



Interview



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Chris Aguilar

Trained in singing at the Eastman Conservatory in New York and grew up in a household where music

«The music and the story are a close tie but definitely both always come first»

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Chris Aguilar is a young talented musician, trained in singing at the Eastman Conservatory in New York and grew up in a household where music was always very present. Chris is the only Andorran who managed to win the international TV casting show. A few weeks ago he released his album «Neon Lights». We had a chance to talk with Chris about the underlying themes of his album, his works in the field of audiovisual installations, musical influences, favorite places to perform and many other interesting things.

–Your mom, Alondra Jahel, is a famous singer, who conquered the pop music charts in Mexico and Latin America in the 80s. Have

you had a passion for music since childhood?

–My mom gave up her whole music career when it was at its highest point in order to be present for my sister and me but she would always sing for us. I also would sing as a kid when we lived in the USA but only in private, when I was home alone. My music was my little secret and my family didn't know that I loved to sing. It was and continues to be my medicine and my escape. Music has always helped me process difficult times in my life and when I sing it is a kind of therapy where I release everything and am able to be present and in the moment. I can't properly put into words how incredible it is to be able to connect with people with my songs and my interpretations.

–How did you realize that you wanted to connect your life with music?

–When I was 8 years old, we moved to San Antonio, Texas and I was «the new kid» in school. On my first day I

went to music class and while singing the American national anthem, the kids and my teacher kept turning around and looking at me. I got really self-conscious. My teacher, Ms. Campbell, asked to see me after class. Ms. Campbell told me in her office that she really liked how I sang, that she had a kids TV show called «Cat Paws» on PBS and that she wanted me to be on it singing and dancing with her. I couldn't believe it! It was this moment which made me realise that singing is what I wanted to do, and it gave me the confidence to share this «secret» of mine with my biggest role model and inspiration, my mom.

I came home and told my mom the incredible news, but she was not so happy. At first my mom really did not want me to sing. She knows how difficult it is in the music industry and she wanted to save me from all the sacrifices and struggles that come with being a singer.

The music industry is not easy, especially now a days where

everything has changed due to YouTube and Spotify. It costs a lot of money to make good music and having your livelihood depend on something you love can make your passion into something stressful and not so enjoyable.

But with time she realised that this is something I am passionate about and called to do and she and I made an agreement that I would finish a university degree first before pursuing my music career. To this day I thank my mom for being so responsible. She continues to be my biggest support and role model.

–The necessary skills that a professional vocalist should develop are considered to be: sound formation and sound production, as well as breathing, diction, and articulation. Do you agree?

–A solid foundation in education in proper vocal technique is the most important thing for any singer. I have been taking voice lessons since before

I was a teenager. I had the best teacher in the world, Cristina Ortega, who is a renowned Soprano in Mexico. She taught me the importance of using proper technique and she trained me to be an opera singer. She was really disappointed when I told her I wanted to be a Pop/Rock artist (laughing).

–Please tell us about your study in singing at the Eastman Conservatory in New York. What was the most challenging?

–I was lucky enough to be accepted into the Eastman Conservatory in upstate New York. This conservatory is one of the best in the country, often going up against Julliard in rankings. At Eastman I studied with a lady who absolutely changed my life, her name is Erica Washburn. She is larger than life and taught me everything I needed to know about connecting with my instrument and connecting with my audience. At many times she was more than a vocal coach, she was also my psychologist! Singing

is such a unique phenomenon. We use an instrument that is directly connected to our soul and deepest intimacy. She helped me fall in love with my singing more at a very important time in my life.

-What skills were most useful?

-Apart from good vocal technique and music theory, it is important to be able to connect to the song you are singing. You must feel every word that you sing, this is what moves your audience, this is what marks the difference between karaoke singing and actually interpreting a song. Your audience is not dumb, they know when you are having a bad day and going through the motions and when you are actually connected to the song and the music. One must be able to live the song they are performing.

-You are the only Andorran who managed to win the international TV casting, «Popstars», on Austrian national television and signed a recording contract with Sony Music. Please tell us about this experience. What do you think was the secret of your success?

-Popstars was a beautiful chapter in my life. I managed to win the top spot in a competition that had auditions and was broadcast in all of Germany, Switzerland and Austria. The fact that I am currently the only Andorran to have won an international singing television competition is quite funny, but having this title makes me want to help other aspiring young artists in Andorra who are trying to do the same. These kinds of shows should be seen as a jumping board into getting a career started, a starting point. Winning this show allowed me to reach all my dreams. I signed and produced an album with Sony Music, did interesting interviews, was featured in magazines, newspapers and TV shows and met some incredible people; but, at the same time, I wasn't allowed to write my own music and got to see behind the scenes of the industry. I don't regret taking part in this show, and I was grateful for the wonderful opportunity, but it's not easy and not the quick solution to having a successful music career - it takes a lot of work, discipline and luck. Currently, there are so many singing competitions that it has become saturated. I was lucky, because the season I was on was the first in Austria.

-A few weeks ago you released your album «Neon Lights».

Congratulations, this work sounds really impressive. Can you tell a bit please about the creating process of the album, how it was shaped during the time and is there a kind of a general idea and concept that was the driver of creating this album?

-Releasing our EP, Neon Lights, last year was a rollercoaster of emotions in the best way possible. I am so lucky to be in this music project with one of the best humans on this planet, Hector Perez. He is my brother from another mother! We have worked hard on these songs ever since the pandemic, and, step by step, have taken on this long process of writing, editing, recording, producing and mixing music. A lot goes into the process if you want to do it well. I wrote one of our songs, "Dream Lover," ten years ago in Vienna while I was filming a short film. I really liked the concept of the movie, where my character, Alan, has the same nightmare. However, before dying, he meets the love of his life. Our song, "Dream Lover," asks that question. Just imagine, you only see the love of your life in your dreams... This concept and the melody haunted me for ten years! Finally, I was able to record it with Hector, who managed to take the song to new heights and really made it evolve. You can imagine how ecstatic I was to finally release our songs.

-You have an impressive number of great collaborators who took part in the creating of the album. How did you manage to put together all these people and get them interested in working on your album?

-This EP gave us the opportunity to collaborate with some of the biggest music talents/geniuses in the country. Pere Revert and Marc Mas are beyond talented and a big inspiration for Hector and me. They helped us capture our sound and emotions and guided us along the way. We also got to collaborate with Ivan Gonzalez who mixed our songs. Toni Gibert, Miguel Espinosa and Carlos Lozano helped Hector with guidance. Ana Garcia, Rebecca Salcedo, Borja Sanchez, Miquel Comella, Xavi Capdevila and our incredible dancers, Ioli Martinez, Alvar Hernandez and Abril Mela really made the release unforgettable. The most important collaboration for me has been having my mom Alondra and my sister Valerie featured in our songs.

-Akiba is an electro-pop/synthwave



C.A.



band with captivating visual elements. It would be interesting to know what was coming first to your mind when you were working on your album «Neon Lights» - the music, story or visuals?

-The music and the story are always a close tie but definitely both always come first. The last would definitely be the visuals. It's hard to say, sometimes we would find this catchy melody/riff that would get us started with the song, and sometimes (like with Dream Lover) the concept came first.

-Do you think that this multidisciplinary approach, when you have visual elements combined with a song is a growing tendency and in some ways a path of future development of contemporary music art?

-Yes, I think that incorporating visual elements is a growing trend and an important one! When done correctly, this visual element can be a tool which can help us further connect with our audience. In the genre of Synthpop/Synthwave, lights and video elements are

crucial. We have a lot of exciting ideas and concepts that we want to implement and we think we may have found a talented team of artists who we can collaborate with. Stay tuned, we think you will be positively surprised.

-Since your first steps in music, you have traveled a lot. Do you have some favorite places where you like to perform most of all?

-I am so thankful for the opportunities I have had to travel with my music. In fact, travel is my second biggest passion after music. My favorite place to perform without a doubt is Austria. I have gotten the opportunity to sing in almost each corner of that country and I am in love with the people, the stages and the technical teams that I have worked with. I also love to perform in Barcelona each year with my family at the Plaça Espanyol! The audience is amazing and my mom, sister and I have a blast thanks to Albert and Cesar from Mexcat.

-What are your plans for 2024?

-We are currently in the studio releasing two new songs! Hector and I plan on continuing to release more music and take our songs to different corners of the world. We hope the reader will listen to our songs on Spotify and stay tuned for what's to come with Akiba! ≡

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