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## From opera to folk, Kay Gillette's vocal range fuels folk duo Bella Ruse

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Kay Gillette of Bella Ruse (Minneapolis, Minn.)

By Munson Haver  
NOISE! Editor

Kay Gillette has a lot of cred.

She's got cred in circles of classically trained musicians and also cred with touring musicians that haven't necessarily gotten caught up in all them fancy book learnings.

Gillette, one half of the minimalist folk duo Bella Ruse, graduated from Hope College in Holland where she sang opera. She's parlayed that experience into becoming the tonsils behind the whimsical folk act from Minneapolis, which will visit Foundry Hall in South Haven on Wednesday night.

"I think the years I spent singing opera totally made me the singer that I am even though I'm not doing that same stuff," said Gillette from the road in Columbus, Ohio. "It kind of taught me to be intentional about every sound I make. Even though I'm not choosing the same sounds I made with opera, everything I do is a choice."

Along with Joseph Barker, the two have crafted a classic folk sound, hitting the road as a duo but playing at home in a full band setting. Barker commands guitars while Gillette plays auxiliary instruments ranging from the glockenspiel to a toy piano, which gives a surprisingly heavy dose of diversity for just a couple of musicians.

"I really like it," Gillette said of performing as a duo. "It always feels very intimate. I like the challenge. We have to keep things interesting. We can't just be a voice and a guitar. That's why I have all those instruments to lug up on stage."

I scored a complimentary copy of Bella Ruse's latest EP that intoxicates the ears with Gillette's refined vocals. She sounds like Norah Jones one minute and Macy Gray another. Gillette likes to see her act as in the vein of artists like Feist and Ingrid Michaelson but with the old-fashioned jazzy feel of Edith Piaf.

"I try to make decisions about how my voice sounds, but those are obviously dictated by what type of

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song we're doing," Gillette said.

Gillette's opera influence comes blatantly pouring out of the speakers on a short ditty entitled *J'ai presque peur*, which also let her show off her French.

"The French is the most obvious example," she said. "I took French diction in college and it taught me how to sound like a French person even though I have no idea what I'm saying [laughs]."

The band is poised to release a full-length in October. This summer, it's been solid touring along with earning a spot opening the local installment of Lilith Fair. Back home, Gillette teaches music lessons while Barker tutors. The gigs offer flexible schedules as they work to convert performing as their jobs.

"We're putting a lot of time and effort into that to make it a big thing," Gillette said of the forthcoming album. "As far as the future, I'm just really happy. I think things are going really well and we're trying to make this our full time thing the best we can."

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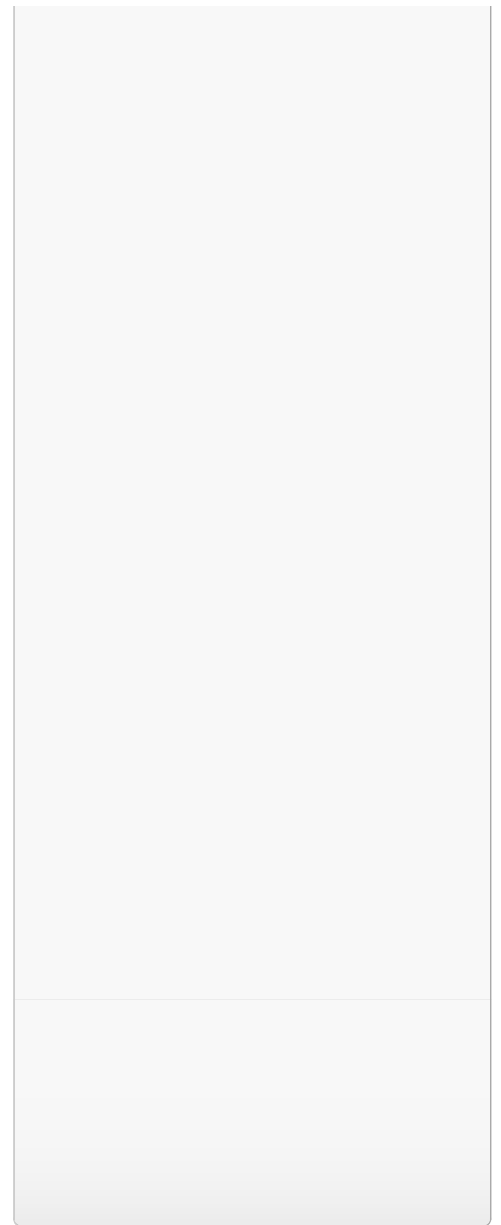
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