

The new voice of Eurovision



Photo: Vossen

Joan Franka, a former Voice of Holland hopeful, has made it through to represent the Netherlands at the Eurovision Song Contest. TIFFANY JANSEN catches up with the singer to talk about her rise to prominence.

"When I was six years old, I decided I wanted to have a career in music," says Joan Franka, a bubbly young woman with striking blue, almond-shaped eyes. And it seems as though that dream is now becoming a reality for the up-and-coming singer/songwriter.

The 22-year-old Turkish-Dutch national is currently working on her debut album and, most notably, will be representing Holland at the 2012 Eurovision Song Contest. Franka, who was scouted for the popular television programme *The Voice of Holland*, where she participated in three live shows before being voted off, will be appearing in the Eurovision on 22 and 24 May in Baku, Azerbaijan. An estimated 125 million viewers are expected to tune into finals night on 26 May.

During its 57 year existence, the contest has featured more than 1,000 songs, some of which have been covered by

renowned artists such as Dean Martin, Cliff Richard, and David Bowie. By far the most successful Eurovision winners came out of the 1974 contest: a Swedish four-some known as ABBA.

Since the beginning of 2012, participating countries have been selecting their representatives, with winners being announced on the Eurovision Song Contest's official website each week. Countries hold national competitions and interested parties send in their entries, which are then narrowed down to a select few to be performed live. With the help of a television audience, a panel of judges selects the winning song and artist to be the country's Eurovision entry.

In the autumn of 2011, Franka's manager sent in her single, "You and Me" for consideration to the Dutch National Eurovision Songfestival.

"It took a few months before we heard

that 'You and Me' had been selected to be in the final six at nationals," Franka recalls. "I was very excited when I heard the news. I ran downstairs and my mother, sister and I all jumped up and down!"

From there, she made it to the top three and, although the judges placed her in third, viewer votes streamed in to sweep the contest in Franka's favour.

The song that brought her so far was inspired by Franka's first love, a childhood crush on a boy in her class during primary school. She describes it as "a song about pure friendship and love we have at a very young age."

And, it had to be asked: What is the deal with the Indian costume she wore at Nationals?

"I used to play Indian with the boy the song is about," Franka laughs fondly. "For me, it was a symbol that you can always carry your memories with you."

Franka credits her sister for instilling in her a passion for music. "She used to sing, dance and act, and I tagged along," she explains. "She always motivated me to do theatre and music."

When Franka turned 17, her mother bought her a guitar, which went mostly un-played after the instrument proved to be more difficult than she had anticipated.

She later turned to the piano but "didn't feel like it was my instrument. So after three years of staring at my guitar collecting dust in the corner of my room, I started playing it again."

This time, the artist was determined to master the instrument that had eluded her years before. She spent five hours or more each day practicing. One has only to catch a glimpse of her Songfestival performance to see that her hard work has paid off.

For such a small country, Holland has had quite an impressive track record at the Eurovision Song Contest, having won the competition four times.

Three of those wins were with Dutch language songs. Dutch conductor Dolf van der Linde has lent his talents to seven different countries.

The last win for Holland was in 1975 with Teach-In's "Ding-A-Dong."

When asked what she felt her chances were of taking home the first win for Holland since 1975, a modest Franka says, "I don't think you can ever expect to win anything. I plan to simply do the best job I can and hope for the best."

Whatever the outcome, friends and family in both Holland and Turkey are extremely proud of Franka's accomplishment. And the rest of Holland will be right there with them, rooting her on come May.