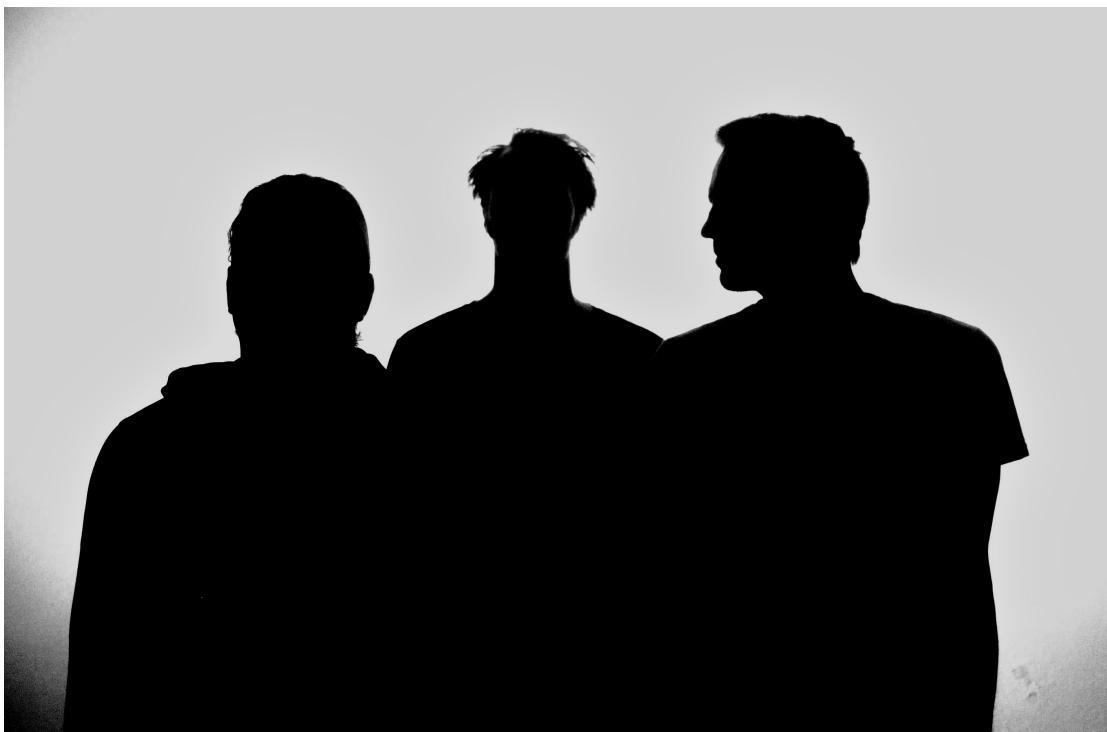


BAND OF THE MONTH: ILLEIST COLLECTIVE

Miro, Silas, and René of illeist collective.

Swiss/Swedish group [illeist collective](#) (Silas Bieri, Miro Rutscho, and René Flückiger) has defied genre expectations since their first album *Electrees*, an inventive mix of jazz, electronica, chill-out and drum'n'bass, was released in 2010. Now with their current album, [Monkey Dope](#), they have unleashed a dark and gritty piece of atmospheric electro trip-rock, complete with an inspired visual concept that elevates the album into the realm of genuine art. Musical purists at heart, *Monkey Dope* is chock full of lovingly produced, vintage analogue sounds, which is a perfect reflection of the trio's attitude and ethos toward their music and the band itself.

We recently sat down with Miro and René over beers, bratwurst and iced tea to talk about *Kuschelrock*, free downloads, their secret pop sympathies, and digital vs. analogue recording.

Congratulations on *Monkey Dope* – what an amazing album. Were you happy with the end result?

René: Thank you. We were really happy once we had finished because as everyone who has been involved in a production knows, you start with an idea, but you have to work so hard to maintain that focus...by the end of it you are just really happy to be done. For the mixing of the album we went to [Gula Studion](#) in Malmö, Sweden because of the unique possibilities of mixing with a complete analogue workflow. We mainly worked on a analogue Neve desk from the 1980s that was custom-made for the [BBC](#). We used almost only analogue gear and mixed and automated in real time while bouncing to tape.

Miro: While we recorded the song on tape, we had to operate the desk and effects ourselves - you had to time when to push in some vocals or bring them back. Sometimes we needed eight hands to automate the mix on a song. Old school!

So it was a deliberate decision to go the analogue route?

R: Yes, it was a conscious choice. We recorded the last record digitally, but used analogue mastering. We all are very much into sounds – we love and used a lot of [Korg MS-20](#) and [Juno-60](#) sounds, but also a lot of very unknown and sometimes self-made machines. Of course it is more work, but the analogue mix on tape just sounded much better than every digital premix we've ever done. We took the time, and were up for it, so we did it. If we wanted to go back and redo something, we couldn't just re-set it, so we had to take pictures of the single tracks in case we wanted to remix something at the end. But it all worked out. There is a more detailed description and some pictures about the mixing on [Silas' blog](#).

[Monkey Dope](#) isn't just an album, there is also a whole other aspect to it – for each of the 11 songs there is a video – a kind of visual album. I'm curious - How did you fund it?

R: If we really had had to pay for it all, it would have been impossible. We involved a lot of artist-friends and paid them as much as we could. We received grants and fundings from the cities of Biel and Langenthal, the canton of Bern, [SUISA](#), and many more. Thanks again! All the people involved were artists themselves, and fascinated by the music somehow, and were willing to work for free, more or less. We paid their expenses and that was about all we could afford. We were really honored that so many people supported us to this extent, without taking a dime for it. We didn't take it for granted. All we could say was 'thank you' from the bottom of our hearts.

M: They did earn something in another way – we've created a platform for them to represent their work, their videos, a kind of showcase.

R: We like to think of it as a kind of symbiosis.

[Each video is creatively distinct](#). Was there an overall theme that you wanted for each, or did you let the filmmakers decide?

M: We just gave them the tracks and pretty much said 'Do what you want!'. We couldn't say, 'We have this vision, please make it for us!'

R: Because we couldn't pay them, we didn't feel like we could impose anything. They were all very cooperative. They came to us with their concepts and we talked about it until we were on the same page, and then it worked. We never had to say 'We don't like it', and we were really happy with all the results.

Can you tell us a little about your creative process – do you start with an idea, a sound, or a visual?

M: I start with sounds or checking what my mood is...but I don't start by playing guitar or drums, like a singer/songwriter. In fact, I don't even like singing <laughs>.

R: We don't have a formulaic creative process. We jam – for example, the opener on *Monkey Dope*. We had that for a long time, we played around with it for a while, then we found a synthesizer riff and the whole thing just came together. Or one of us might have an idea, which we send to each other, and we either love it, hate it, or leave it. Normally we love it. Then we develop the ideas from there. We would love to develop the songs together more often, but as Silas is now in Sweden, Miro in Biel, and me in Zurich, we are forced to work this way. We use [Dropbox](#) a lot! But for *Monkey Dope* we recorded most of the tracks in a ten-day session. We went to a nice wooden house in the Jura, with two cars filled with equipment and set up a studio in the middle of the forest. That gave us an incredible creative base for this album.

You've made [Monkey Dope](#) available for free download – can you explain the philosophy behind making it available for free?

M: We didn't have anything to lose. We thought we would reach more people with this type of release. We've had so many more downloads than we would have gotten in sales.

R: It was also an image thing. We are just a small band, and if people don't know your name they aren't going to buy your album. People aren't really prepared to buy music anymore. We had an option for people to donate money, but not that many people did. We thought given our popular status - which is not that well-known yet - let's just try to reach out and let more people know that we exist. We thought a free thing is always good.

So how will you recoup the money you spent making the album? Or is that not a major objective for you?

R: Well unfortunately we can't live off the illeist collective at the moment. Only Silas is a full-time musician. We don't make a single dime with our music at the moment. If we can pay our bills with our concerts, that's very good already.

M: Our investments in the band actually aren't that high, because we managed to get some money through the various grants and cultural funds.

Do you have a favorite track/video on the album?

R: (simultaneously) '[Going Down](#)'. I think because it's the best video. The video really lifts the music up to the next level. It's also the most epic song we have on the album, lots of lovely sounds from the Korg MS-20.

M: '[Maybe](#)'...Ok, I choose 'Going Down' as well.

What are your musical influences?

M: In the *Electrees* phase, we were totally into [Herbie Hancock](#) stuff. Lately I've been listening to a lot of NIN and [Marilyn Manson](#), because he is touring and I'm seeing him soon in Neuchatel. So more rock music than before.

R: In the 90s I was into the [Euro-dance](#) stuff, then heavily into heavy metal – I had long hair and a heavy metal band. Then it was dream theater, progressive metal. Then I was really into hand-made music – if it was electronic I hated it, everything had to be produced authentically. I was really dogmatic and stupid. Now, it's folk, rock, songs that have a nice melody.

M. And I have to admit, I'm pretty into pop songs as well. They will beat me for saying what I'm actually listening to...

Pop is nothing to be ashamed of! Go on, just say it.

M: I like the album from Jessie J. I like the songs because they are so plain and simple, and entertaining. Lots of people say, oh it's just pop music, anyone can do it, but if you listen to it, you realize that you'd have to work your ass off to get it to sound like that. Most people who say it's easy are just complaining, because they aren't in a position to have a song so well produced.

Most embarrassing teenage musical obsession?

R: I loved Ace of Base. And 2Unlimited, Snap. And even earlier, Nicole, a German Schlager star. I liked her, I was into her. And now, Augie March, the Australian folk singer.

M: I found a micro-cassette with US3 on it. And Ace of Base. And George Michael. Wham... And I loved Roxette, but that's not embarrassing.

Are you sure? It might be. But I think our [CEO would agree with you.](#)

M: No! Roxette isn't embarrassing.

R: Yeah, Roxette were great. They were one of the *Kuschelrock* slow-dance CDs that you pulled out at the school disco to cuddle to <breaks into a rendition of 'Listen To Your Heart'>. Oh, and David Hasselhof, 'Looking For Freedom'. How pitiful. And embarrassing.

Future plans?

R: Well, we put this album out in October 2011, so some time ago now. The next step for us is new material, and some remixes. We have one remix already, and we are in contact with other artists and bands, mainly from the electronic/house genre, to remix some of more dance-y tracks from *Monkey Dope*, to make them really work on the dance floor. We'd like to have those done by the end of summer, or September at the latest.

M: Creating new songs, and hopefully releasing a new album. We'll definitely do a different concept to *Monkey Dope*.

R: We don't know if it will be in album format, or single songs, free, or EP... we don't know yet. It's an open question. But there are some crazy ideas already!

Perhaps a new musical direction?

M: We are always fighting over whether we are allowed to have a guitar or something like a guitar on our tracks.

R: They (Miro and Silas) always want to have a guitar on the tracks and I'm always like....no. It's also a question of how we are going to reproduce the sound live. At the moment we are forced to rely on artificial sounds. With the new album we'd rather have less electronic stuff in the background, and be able to produce all the sounds ourselves. But that does make it more difficult for us, and puts limits on the ideas we have. The one song we are working on at the moment is pretty catchy, and some songs we've stopped working on because they were too catchy, too pop.

Is that going to be your new direction – pop?

R: It probably wouldn't be your standard pop album, but yeah, who knows. It could well be the case that the songs are a bit shorter and more radio-friendly.

M: Radio-friendly means not saying 'fuck'.

R: We never swear anyway, we're harmless <laughs>

Harmless or not, we're sure that Miro, René and Silas will come up with something amazing for their next project. We can't wait to see what they create next, whether it be pop, guitar solos, [Kuschelrock](#) or folk. Good luck, guys. Oh, and thanks for all the laughs over dinner!

***[illeist collective](#) are Silas Bieri (vocals, synthesizers),
René Flückiger (drums, sampler) and Miro Rutscho (bass, synthesizers, sampler).***

[illeist collective on Bandplanet.](#)

Get your free fix of [Monkey Dope](#) now.

[illeist collective](#) play a series of dates over the 2012 summer festival season:

***Festival Des Arcs, Ehrendingen 15.06.2012
Pärkli Jam, St Johannspark, Basel 22.06.12
Earthquake Openair, Herzogenbuchsee, 23.06.12***