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# Violinist Ari Swan to release her debut EP, Symphonie Plastique, this Thursday at Casa del Popolo


Posted by Greg / SEPTEMBER 16, 2013

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Even if you don't know it, you've probably seen Ari Swan perform before, whether in [Folly and the Hunter](#), or accompanying [Little Scream](#), or in her previous band, [Heirloom](#). This staple pillar of the Montreal music scene has also been playing solo for a long time, and [this Thursday](#), she will finally release her debut EP, *Symphonie Plastique*. Recorded with former [Unicorn](#)/current [Island](#) Jamie Thompson, the songs on *Symphonie Plastique* are lush, melodic, and intimate – perfect companion pieces for the coming Fall season.

Listen to "Black Eyes" and read an interview with Swan below.



Ari Swan

Black Eyes

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298

When did you write the songs for Symphonie Plastique? What was it like putting them on record?

The songs on the EP are all from the past year and a half, which is pretty much when I decided to start working on a solo project. One in particular, a track called "Reprieved", is the very first song I wrote so it feels great to have it come to fruition like this. Putting the songs on the record really made me think about what I wanted out of them! You start to think about it from a listener's point of view. It's really easy to get caught up in what I hear in my head and loose perspective when performing live.



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**How was working in Jamie Thompson's studio? Did you choose to work with him for any particular reasons?**

I met Jamie when we were both playing with Little Scream a couple of years ago. It was basically my first touring gig ever, and Jamie has been doing this for years, so he was really sweet about giving me touring advice. He's got such artistic integrity and an aesthetic that really aligns with mine, so when I started working on a solo project I knew that I would want to work with him somehow. As luck would have it, Jamie was looking to start recording more artists and I wanted to do an EP, so that's how I ended up working in his studio. It's been a really positive experience, really low-key and creative.

**When you write songs, do you conceive of them being performed live solo or with backing musicians?**

I've been trying to write with the idea of working with more musicians, but it really depends on the song! Practically, I have to think of how I can do things solo, since I have a rotating cast of band members who are amazing but super busy, so they're not always available. That has sort of meant trying to expand into more pedals, more technology that can fill out the sound, etc.

**What do you like about being a solo artist, and what do you not like so much?**

I'm kind of a mico-manager, so being solo allows me to practice wherever (and as often!) as I want. However, it's just so nice to perform with other people and have their interpretations / energies / whatever on the stage with you. Plus having the perspective of other people's opinions can be really helpful so you don't fall into a weird Kanye West "I am a god" spiral.

**You've contributed some great work to some amazing Montreal bands and artists, in addition to your solo work. Do you have an all-time favourite gig or recording session you can tell us about?**

Oh man, that's hard because I've been so intensely lucky with the groups I've played with here.

One moment that was particularly meaningful was at the end of the tour with Little Scream a couple years ago. Like I mentioned, this was my first touring gig and honestly one of my first (non-classical) gigs in general. I learned so much during the process and really grew as a musician/person thanks to the awesome people around me. We had been touring with Sharon Van Etten and at our very last show both bands got on stage to sing this really slow and kind languid version of "she drives me crazy" by the Fine Young Cannibals. The song is kind of silly, but it was really amazing to be up there with such strong leading ladies who have both influenced me as a performer and bandleader.

**What's next? Touring, working on more songs, getting some rest?**

I have to finish my master's thesis, I'm still a student at McGill! But I want to keep working on new songs and perhaps do some out of town shows back in the old country (aka, the USA). Really I'm just looking forward to collaborating/jamming with friends here and seeing what comes out of it, continuing to grow as a musician, maybe starting an electro-pop band? who knows!

**What are you listening to these days? Anything you can recommend to readers?**

I am really into Julianna Barwick, I think her new album is so magical. I'm constantly in love with the music of Timbre Timbre, and am really happy to have recently discovered Yamantaka // Sonic Titan, such a great combination of sonic and visual heaviness.

*Ari Swan performs [Thursday, September 19th, at Casa del Popolo](#) with Pietro Amato & Mathieu Charbonneau and [Ohara](#).*

*photograph by [Tyr Jami](#)  
stylist: [Zuzu Knew](#)*



Ari Swan, *Symphony Plastique*  
(independent)

Fans of Owen Pallett and Björk, perk your ears to this debut EP from the already accomplished Montreal violinist Ari Swan. Four diverse songs, lots of layers and a cinematic approach to pop music give further credit to Ari's past and present experience with Little Scream, Heirloom and Folly & the Hunter. Jamie Thompson (Unicorns/Islands) helps bring the songs to life, and the results are clean and uncluttered despite ample violin harmonies and ambient drones. This record is honest, accessible and unique. 7/10 Trial Track: "Reprieved" (Nick Schofield)





09.03.14

THIS WEEK'S SHOW

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## THE YELLOW DOG BLUES GET LOOPED

Extra Credit

Friday, June 13, 2014

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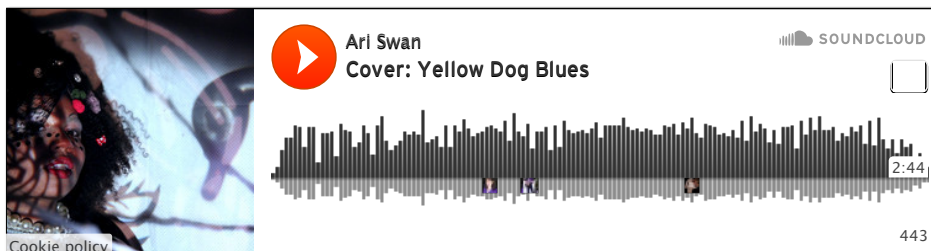
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(Xavier Watkins/flickr)

A few weeks ago, we asked listeners to send in cover versions of W.C. Handy's classic "Yellow Dog Blues," to help us celebrate the song's centennial. So far, we've received dozens of versions, front-porch blues to programmed beats. **Ari Swan**, a musician and music teacher in Montreal, sent in this interpretation using her voice, a violin, a looping pedal, and a cello-playing collaborator:



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I wish Ms. Ronstadt all the best. She has brought me much joy and imbued me with emotion through her ...



Linda

on **Linda Ronstadt's Curtain Call**

Thanks for offering a different lens through which to view this film. Mary Poppins ranks among my favorites of the ...



Alex

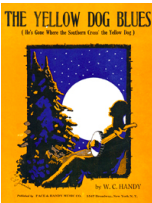
on **Mary Poppins: Still Flying at 50**Find Studio 360 on Twitter at [twitter.com/studio360show](https://twitter.com/studio360show)



Swan tells Kurt Andersen she was inspired to take the approach after listening to [Bessie Smith's version](#). “Bessie Smith won,” she said. “There’s no way I could be any better than that. I need to find a way to bring this into my own style.”

So she turned to Handy’s lyrics for inspiration. “If I had these, what would I do given my own musical aesthetic?” Swan asked herself. The result is delicate and lovely.

There’s still time to enter our contest.



**ENTER: 1914 Blues Challenge**

Record your own version of “Yellow Dog Blues.” It can be in any style, with any instrumentation, as traditional or as radically different as you'd like.

Marc Anthony Thompson (a.k.a. Chocolate Genius) will judge the entries.

**The deadline to be considered for our challenge is Monday, June 16.**

[See the sheet music and submit your composition here](#)

MUSIC PLAYLIST

1. **Yellow Dog Blues**
- Composer: W.C. Handy
- Artist: Katherine Handy
- Album: Classic Piano Blues
- Label: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings
- Purchase: [Amazon](#)

2. **Yellow Dog Blues**
- Composer: W.C. Handy
- Artist: Ari Swan
- [Soundcloud](#)

PRODUCED BY: [Matt Frassica](#)

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11 unconventional Canadian singer-songwriters you need to hear

February 25, 2014 | [Greg Bouchard](#)

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Boyhood (via Facebook)

When Bob Dylan went electric at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965, he was doing more than changing his instrument of choice. He was knowingly destroying a set of rules that his fans and peers had set for his music. Forsaking acoustic folk songs, he moved onto a much wider variety of styles, but remained every bit as much a singer/songwriter. That spirit exists today in many Canadian artists who avoid taking the traditional route.

Still, we still tend to think of a singer/songwriter as an acoustic guitar and a pretty voice. Nothing against anyone who fits that description, of course, but it leaves out the numerous artists working with other instruments, creating different sounds, experimenting with noise, deviating from traditional song structures, and singing a little differently. In short, it leaves out a lot of musicians doing new and interesting things.

Here are 11 Canadian singer/songwriters who aren't only breaking rules—they're making some of the best new music out there.

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Ari Swan



Montreal's Ari Swan is a solo violinist whose songs have a dark theatrical quality, as she tell stories by squeezing an uncanny variety of sounds out of her instrument and voice. Before releasing her debut EP, *Symphony Plastique*, in the fall of 2013, she had cut her teeth playing in the backing bands for artists like Little Scream and Gabrielle Papillon. Since going solo, her work has received much-deserved praise and intrigue.

Symphony Plastique

by Ari Swan

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Boyhood



Boyhood, experimental pop project of Ottawa's Caylie Runciman, plays sludgy, noisy songs that flit

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Canada's emerging artists never cease to amaze us. Here are 11 more worth checking out [bit.ly/1o474Vt](https://bit.ly/1o474Vt)

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## Ari Swan | Casa Del Popolo

CLASSICAL, CHAOTIC, MENAGERIE | KAIVA BRAMMANIS

PHOTOS | TYR JAMI

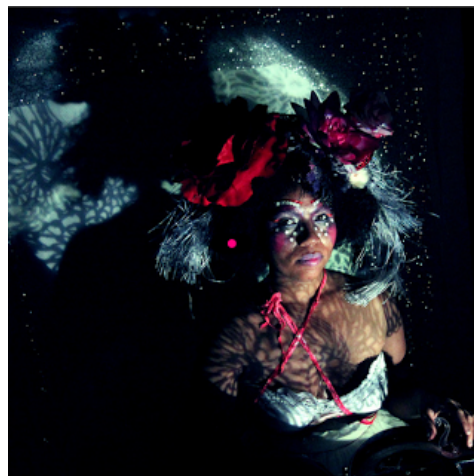
September 19, 2013 - Casa is one of those places that immediately feels familiar and comfortable. It has walls lined with posters of shows past and threadbare wooden floors that remind you of your own slanted, haphazard apartment. There are tea lights dotting the room that give everything a softer edge, and people sit curled up and cross-legged on the floor, sipping pints and small glasses of whiskey. Tonight, there are also giant flower crowns dangling in front of the stage, casting large, round shadows into the flickering candlelight. Doesn't everything just look better in candlelight?

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Casa looks good, but it also sounds good. Ohara starts off the evening, complemented by instrumentation from several other musicians and slow moving images that stream onto the wall behind her. Ohara's music has the beauty of a paradox: it's both slow and upbeat, both vulnerable and resilient, both gentle and assertive. Images of storefronts and city streets flash across the musicians' faces as her vocals float out into the room with a tender clarity.

Pietro Amato and Mathieu Charbonneau step onstage next for an instrumental set. French horn and piano stumble together into a beautiful sound. Maybe it's just something about instrumental music that makes me imagine movie scenes, but this sound is cinematic in a quietly grand way. It evokes the moment when the music starts at the beginning of a movie, before the opening credits have even started rolling, only a split second before the first scene lights up the screen. The two musicians seem to be each in their own world, but together, they make something cohesive.

As the final act - and main act - of the evening, Ari Swan takes the stage. Swan, along with her accompanying musicians, are all wearing flowers in their hair that match the ones dangling from the ceiling. Swan grins. Everyone else onstage is smiling too. She begins to sing, and it's the sort of sound that makes you feel like you're getting lost, but not necessarily in a bad way. Her vocals bend and twist and sway gently, enticing the audience into a kaleidoscopic world. The violin sculpts and drives the sound forward, sometimes with long, drawn out notes, and other times with faster, urgent



bow strokes; it's the essence of this act. The show's visuals echo the songs: an old-fashioned overhead projector fills the background with swirling, twinkling images.



For Swan, a classically trained violinist, this is one of the first shows in a while playing with other people. Tonight, her solo project's EP is being released. "I have to be able to do it by myself when I need to... but then, if I'm lucky enough that other people are available, I can have them play with me and it can be more full and more interesting," Swan says of her music. Though Swan has only lived in Montreal for three years, she is no stranger to playing with Montreal musicians: among many others, she has played with Little Scream, Folly and the Hunter, and Heirloom. "I've had really, really good luck playing with bands here," Swan says, smiling the entire time. She has only good things to say about the local music scene, declaring that there is a "great niche for anything."

Swan has good things to say about both the recording process and playing live. Recording, for her, is "like a constant performance where you have to be really, really perfect." In contrast, playing live is more spontaneous; she loves "playing off" the audience or "feeding off" other musicians onstage with her. This comes across in her set - her accompanying musicians ramp up the sound and give Swan something to play with.

How to describe her sound, something seemingly in its own category? Swan suggests "classical chaotic menagerie," and it's fitting. But really, you should hear it for yourself. Check out [Symphony Plastique](#) at [AriSwan.Bandcamp.com](#).

MORE PHOTOS OR ARI SWAN @ CASA DEL POPOLO

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## Ari Swan - Symphony Plastique

Self-released

[fmiuni](#)



*Symphony Plastique* is the debut solo release by Montreal artist [Ari Swan](#). This four-track EP, recorded with **Jamie Thompson** (The Unicorns, Esmerine), paints a beautiful aural space that includes percussion and various effects that yield an eclectic mix of sounds and rhythms. Swan's vocals and violin weave together nicely around the canvas of sound created by Thompson giving us tracks that are fun, playful and at times intricate; a true symphonic duet.

It's a delight to hear musicians using instruments that tend to fall between the cracks of popular music. Using the violin as the lead instrument is adventurous. You don't always think that violins and pop music can co-exist without potentially going too far into something like the avant-garde, but this EP is accessible. Even amongst the various noises and carnival-like sounds on this album, Swan's vocals are warm and inviting, which helps her pull you into her world. I enjoyed this EP, something about it made me feel good when I was listening to it. Now, it's all about trying to see Ari Swan live.

Final Mark: B+

Catch Ari Swan perform in Montreal on December 20th during the [Passovah](#) Holiday Special.

--Fredy M. luni hosts [Hiway 1](#), Sundays at 1:00 pm on CJLO





October 15, 2013

# Squirrelin4sounds Track/Album Reviews: Blood, The This Many Boyfriends Club, and Ari Swan

## Ari Swan – *Symphony Plastique*

"I'll build you a symphony, if only you'd ask" says Ari Swan's page. Well, we're definitely gonna be asking (politely of course) now that we've heard Swan's debut album.

I first heard of Ari Swan when she played with Gabrielle Papillion, one of my favourite Canadian folk artists. Upon further research, it's pretty clear to me that Swan has got quite a bit of experience under her belt including Folly and the Hunter, Little Scream, Heirloom, Lakes of Canada, and Chimneys. Recently, Ari Swan has released *Symphony Plastique*, an EP of her solo project and it's pretty darn rad. Violin driven pop is a hard thing to pull off, I'll admit it's something I often find overbearing, but Ari Swan does it masterfully and with charm. Recorded by Jamie Thompson (Unicorns), *Symphony Plastique* seems to have been a two person album with Ari Swan on violin and vocals and Thompson on percussion and effects. A two person art pop symphony that weaves loops and experiments with all the things a violin and a voice can do. Impressive, very impressive. "I've Come with Nothing" and "Words that Follow" are our favourites.

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## FEATURES

## MONTREAL'S HOWL! ARTS COLLECTIVE IS LEADING A DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION

WE SAW THIS

By Miranda Campbell

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Photo courtesy of **Howl! Facebook**

The phrase, protest music can conjure up a number of images; a kumbaya moment of **acoustic guitar sing-alongs**, the roar of an anthemic chant passed through throngs of people, or an in-your-face punk fury that presents itself in opposition to the norm. But **Montreal-based Howl! arts collective** is protesting in a more experimental and emotionally earnest way. The collective put on a week-long festival of concerts, films, and exhibitions in Montreal from April 20-26 that was billed as a "celebration of art and revolution" and highlighted the role of artistic expression to challenge oppression. Protest music can be powerful beyond just making a racket, and the festival harnessed this power to support social justice struggles while also providing solace and release in uncertain and chaotic times.

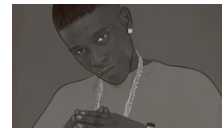
## LET'S BE FRIENDS



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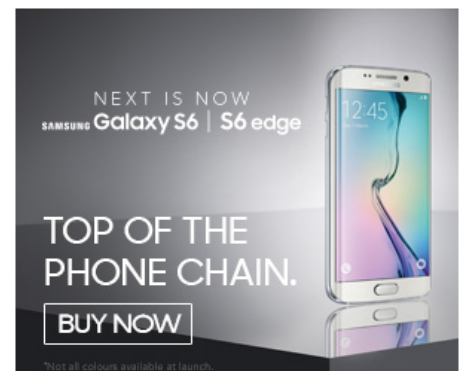
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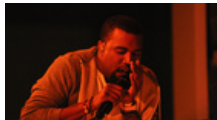
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Cozy Culture Clash



## NOW PLAYING ON YOUTUBE

For Howl! arts collective member and festival organizer Stefan Christoff, music and activism can be complementary pathways towards social change. According to Christoff—who worked as an activist to support exiled Sudanese Montrealer Abousfian Abdelrazi's case to return to the city—the first Howl! release was a record of six piano duets called ***Duets for Abdelrazi***. But more importantly, Christoff believes, is that music can provide a different language for impulses that are difficult to express in words. "There's something within the context of a social activist campaign that is challenging one to express through a banner or a press release on the more emotive side, more spiritual side. Music can communicate the dream world aspect of activism, the imagined possibilities, the impossible. I'm so molded into trying to speak in sound bites because as an activist you try to always be articulate. Music doesn't always have to be that, and that's good," says Christoff.

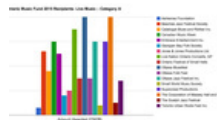
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The Howl! festival coincided with the Printemps 2015 demonstrations, which have railed against the Québec government's austerity budget. The Howl! arts compilation album ***ne pas plier: artists against austerity*** lays out the broad focus of these protests, stating that the "current Conservative government in Ottawa and the Liberal government in Québec are sustaining massive corporate tax cuts, while cutting public funds for institutions that form the social bedrock of the collective victories of activist movements in Canada over generations." Rather than directly discuss or attack these policies, the album aims to communicate a spirit of sonic opposition, wordlessly through musical experimentation.

Nevertheless, not all was experimental and wordless-sprawling sounds, as the emotive capacity of music to communicate protest was also on display. The festival featured a benefit for **Missing Justice**, a solidarity collective that works to bring attention to missing and murdered Native women. Performing at the benefit, musician **Ari Swan** commented on the urgency of coming together to address pervasive social problems. "It's such an important idea to have solidarity between people who are dehumanized. There are so many groups of people who are considered so far away from being important that we don't even notice when they are missing... as well as a lot of frustration sometimes that I feel as a woman; a woman of colour, doing music that is not really what you would expect to come from me. The ability to be heard is very difficult. The frustration comes out in my music sometimes even if it's not totally conscious," says Swan. Also performing at the Missing Justice benefit was the Choeur Maha women's choir, which formed the year of the Polytechnique Massacre in Montreal and has been led by Kathy Kennedy for nearly 25 years. Against the backdrop of a culture of violence against women, Kennedy highlights the "consciousness of choosing feminist repertoire and music written by women" and "feeling of sisterhood and sorority" of women coming together in the choir.

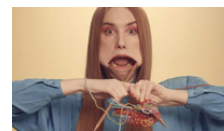


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\*Not all colours available at launch.





*Ari Swan speaking at Missing Justice benefit / Photo By Miranda Campbell*

This feeling of solidarity is also apparent when the members of Saturn Returns, a queer, feminist, anti-capitalist music collective and record label, get together. The collective is made up of three bands: Doilies, Heathers, and Loose Strife. At the festival, **Saturn Returns** launched the second album put out by the collective, the Loose Strife record, *Getting Better Getting Worse*. As a collective, Saturn Returns seeks to share the labour and the love of making music, putting on shows, and releasing records, but above all, they are friends. Loose Strife band member Claire Lyke stresses the benefits of working in a collective model, explaining that she's learned a lot from watching the example of Heathers, which she characterizes as "an extremely organized band." Smiling, Heather Hardie of Heathers says, "I do a lot of spreadsheets." Lyke adds, "I've been making so many more spreadsheets, inspired the exposure to your band." The other half of Loose Strife, Shaun Weadick quips, "which I still haven't filled out."



June 28, 2012

## **A Different Kind of Rockin': Montreal Infringement's Closing Weekend (Thursday & Friday)**



Relevant Excerpt:

“The stage was set for [Ari Swan](#). Now according to the Infringement website, this was violinist Swan’s first show vocally fronting a band, though you couldn’t tell it by watching and listening to her. She owned the stage and sang with all the confidence you’d expect from a stage veteran.

Swan’s powerful voice and energetic accompanying musicians and singers revved up the room. That revving would continue with the next act.”