

Tales of a Samuraicita

Written by allie

Monday, 04 June 2012 03:03 - Last Updated Sunday, 28 October 2012 11:22



In February I received an email that I was convinced was spam.

It was from [Womex](#) , the World Music Expo, inviting me to be one of the ["Seven Samurai"](#) jury members selected each year to choose the coveted 27 performance

showcases at the conference. When [Mike Orlove](#) , one of my Chicago mentors, was chosen to be a Samurai in 2009, I interviewed him about the jury experience on Radio Womex in Copenhagen. I was fascinated by the process, and hoped that one day I would be lucky enough to be recognized with the same honor. Thinking it impossible to be asked at age 24, I didn't believe it until I received a confirmation letter inviting me to the jury meeting in Berlin in May.

I am thrilled and humbled by the opportunity to become further involved in the Womex community that feeds me with so much energy every year. I enthusiastically dug into the 850 submissions throughout the month of April to complete the pre-selection before the meeting.

My personal highlights:

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A Tribe Called Red - My favorite new find of all 850. Fusing global bass and moombahton (yes, I am a huge sucker for moombahton) with aboriginal pow wow music, ATCR creates a fiercely original musical hybrid with mind-blowing visuals. Win.

Mashrou Leila - Lebanese indie rock. Killing it on the strings!!

Le Sahel - Thanks to Maarten for calling my attention this one, Senegalese salsa legends reunite for the first time in over 30 years! Vintage digs.

Murra Lala Fafal - There is something so beautifully simple in this band that stuck with me. I've seen a handful of similar Rajasthani groups (although they are from Gujarat). Maybe it's the chimes that ground it for me with a bit of rhythmic percussion. Call me a hippie, but I could listen to this all day.

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Skip and Die - Have definitely heard their hit track ["La Cumbia Dictadura"](#) on dancefloors of Buenos Aires through my

[ZZK](#)

boys, but was good to match the beat to the face of the band. This chick has the makings of a

[Li Saumet](#)

/Gwen Stefani lovechild with her wild stage presence. Excited to see what comes next from these guys.

It was an intense weekend of Samurai boot camp in Berlin, pulling 10am-5am days back to back, overdosing on coffee, Finnish fiddle and Balkan clarinet to the point of mild to moderate insanity. Looking at 850 submissions back to back is an education in of itself and reveals some interesting patterns. **Here are some application tips that I've gathered in the process:**

1. **Find something else to say besides how your band goes beyond borders**, eliminates borders, is a kaleidoscope of countries, fuses nomadically, draws on Asian, Balkan, African and American music all together at once. Keep in mind almost every artist in this industry is presenting music influenced by more than one country or genre. On submission 799 at 4:32am Sunday morning it's redundant and you are driving me crazy.

2. Especially in a competition of this size, **put your BEST SONG first**. Hit me over the head with it. I shouldn't have to wait to get to the good part, because I might not.

3. **How are you different from everyone else?** Or how is your West African blues/Ethiopian funk/Balkan party band different from the 15 others I just listened to?

4. **Include videos. Always.**

5. **Stop saying "fresh".**

The process was incredible and eye-opening (and it's not over yet- currently curating the DJ portion of the conference!). I felt like I was at the world music Olympics debating Albanian polyphonic choirs at 4am trying to make the selection fit together while factoring in balance, musicianship and even risk. I am so grateful to the Womex team for the opportunity, and stay tuned for the final lineup announcements coming out soon! Looking forward to reuniting with the other 4 amazing Samurai that I was so fortunate to learn so much from and see our "puzzle" come together live on the stages of Thessaloniki, Greece this October!