

Claudia Serrano

Interview with Claudia Serrano, Artistic Director for the IME
(Introspection Music Experience) Project



IME Introspection Music Experience

“When everything clicks is because before it was chaos. That’s how we work”

The international project Introspection Music Experience (IME), funded by the Creative Europe program of the European Commission, joins musicians and composers from Belgium, Greece, and Spain. Twelve solo artists and bands collaborate with composers who live having symptoms of mental illnesses to create music together. IME is a unique space of encounter, dialogue, exchange of experiences and acquired knowledge, to finally produce genuine material – an album, 16 songs and a documentary film that deals with reality and diversity. Claudia Serrano, Artistic Director of the project and member of one of the participant bands, Grounded Theory (Zamora), delves into the ins and outs of IME and reflects about the power of music and creativity... and about unconditionally believing in others’ capacities.

“We all are musicians first”, she affirms.





In this project musicians with and without the symptoms of mental distress have collaborated, how has it been the collaboration between them? How has the joint work been constructed?

You have to start by getting to know the person you are collaborating with, not only their ideas, emotions, thoughts... but also their environment. This will give us many clues to understand the lyrics. If you don't know the person who wrote the song, sometimes it's hard to understandmake sense of the words. In our case, the lyricist of the group wanted to reflect the extreme emotions he

experiences, the uncertainty of not knowing how he will be tomorrow and how his circumstances condition his life. The whole band has to understand the meaning of the song so that the music goes in the same direction and both express the same idea. Whenever possible, the vocalist himself has explained the reason for each idea. I don't seek open conversation on the subject unless it is on the initiative of the vocalist: we are all musicians, illness doesn't matter.

With that material, is it easy for uncertainties to bloom?

Another particularity we have worked a lot with is the doubt. There is little room for uncertainty, if something seems like it won't work, it will never work and we have thoughts like "this will be impossible", "we abandon it and period", "I do not add anything". There have been a lot of moments in which everything seems to click and we want to



create various songs; but also lots of moments in which nothing clicks, overwhelming feelings appear, they close their minds and want to leave the group. We have to be prepared to remember that something clicks when there was chaos before it, and that's the way we work.

During the creative process, it does not matter if consume makes our rehearsal difficult, if you are down or feeling the abstinence syndrome, everything has been a part of the process. Before the rehearsal, I get called many times by the members saying that they won't be able to come, but then they do, we are all together and it is rewarding although the conditions are not the best. We have been flexible, adapting the working and rehearsal schedules from 60 to 40 minutes if necessary.

How have the relationships between the members of the group evolved?

One of the strengths of the group has been the strong sense of belonging that we have all developed, which has gradually come to be seen. We have supported each other a lot, especially when facing feelings of loneliness. At the beginning we were not friends, now we have a very close relationship, we call each other every day, we want to be sure that we are all well and that the group is moving forward. This relationship has motivated us. When someone wanted to leave, the rest of us pulled and in the end, we were still here as a team. To finish the process, we had to record the song. After all the rehearsals and discussions, the recording of the song was the perfect ending. All the members of the group made a remarkable effort, with the instruments, the mixes... we were serious, we were all equally concerned about the result. We were rehearsing in a basement in a marginal neighbourhood in Zamora. You can imagine the atmosphere... However, the recording studio allowed us to feel professional, it was beautiful. The studio technicians and the

musicians understood each other very well, it was a very natural relationship, we were just another group. There have also been moments of nerves, we've been demanding, and we've all worked hard to get something out of the whole process.

Can you describe how it was possible to add music to the composers' experience?

The process has been important, it seems a cliché, but creating a song, putting music to a person's experience, has been a creative process in which we have all changed, grown, evolved. It was trial and error, kept or discarded, we have kept what we liked, and we have enhanced what was good. My job was to bring out the best, to work to achieve the results we all expected; a job that we have all gradually taken on as our own. Another important thing is that the lyricist is present in the musical construction, even if he has no musical training. He knows what he wants to transmit and his opinion on the type of music has been key to generate musical models to decide how he sees his lyrics. Having the lyricist has meant that the result is not generic, but authentic, real.

You have also filmed a music video. How have you done it?

The video is a making off of that road so important to us. Video shots in the rehearsal room, outdoors, mixed with the recording room, fast shots and changing instruments... we wanted to reflect that the instrument is our soul, we opened up to the rest of the group and we all put ourselves in each other's shoes.

Can you talk to us about the results?

I am very satisfied, like everyone else, with the song created, happy and proud of the group, of what we have built together and of the good feeling we have among all the members. There are no barriers related to illness, there is music. Music has facilitated communication and provided us with a common language.



The quality has improved a lot, we have gone through difficulties, but we all wanted to improve as musicians and lyricists: some members of the group have signed up for music theory or intonation classes. This project is a tremendous source of motivation to stop consuming, for example, but also to become better musicians and to keep the group afloat. "We are in IME, we are going to create a song, we are going to do a concert, we have taken all this very seriously," they say. We have discovered together how far music can go and we have found a common goal.

What problems have been overcome? How have they been solved?

Problems, we have already talked about the comings and goings and how some moods have been difficult to manage. Another problem has been the lack of musical training; it has been a challenge to get something professional where there was no training, but there is a lot of motivation: "It's the best thing that's happened in my life in a long time," says a member of the group. Another difficulty has been memory, from one week to the next we forgot what we had played the week before. We had to record what we were playing with our mobile phones. We would listen to the previous week's song on the microphone with our mobile and then move on.

What has turned out well? What can we learn from this experience?

The positive aspects outweigh the difficulties. It's very rewarding, it's been a challenge, but it's been worth it. On a musical level it is very enriching to see how we all improve and move forward together. On a personal level, to see how music has managed to make people who had no enthusiasm for anything develop such a deep sense of belonging and make such an effort... In addition, music has motivated all of us to improve. As a result of this project, one of the musicians is collaborating in the publication of a local music magazine, others

have a more active life, more social networks in the community environment, I myself am training in percussion which was not one of my skills initially... We have learned to work in a group. It seems easy but making everything participatory requires effort from everyone: from the artistic director who gives up directing and from the members of the group who take responsibility for the decisions that are made. Everything was taken seriously, there was no fear of saying anything. Even from the most difficult situations positive things have come out. We have learned to make music regardless of everything else, of how we and our colleagues are doing. Yes, sometimes it was disastrous, but we kept going, nothing happened, there was always a reason to keep going and then, from time to time, the magic came out.

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