

ON TO A WINNER?

Could this be the year we finally claim victory in the Eurovision Song Contest?

Mike Ward speaks to UK entry SuRie...

THE EUROVISION
SONG CONTEST,
TONIGHT, 8PM,
BBC1

For some Eurovision fans, the contest's golden age can be a bit of an obsession. They are fixated with its colourful history, its legendary names. They can't quite believe they're following in the footsteps of Bucks Fizz, Katrina and the Waves and such like.

A glance at the CV of SuRie, the Hertfordshire singer-songwriter representing the UK tonight in Lisbon, would suggest she fits this profile to a T.

This, after all, will be her third appearance at the contest. She appeared as a backing singer and dancer with Loïc Nottet's *Rhythm Inside* – Belgium's entry in the 2015 Song Contest, who finished in fourth place – and was musical director for their 2017 entry, Blanche's *City Lights*, which also came fourth. Surely that's obsession personified? Or possibly not.

"I've actually never been Eurovision-obsessed," she insists. "Eurovision had never been on my radar growing up. I'd never watched it, I'd never seen a contest. I'd never tuned in. I'd been missing out on all these amazing years. ▶

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SURIE



This is Graham Norton's 10th year as Eurovision host



EUROVISION

"But then my brain was blown when I had the opportunity of working with the Belgians.

"I went to Eurovision just working it as a gig, and it was like, 'What have I missed?! What is this incredible world that I didn't really know existed?'

"Now I'm a complete convert. I've delved back. I've listened to a lot, I've watched a lot – with those iconic Terry Wogan and Graham Norton commentaries. They're amazing.

"I've seen how positive and wonderful the whole Eurovision experience can be. And now I find myself in this brilliantly bizarre position."

The song that SuRie will be performing, *Storm*, is a rousing, upbeat number with an infectious chorus. But given the UK's woeful recent track record at the contest, doesn't this engaging 29-year-old worry that her positivity is about to take a knock? Being the UK's Eurovision representative, after all, is seen by many as a bit of a poisoned chalice.

"I don't think of it like that," she says. "I've always gone through life taking opportunities that feel right and trusting my gut, and this feels like a really exciting, positive, wonderful thing to be a part of, with a song I really believe in.

"Obviously there'll always be a lot of chatter about other aspects, but I've seen first-hand at Eurovision that it's ultimately all about the song.

"So it was a no-brainer for me to get involved, to do it for my country which I'm very proud of."

And was it SuRie's previous Eurovision experiences that whetted her appetite? Did she watch those Belgian acts that she worked with and long to be standing in the spotlight herself?

"Well, that's always where I feel most at home," she admits. "But the

good thing about doing it for Belgium as a support was that the pressure was slightly off me.

"Maybe I wouldn't have been ready for it at that stage. Now, hopefully, I am. It's funny how life works out that way."

Nerves, mind you, shouldn't be a problem for SuRie. She's been singing in public most of her life.

Aged 11, she even performed before royalty.

"In Bishop's Stortford, where I grew up," she explains, "there was an amazing choir called

Cantate – which is still running – that

toured all over the world. We won competitions left, right and centre.

"It was a fantastic musical venture that I thrived on, and one of the amazing opportunities was singing at the Royal Albert Hall for Prince Charles. I had a little solo. I think my career peaked at quite a young age!"

Back then, mind you, nobody called her SuRie. Her real name was – and remains – Susanna Marie Cork. But she decided a couple of years ago that this was "a bit of a mouthful. I wanted to condense it a little bit."

So has she had a chance to weigh up tonight's opposition, to figure out which songs may pose her the biggest threat?

"No, I think in life the only competition you should have is with yourself. I mean, I'm fully aware I'm involved in a contest, but I don't want to get bogged down in comparing myself to others, to people who have very different songs, genres and styles.

"My focus has to be on my own performance, on my song.

"Ultimately, we're all in it together on a wonderful night of entertainment. Result-wise, who knows? We'll see what happens..."

Mike Ward

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IT HASN'T BEEN ALL BAD...

Since our last triumph, back in 1997, when Katrina and the Waves won in Dublin with *Love Shine A Light*, it's fair to say the UK has struggled a little at Eurovision. And yet it hasn't been an out-and-out disaster. Here are five of our Eurovision low points from the past 20 years – but also five of our happier moments.

THE LOWS 2003

Latvia's capital Riga was the setting as ill-fated Liverpool duo Jemini took their place in Eurovision history – as the first UK act to come rock bottom, with no points at all.



2007

Cheesy outfit Scooch stunned the Helsinki audience with their

excruciatingly suggestive rendition of *Flying The Flag (For You)*. It finished joint 22nd out of 24 entries.

2008

Runner-up to Shayne Ward in 2005's *X Factor*, Andy Abraham had high hopes as he headed to Belgrade to sing our 2008 entry *Even If*. Sadly, he came equal bottom.



2012

Veteran act Englebert Humperdinck was a bold choice

to sing for us at the contest in Azerbaijan. But the gamble didn't entirely pay off. *Love Will Set You Free* came 25th out of 26.

2013

The BBC put its faith in another familiar name from pop history. *Believe In Me*, sang Bonnie Tyler, our representative in Malmo. Unfortunately, few people did. Bonnie came 19th out of 26.



THE HIGHS 1998

The UK very nearly notched up a second win on the trot with *Where Are You?*, sung at the contest in Birmingham by Imaani.



2002

Former *Pop Idol* star Jessica Garlick came a very respectable joint third in Estonia,

tying with the hosts with the rousing ballad *Come Back*.

2009

Written by Andrew Lloyd Webber – who also played piano on stage – and sung by future Sugababe Jade Ewen, *It's My Time* managed fifth place in Moscow.



2011

Reformed boyband Blue may have had to settle for 11th place in Dusseldorf, but the televote part of their score made theirs the fifth most popular song that night among viewers across Europe.



2017

Former *X Factor* finalist Lucie Jones performed in Kiev with *Never Give Up On You*. Fifteenth place, to put a positive spin on it, was our fourth highest placing this century.

