

The First Touch

A Swiss amalgamation of Elliott Smith, Thom Yorke, and Michael Stipe. This is exactly what Fribourg's **CAT'S EYE** delivers. Under the leadership of Benoit Perriard, this project delves deep into the lo-fi alternative universe, painting sonic soundscapes that travel into emotive spaces and locations. There is a variety and depth to this output, as has been captured in recent times through releases such as 2024's collaborative 'The First Touch', 2022's Steve Albini approved 'Night and Soul', and 2018's full-length *Curves of a Straight Line*. These are the building blocks of a truly exceptional independent and underground discography. Having recently released 'The First Touch' in July, Benoit took some time out from his current creative activities to once again chat with *Aldora Britain Records* about his Cat's Eye adventure to date. We discussed the influence of *Automatic for the People*, the lasting impact of the COVID pandemic, early live memories of Jean-Jacques Goldman, and much, much more. That exclusive in-depth conversation is published here in full for the very first time.

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Aldora Britain Records: Hello Benoit, how are you? I think it is about time that we welcomed Cat's Eye back to the *Aldora Britain Records* e-zine. The last time was back in 2021. It has been far too long. As always, let's kick things off by rewinding the clocks. You previously mentioned your first live music memory was Jean-Jacques Goldman. Can you tell me about this? What formative impact would you say this show had on you?

Benoit Perriard: Hi Tom, thanks for having me back! Yes, I was captivated and thrilled by the power of a rock show. I simply dreamed about being one of those guys on stage someday. I still believe a good live show is something beyond us. The sound, the people, the interaction. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts, as one says.

Aldora Britain Records: And now, let's take a leap forward to the present day and your impressive output with Cat's Eye. You know how much I love this project of yours! I am definitely drawn in by your songwriting and songcraft. How do you approach this part of your creative process? Are you drawn to specific themes or topics? Perhaps coming from a personal, observational, or even fictional perspective or point of view?

Benoit Perriard: Thank you so much, it makes my day! Songwriting is the most important step for me, because it's the start of everything that's happening next. It also gives the colour and the soul of everything coming after. And it's a total mystery, where does it come from, how does it work, what is inspiration? The truth is that I don't think when I write a song. I let my brain do whatever it wants. I always start with the music and then the music tells me what it could be about. And I write the lyrics accordingly. But of course, by letting your brain freewheel, everything that has been on your mind, what you observed, experienced, what you thought about or read is making the words. In a way, being it music or words, I let my brain channel what's ready to come out.

Does it sound weird to you? It's just that it's very difficult to describe the process. A long time ago, I tried to choose certain types of chords, some topics to write about, and such. Each time I did this, the songs were nondescript. Conscience is probably too rational, let's let the unconscious express itself! What's more, the songs write themselves. Or almost!



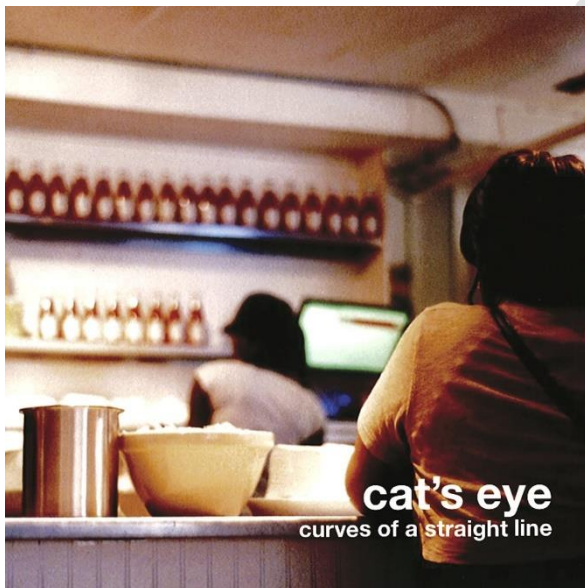
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Aldora Britain Records: You kicked 2024 off in style with the release of ‘The First Touch’, a fantastic collaboration with Guthrie Lord. I have just discovered this outing over on Bandcamp, but it has made such a strong impression already. How did your work with Guthrie come about? How did you guys first meet and what was the initial spark that brought you both together on a purely creative musical level?

Benoit Perriard: Cool! Guthrie was the guitar player for the European tour of Sarah Perrotta, now Sarah Powers, who is on my label 8 Hours Records. I had excellent contact with the group and we all kept in touch. I think we have similar music sensibility and taste. Last year, they organised me a small tour in New York state. We played together for a gig and we were looking forward to playing again. Guthrie had some free time in June and visited me for a week in Switzerland. We decided to play a few Cat's Eye gigs together and to try to write a song, then record it. The result is ‘The First Touch’.

Aldora Britain Records: Prior to this release, you unveiled two superb tracks entitled ‘Strange Fall’ and ‘Night and Soul’. These tunes really have captured my imagination, another fine, fine outing from the exceptional Cat's Eye. For each tune, what is the story behind the song, and can you remember the moment it came to be? Did anything in particular inspire them and what do they mean to you as the writer and performer?

Benoit Perriard: Those two songs are particularly important to me for several reasons. The first is that I recorded them with Steve Albini in his studio in Chicago. Since he passed away this year, it reminds me of the luck I had to be able to work with him. It can never happen again. Which makes this unique experience even more special. Concerning the theme of the songs, I'd say they're two sides of the same coin, something I experienced in my life a year before recording it. Those two songs will be on my next album. It's not far from being finished.



Aldora Britain Records: Previously, if we travel back to 2018, you released an essential LP in the form of *Curves of a Straight Line*. This is actually one of my favourite outings from the Cat's Eye project, twelve musical pearls from you, for sure! Thank you for the music. What are your memories from writing, recording and releasing this set, and is there anything that you would edit or change with the benefit of hindsight?

Benoit Perriard: Great! Thank you for listening! I enjoyed the circular process, which nourished my songwriting and my performances. The circular process with Gerry Leonard, who has worked with David Bowie, Rufus Wainwright, Suzanne Vega, the recording of the drums with my close friend Pascal Wagner, the recording of the two violin sessions with Delphine Richard and Stephanie Jungo. I recorded the songs as I wrote them. So getting Gerry's guitar parts for one song would drive

me to compose the next track. Plus I travelled to his studio in upstate New York and that was a magical human moment. And Kevin Killen, who has worked with David Bowie, U2, Tori Amos, mixed the first two tracks and Gerry mixed the rest. It was simply enthralling to hear their work.

Aldora Britain Records: I always love to delve deeper into an artist's roots. For me, it is actually one of the most enjoyable parts of any interview. You previously namechecked *Automatic for the People* as an all-time favourite. Can you remember the first time you heard this record? How would you say it has informed you and your musical output since? More broadly, who are some of your biggest influences and inspirations currently?

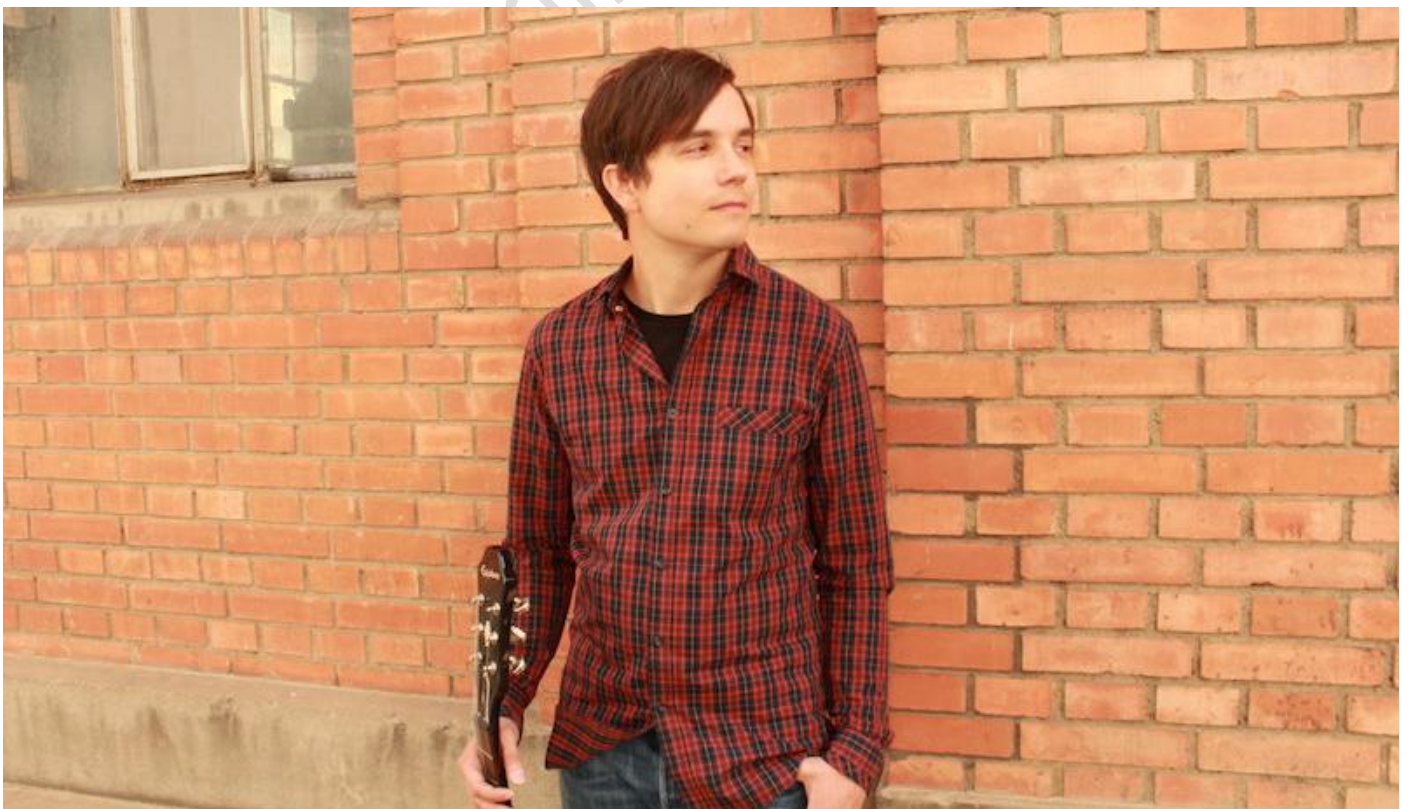
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Benoit Perriard: Yes, it was in a record shop. I had already discovered R.E.M. with ‘Losing My Religion’, then someone at school lent me a cassette of the album *Out of Time*. I wanted to hear more R.E.M. I subsequently remember listening to *Automatic for the People* in the record shop on headphones and being mesmerised by the freshness of the sound and the beauty of it. It's difficult to say how it has informed my musical spirit since. Since day one I've been a music fan, from classical to rock, so I've been rocked by music all my life. In both senses. At the risk of sounding corny, it's life that inspires me the most to make music. It's a need, it's a way to balance my existence.

Aldora Britain Records: A broad question to finish. We have been through such a unique time in history over the last few years. Both politically and within society, and that is before you throw in the pandemic. How have the last several years impacted on you personally and as an artist? How do you think this time has changed the music industry, both for the good and the bad? I am curious to hear your insights.

Benoit Perriard: Personally, of course it impacted my everyday life. As I studied psychology, it was also an experiment for me and I was observing as well as adjusting as I could. I loved seeing solidarity at first between people. But not surprisingly, it faded out the second year. No more help offered to those who needed it, no clapping anymore for hospital staff every evening at nine o'clock. People were fed up, so they have refocused on themselves. Interesting, isn't it? This period therefore exacerbated people's behaviour. During the pandemic, in my own life, I saw the best and the worst of people.

As an artist, I couldn't play live but I knew it would come back. I knew I just had to have a bit of patience. For the industry, yes it was difficult for a lot of venues for instance. For sure it was a shaky time. But I think the lack of pay for streaming has tremendously changed the music industry, in a much broader and deeper way than the pandemic.



Quickfire Round

AB Records: Favourite artist? **Benoit:** Really too many to choose only one. Many different artists are my favourite for different reasons. Longtime favourites are David Bowie, R.E.M., Elliott Smith, Radiohead, Kraftwerk, Blur, Emilie Simon, Michel Polnareff, Gillian Welch, Beck, Portishead, the Eels, Tori Amos, The Beatles, The Notwist, Kaki King, Sonic Youth, and more.

AB Records: Favourite album? **Benoit:** *Automatic for the People* by R.E.M. But actually there's a certain number that I'd put as favourite. So much great music.

AB Records: Last album you listened to from start to finish? **Benoit:** Gillian Welch and David Rawlings, *Woodland*.

AB Records: First gig as an audience member? **Benoit:** Jean-Jacques Goldman.

AB Records: Loudest gig as an audience member? **Benoit:** My Bloody Valentine. I couldn't hear anything, even from the back with earplugs. How good did they play? I have no idea.

AB Records: Style icon? **Benoit:** My Rickenbacker 360 electric guitar.

AB Records: Favourite film? **Benoit:** Same as for albums, there are many. I love *The Godfather* trilogy.

AB Records: Favourite TV show? **Benoit:** A French series called *Le Bureau des Legendes*, *The Bureau* in English. A very accurate spy series according to the French Secret Services, I'm not kidding. I heard Damon Albarn in an interview saying it was his favourite series. Now I share something with him.

AB Records: Favourite up and coming artist? **Benoit:** Irish band Sprints.

