sounds, when they turn out just right, become very tangible to me - I feel like I want to touch them with my fingertips. I have this almost colourful, physical feeling - you know, that synesthetic feel - when I can say: okay, now it's good."

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