



Sibu Manaï

PROFILE OF JUSTINE MAUVIN

by Lucy Small



Reef pass, Tahiti.

Photo: Tim McKenna – @timmckenna

The phoneline cut out a few times before Justine Mauvin and I could start our chat. She was calling from her apartment in Paris in France most of us wouldn't quite recognise as the country battled with Covid-19. It was mid-April when the virus was peaking in Europe and Parisians hadn't had much access to fresh air for a few weeks already.

"Sorry, it's been a while since I've spoken English," she says quickly.

The way Justine speaks English has a particular rhythm. Her words are delicately

articulated in a way that made me want to keep on listening. I wanted to write about Justine because I was wondering what she was up to since she disappeared from the World Longboard Tour a couple of years ago and I'd seen a photo here and there of her in different parts of the world. She also recently released an independent EP under her artist name Sibu Manā so it was interesting to learn a bit more about the way music and surfing go hand in hand for Justine.



Photo: Thibaut Paruite – @thibaut.paruite_spo

She was born and grew up on Reunion Island. Her mum lives in front of Saint Leu and the way Justine describes her childhood there is enviable:

"I have really sweet memories about my childhood. I grew up next to the ocean and at that time we could go surf anytime, anywhere. We would go to the beach every day, swim, go on the boat, surf, before and after school and we would live barefoot and almost naked and everywhere there's a lot of tropical fruit." She describes. "Everyone there comes from Africa, India, China and France, so it's a huge melting pot of different cultures and different religions. We are this big diversity of people."

"It's a really nice and peaceful place."

Playing music began at home when Justine was just six or seven. Having played more than one instrument since she can remember, it doesn't really seem surprising that she has since grown into a fully-fledged musician:

"I used to play the piano when I was a child," she said. "First, I had a teacher who was really amazing in the way she taught me. It was really intuitive and natural with rhythm and melodies, so it was easy as a child. Then I changed teachers and I was not good at all. So, I went surfing and then I went back when my father taught me the guitar."

"At 15 or 16 I went back on the piano and everything came back to my memory so I started writing music by myself and then it all came naturally."

"My neighbour was a bass player and he would hear me play and I would hear him play so we started a band and started to make concerts. It made me write even more songs, so it started naturally I guess, with neighbourhoods and family," she said.

Justine left the island for Biarritz when she was 18 to surf, and as part of the Roxy team, had access to the recording studio at the office in France. She started making music under the Roxy label, playing piano at home instead of going to the university course she was enrolled in and surfing at the same time.

"That was a really good opportunity for me because I could meet other musicians, start playing gigs and concerts. Being on stage is very particular because you are acting and performing and giving something to the people right now and every audience is different every time."

"There's a conversation, an exchange between the audience and us on stage."

"It's very ephemeral, something you can't grab, you can't do again, you can't make it happen twice. It's just once, it's just now and I like it, I really like it."

"There's some magic happening on

stage," she said and I can hear her smile down the line.

I ask about her favourite memories of performing and she describes a homecoming festival performance which was around the time she decided to step back from surfing and immerse herself more completely in music:

"I played at home two years ago at a very big festival, it's the second biggest festival in the Indian Ocean and it's held in Reunion. We were playing just in front of the ocean in the lagoon at sunset time and there were all my family and friends from childhood. It was a very pure and magic moment. It was nice to see my relatives and people who I'd grown up with watching me, who I had become, my work and being able to share it with them," she said.

Music and surfing are tied to each other in many ways. Justine is well aware of how these two pastimes mirror each other, surfing is alive in Justine's music but music is also part of her surfing:

"The state of mind when I would go surfing is quite similar as when I start making music because you move into a sensitive bubble and you're very aware of your senses."

"There's something that is written in time that is very interesting for me."

"When I'm on stage I only play now, and the present moment is very important and so it is in surfing. When you surf, you only draw one line on one wave and the next wave will be different," she said.





Justine at home in Biarritz. Photo: Aurelie Michel – @rideandsea
(below) North Coast, Papua New Guinea. Photo: Andrew Carruthers – @andrewcarruthersphotography





With two-time world champ Kelia Moniz in Tahiti. Photo: Tim McKenna - @timmckenna

After competing on the World Longboard Tour until 2018 there was a point when Justine needed to become more selective with how she spent her time - doing both surfing and music full time meant not enough for each rather than the best of both. So she left the Tour to follow music, but still competed in events like the Duct Tape Invitationals. Justine had an interesting way of describing competing. She talked about "the game" of competitive surfing as something she enjoyed, but the weight of sociality and structure was more of a deterrent on the world stage.

"I love the game and I love trading our skills and surfing with all the amazing surfers," Justine said. "I prefer events that are more fun and helping bring a new vision of surfing into the industry, rather than just competing."

"I now try to choose my contests so I don't have to make it all year long, so I have time to work on music because it asks for a lot of time," she explained.

Justine has some interesting stories from her travels that are embedded in her music. She recently travelled to Papua New Guinea to shoot a documentary about wooden boards. As surf culture diffuses from the fast fashion lifestyle of the western world there is a need to preserve the historic methods and approaches to surfing that still live on in the Pacific Islands. Fibreglass boards quickly turn to trash without the materials to repair them and people living in these places start to view western surfcraft as superior and cast aside the boards that have been built over generations and generations out of local materials.

"We went there to make a documentary about surfing and about how traditional culture is already in the people's lives and how important it is not to be influenced by the occidental way to surf with all the fibreglass boards," Justine said.

"I went there to try the boards as an international surfer and as a woman as

well. It was very interesting because they would see a professional surfer surf on their wooden boards, showing them it's possible to ride them just as the glass boards. Also, for the women it was really good because they would see a girl riding the boards the way she wants and riding it good and surfing every day.

"We went to a little village and we brought them some wooden boards and all the little boys grabbed the boards and would go surf and a lot of girls would sit next to me.

"One of them, I asked her, 'why don't you go surf?' and she said, 'because I have no board, because the boys take it first and then the girls at the end, if the boys have finished. I said, 'wait I'm gonna give you a board, that's not even a problem'."

"So it's just starting to change a little bit, the priorities, and makes women a bit more powerful and confident enough to grab a board and go surf whenever she wants." Justine said.

JUSTINE ON MUSIC:



When I had a first chat with Lucy I was processing the release of my first EP. It's out now on every platform (Spotify, Deezer, iTunes) under the name of Sibu Manaï. I've been working on the release (art direction, distribution etc.) during the French national quarantine, which was a lot of work but very constructive as well.

You can also find my last music video here: youtube.com/watch?v=R2_rR9Hm0Kg

The story behind it is based on a simple point – on our big way home called life, in every stranger you meet, you find a part of yourself (that's why I play all the characters).

This photo is of my band and I – Sylvain Rabbath (François Rabbath's son) and Aurélien Fradagrada. My EP *Vavanguer* (means wanderer in Creole) is a mix of what I learnt on the road, from growing up in Reunion Island to travelling for surfing.

It's hybrid between pop, soul, electro and traditional music from Reunion. I sing in English and Creole to make the link between the wider world and my little island.

I have a lot of influences from Ghana, Nigeria and all the West Coast of Africa – The Lidjadou Sisters, Blay Ambolley, and Ebo Taylor, but also some very folk and soul names like Joan Baez, Fleetwood Mac, Candy Staton. My biggest artist and influence from Reunion remains Alain Péters, a deceased poet I covered in *Vavanguér* as a tribute.

Sibu Manaï is the name that a Mentawai tribe gave me. (You can find the movie of our trip here vimeo.com/228090548). It means "cherish the flower, make it blossom" and I chose it for my musical project because I think it summarises perfectly the message I want to give in this time when our society is sick from treating every living and non-living thing in a non-kind way.



Paris. Photo: Cécile Chabert - @cecilechabert



PNG. Photo: Matty Hannon - @matty_hannon

Her artist name, Sibu Manaï, is a name given to her by people she spent time with on a trip to the Mentawai Islands. While foreign surfers so often travel to the Ments chasing barrels, sinking Bintangs and barely setting foot on land, Justine chose to delve into some of the life on the islands.

"I spent some time with a tribe over there, in the jungle with a Mentawai tribe because I wanted to go to the Mentawais but not only like a lot of surfers do. They go there and surf the wave and go back to Bali," she said.

"It doesn't make sense to go somewhere and not even say hi to the people who live there. It's not named Mentawai Islands for nothing, it's because there are some people living there."

"They're truly amazing. They make everything out of wood, they know the forest exactly, they know what plant is good for what, it's amazing."

"They gave me the name Sibu Manaï at the end of my trip and it means cherish a flower, make it blossom." She said.

I ask Justine about her relationship with the Indian Ocean. It's an interesting reflection of the people from the communities that loop it – the diversity of life from Africa's East Coast, the long dusty West Oz coastline, the Indonesian Islands, the Indian subcontinent, and the islands within that ocean such as Justine's homeland of Reunion. It somehow seems symbolic that Justine would immerse herself in life from elsewhere in the ocean she calls home and emerge with a creative identity to put forward to the world.

"When I'm in the Indian Ocean I feel at home," she said. "The Indian Ocean mixes a lot of different cultures and this talks to me because I'm from an island where diversity is key."

"It has something particular. I feel safe, I feel like I'm part of this," she said as her voice trailed off.



Mexico. Photo: Rafael Tamayo - @ratamayo75 (below) Tupira PNG, self-shape single-fin. Photos: Matty Hanlon - Thunderbox Films



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MEANS CHERISH A FLOWER, MAKE IT BLOSSOM.”