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Æ—Eva Salina Primack and Aurelia Shrenker

INTERVIEW BY ELENA MARTÍNEZ

This 2010 CD by the duo called Æ, comprised of Eva Salina Primack and Aurelia Shrenker, is a treasure of women's voices. If you love groups like De Boca en Boca or compilations such as Wizard Women of the North, you'll love the harmonies on this CD. It is primarily an *a cappella* work with some accompaniment by Primack on accordion and Shrenker on *panduri* (traditional three-string lute from eastern Georgia), with violinist Jesse Kotansky on two tracks. The 14 tracks feature Georgian, Albanian, Greek, and Ukrainian songs, with two old-time songs from this country, "Across the Blue Mountains," and "Wind and Rain," as well as a Corsican song.

How does this mix of Eastern European, American, and Corsican fit together? Eva explains the Corsican song came from the time they were on tour in Europe and had a week of rehearsal on that island. She heard traditional songs from there, and "when you start listening to polyphonic music from one tradition, it is a gateway to other polyphonic music." So she wanted to learn these songs,

too. Eva and Aurelia learned these songs in three and four parts but wondered where were the songs in two voices? The piece on the CD, a hymn to the Virgin Mary from the 12th century, is the only one in two voices they ever heard. Describing the entire CD, Eva comments, "They are all mountain songs—Balkan mountains, Corsican, Appalachian mountains. They are not that dissimilar. That's the idea of these songs that weave together."

The title of the group and CD, Æ, works on many levels for the duo. It is a Celtic rune that joins the sounds A and E together, pronounced "ash," and means a dual nature—exactly two. For the duo of Aurelia and Eva who perform the music of the old and new, this is perfect symbol to represent what they do.

Eva and Aurelia

Eva grew up in California, and by seven years old, she had started going to the Balkan camps there. For the last several years, she has taught at the camps. She sings in Serbian, Bulgarian, Albanian, Macedonian, Romani, and Ukrainian. While working on a BA in Ethnomusicology at UCLA, she met Aurelia who had moved out there from Massachusetts for school. Aurelia had grown up listening to old-time songs and playing the mountain dulcimer with her family, but at a young age she became very much interested in the Georgian music scene. Within in a few months of meeting, Aurelia and Eva were singing together. They realize they have come to this music from the outside, but because of their dedication they have become integral parts of the communities they perform with—Eva is considered one of the preeminent singers and interpreters of Balkan



vocal music, and Aurelia went to Georgia on a Fulbright scholarship. They conducted workshops and performances together as Æ, and continue to perform solo gigs. Aurelia is currently based between Paris and Caucasus Georgia, where she has been researching traditional folk singing. Eva Salina is based in New York City, and you can find out more information about her performing and teaching work at www.evasalina.com.

To contact Æ, visit: www.aesings.com For more information, visit Eva's website: <http://www.evasalinaprimack.com/music/ash-ae>

The Æ CD was the December 2011 featured selection in the New York Folklore Society's CD-of-the-Month *Voices in New York* membership program. For more information about the duo, check out the New York Folklore Society's directory of traditional artists: <http://www.nyfolklore.org/tradarts/music/artist/ae.html> ▼

Elena Martínez received an MA in Anthropology and an MA in Folklore at the University of Oregon. Since 1997, she has been a folklorist at City Lore, where she works on various public programs including the Bronx Rising! series through the Bronx Music Heritage Center, and is the director of the City Lore Documentary Institute. She co-produced the video documentary, *From Mambo to Hip Hop: A South Bronx Tale*, which aired on PBS in September 2006 and won the NCLR's (National Council of La Raza) 2007 ALMA Award for Best TV Documentary.



AURELIA SHRENKER & EVA SALINA PRIMACK are



Æ. Photo courtesy of Æ (<http://www.aesings.com/pages/press.html>)

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