WHO IS POiSON GiRL FRiEND?

THE ENIGMATIC '90S TRIP-HOP SINGER WHO "DISAPPEARED" IS RESURRECTED FOR HER SECOND ACT







Rarely does hitting the internet's algorithm-roulette jackpot make "the right person famous". nOrikO, known as POiSON GiRL FRiEND (PGF for short), a '90s trip-hop pioneer, is the exception. The enigmatic singer-songwriter/DJ from Japan, with her coolly detached, whispery vocals paired with electronic beats, highly intricate beneath a simplistic disguise, narrowly avoided the tragic archetype of the "artist ahead of their time": admired in hindsight but rarely cut a royalties check.

Instead of being overlooked and rediscovered 50 years later, nOrikO's career received a kind of "divine intervention" from YouTube and Spotify's algorithms around 2022. These platforms introduced her cult-favorite albums, *Melting Moment* (1993), *SHYNESS* (1993), and *LOVE ME* (1994), to international listeners who hadn't even been born during her debut as "suggested" videos and songs. Now, as an artist with almost no social-media promotion and zero Instagram presence until 2024, she's headlining sold-out shows across Europe and the US, receiving the reissue treatment and earning long-overdue praise from listeners both in and outside of Japan.

Theories abound on why POiSON GiRL FRiEND's music is only now gaining wider attention. The first is practical: during the pandemic around 2021, micro-genres like City Pop, Shibuya-kei, and other Japan-originating styles surged in popularity, as people stuck in their rooms explored new musical terrain at an all-time high. PGF is *not* those genres—in her words, it's "tragi-pop," and to others it's broadly classified as trip-hop. Her soft and longing vocals linger over beats that melt and gently throb, making you feel like you've taken a tranquilizer. Her influences span bossa nova, French Yé-yé, and techno. But perhaps algorithmic "computer brains" found her alternative Japanese sound adjacent enough to appeal to listeners jumping on the City Pop bandwagon.

The second reason is more philosophical: many claim 2019 until now is the "age of nostalgia", where an unpleasant present drives younger generations toward playlists and Pinterest boards filled with comforting, if fabricated, memories of the past. PGF gets bonus points: not only is her work rooted in the re-imagined glory days of the '90s, but its themes of longing for connection, intentional reclusiveness, and genre-bending experimentation are a match made in heaven to today's artists and audiences. By around 2021, nOrikO musical resurrection was still confined to niche corners of the web. But over time, as more people began asking "Who is POiSON GiRLFRiEND?" across comment sections and Reddit threads, curiosity began translating into real-world momentum.

To answer the question of *who* nOrikO is, it's better to ask *why* she started making music in the first place. She stated that spending part of her childhood in Brazil—being partially raised by her Brazilian nanny and attending French schools—sparked her love for bossa nova and later her interest in French and British music. A crate digger since high school, her youth was spent listening to French love chansons, Brit Pop, and New Wave.

Originally more of an avid listener with a vast foreign media diet, she eventually became a maker; debuting her first band, despite her natural shyness. A long time fan of Scottish musician Momus since the '80s, nOrikO formed The Poison Girlfriends in homage to Momus' second album *The Poison Boyfriend*. By 1992, she was performing as POiSON GiRL FRiEND and collaborating with Momus, who proposed working as a producer on her second album after he discovered in a magazine interview that she admired his music.

After *Love Me* in 1994, nOrikO went dark—a 20-year hiatus regarding the production of her own album. Maybe local fame was too much, or maybe it was just boring. Either way, she laid low, traveled around Europe (especially Paris), and withdrew from the spotlight instead of forcing new music during a period of feeling uninspired. With the resurgence of techno, she felt the urge to record again, releasing *rondoElectro* in 2014 and *das Gift* in 2018, with less fanfare and promotion than her '90s work, although both albums received positive reviews.

Now, everything has come full circle. nOrikO never gave up, but she also never expected this level of mainstream attention. She's at a place where the "gifts" of fame aren't ego validation; they're more an opportunity to connect with people across generations, through her reissues and live audiences, which greet her like old friends. It seems that only now, some 33 years after her debut, "the ultimate loner" (with a Mona Lisa expression unchanged over the years) has found the appreciative company she deserves.

sabukaru chatted with nOrikO, who is back and ready to talk, about her past albums, her return to the limelight, and what it means to make music as a shy legend.

PHOTOGRAPHER: JAMES ELLIOTT WRITER: ORA MARGOLIS













SABUKARU **You're a pretty elusive figure! Until recently, fans have tried to answer the question "Who is POiSON GiRL FRiEND?" on their own — crafting theories on Reddit or searching for clues in your work. But over the past two years, you've "reappeared." Why now?**

POiSON GiRL FRiEND **Why now? It was probably something required by the times. The world is now entering the Age of Aquarius.**

S **Who is POiSON GiRL FRiEND as a persona?**

PGF **A cat whispering at midnight.**

S **Through what feels like a twist of fate, your past works became "sleeper hits" online around 2020, without any direct promotion. How do you think that "magic" happened?**

PGF **It was you — Generation Z — who cast a spell on me.**

S **What year did you realize *Melting Moment* had thousands of views on YouTube — and that a whole new audience was genuinely connecting with your work?**

PGF **I think it was around 2022. The number of international followers on Twitter, which had just been a tool for small exchanges with friends, suddenly increased.**

S **What was the initial reception to *Melting Moment* in Japan?**

PGF **It seems to have struck a chord with lonely and individualistic girls.**

S **What is it about that album that resonates so deeply with today's young people?**

PGF **Where it's unfinished, impulsive, aggressive, and defenseless. And where they are innocent bystanders.**

















S **This August, you're reissuing two of your albums, *Shyness* and *Love Me* — decades after they were first released. What led you to revisit and reshare this part of your past?**

PGF **It wasn't my decision, but that of the record company. But I'm very pleased with the re-release of these two albums.**

S **What was it about London's electronic scene in the '80s that inspired you to start The Poison Girlfriends and launch your solo act?**

PGF **The electronic scene in the UK in the late 1980s was an intriguing mix of different kinds of music, coexisting without conflict.**

S **How do you reconcile being a public artist with being, by your own description, a shy and reclusive person? Does that create any challenges?**

PGF **Not at all, just enjoy the silence.**

S **How does it feel to have your music re-evaluated and celebrated more widely later in life?**

PGF **People born under the sign of Aries are said to bloom late. I'm an Aries — like Vivienne Westwood and Serge Gainsbourg.**

S **Has this newfound recognition changed the way you see yourself or your body of work?**

PGF **Nothing has changed for me personally, but I think my old fans and friends are finally relieved.**

S **Why did you consider "graduating" from your work as POiSON GiRL FRiEND after releasing *Love Me*?**

PGF **I wanted to see another side of life, because until then I really only thought about music in my life.**

S **Before the internet, how did you access foreign or world music as a young person?**

PGF **There were many very good record shops in Tokyo in the past. One of them was called WAVE in Roppongi. I would choose songs that were playing there or ask the shop assistant to play a recommended record for me.**

S **If someone wanted to understand you better, what movies, books, or albums would offer a window into how your mind works?**

PGF **Film: *Mauvais Sang (Bad Blood)* by Leos Carax. Of his early trilogy (*Boy Meets Girl*, *The Lovers on the Bridge*), this is my favourite. Book: *Do You Love Me?* by R.D. Laing. Album: *La question* by Françoise Hardy.**

S **If you had a completely free day in Tokyo with nothing on your schedule, where would you go?**

PGF **I would love to go to Kichijoji and meet my high school friends.**

S **And finally, what's the next adventure or project?**

PGF **I keep receiving tour offers from all over the world, so it's not easy to start something new — but shall I go to the moon?**