

Interview Transcript – Anna B

Interviewer: Christian Ferlaino

Date: 10 December 2023, Glasgow

CF: The first question is, what kind of music do you like? Is there any particular genre, any particular type of music, or...? What do you usually listen to?

AB: I listen to Italian music from the 1970s and electronic music. Those are my main genres. Then a little bit of everything, techno, electronic... techno and then Italian music and also some Motown. Those are my favourite genres.

CF: Italian music like?

AB: Like Battisti, Dalla. Battisti and Dalla mainly, I would say.

CF: Dalla from the 1970s, I would say, given the way you put it.... What about electronic music instead?

AB: I listen to songs and not artists, so I don't know the names. I kind of go by ear.

CF: Like what? Can you pin down a genre?

AB: Kind of like... I should get my Spotify, so let's ... let's make it easier.

CF: I mean, it's house music or electronic music?

AB: No, a little bit trance, a little bit ... [SHE SEARCHES ON HER PHONE] That is not the right playlist....

CF: Like Squarepusher?

AB: No, more... I don't know if I can find it the name of the artist I listen to the most. A little bit Afrobeat, also a little bit minimal, techno, like that.

CF: What do you like in this music that you listen to? Is there a common thread that links Dalla from the 70s with Afrobeat, techno? Or are there different things in each...

AB: In my opinion there is a common thread. For me, music is kind of ... I use it as an emotion regulator, almost. When I listen to music it's almost... a bit mono.... I don't know how to explain it. The way I listen to music is almost obsessive. Because I don't listen to a playlist with many different things, or all my favourite songs at the same time. It's very specific to how I feel at that moment. And so sometimes I feel like listening to Dalla, and sometimes.... It's almost like a physical need. And then there are also different things, I like the poetry of the lyrics in songs. Whereas in electronic music it's more the physicality, just the vibrations, the beat, that makes me feel safe. It's a bit of an anchor for me.

CF: Do you look for music that reflects the state of mind you're in, or do you look for music that pulls you out of a state of mind?

AB: No, [music] that reflects that.

CF: Okay, so it's a way of feeling surrounded by a very emotional response. Instead, is the physicality related to the impact of the sound or to particular qualities of the sounds? I mean,

is it a matter of volume with electronic music or the fact that it uses sounds that are very concrete or that have very concrete frequencies?

AB: Yes, I think it's both. Both the physical vibration, which is so strong that you feel it, but also the qualities and textures of the sounds. And then maybe also the simplicity, when maybe the melody is not the driving element of the song, but it's more the percussion. In my opinion it's easier for my mind, which is more attracted to.... it's almost the simplicity of the percussion that attracts me to the music. It's like there are less elements to pay attention to, so it calms me down probably.

CF: An element that focuses you?

AB: Yes.

CF: And your response to more rhythmic music is that you dance or move or is it just an inner movement?

AB: That depends, both. Sometimes to write or to draw or to do what I have to do, when I have a creative moment, music focuses me and so it helps that moment. So I don't dance in those moments. But if it's not in that situation yes, certainly there is a lot of movement and dancing. And yes, I do dance.

CF: Did you study music as a child?

AB: I studied piano for two or three years, when I was like five to eight years old. However... I can read music, but I can't play anything on the piano... I mean, songs. I didn't learn music theory and also I didn't have a particularly inspiring or interested teacher.

CF: What do you mean?

AB: I didn't realize much at the time.... I mean, I was learning what she told me to learn. But, from what my parents say, she didn't make me do much. I would stay on a little song for months and there wasn't much progress. My parents are very into classical music, though, so I kind of grew up with that music.

CF: Do you remember what it was like to go to this teacher? What were the lessons like? Do you remember? Even if just if it is a positive or negative memory?

AB: I liked playing, but it [the lessons] didn't have a big impact. I was also enough... Maybe just because ... in hindsight ... it wasn't actually very stimulating. It was kind of a neutral thing. I trusted her a lot, therefore I would never question what she would give me to do. But I didn't want to do those things, so I was kind of a.... I was six years old anyway, so...

CF: And do you remember why you stopped then?

AB: Yes, because I felt some pressure from my parents, that I should continue. So I stopped.

CF: Is there a memory... Let's say ... either the first memory that has to do with music or an event that is related to music or the first time you remember noticing the existence of music or otherwise something significant?

AB: Well, probably always in those years we used to go.... My parents have friends who are musicians and who organize a classical music festival that still goes on to this day in Asiago,

which is called the Asiago Festival. And so I was... I don't know... five or six years old. I used to sit for hours listening to these concerts. Also contemporary music, maybe string quartets, but contemporary music like that. I have so many memories related to that, because they were endless in my eyes.

CF: Aren't they all positive memories?

AB: No, not all positive, but I was surrounded by people who appreciated [the music] a lot. So I was also trying to appreciate it and I found things to appreciate. But then I had... It was kind of against my nature to sit for two hours, so that prevented me from appreciating it more. And then, I remember in middle school, I wrote a song with a friend of mine that we had the whole school sing at the end-of-the-year concert. She had created the melody, I had written the lyrics, however, it was still quite a collaboration. And we were... Neither of us had any musical training but we were both quite creative, lively and not afraid to make a... We really had a big desire to create, so we wrote a song.

CF: Did the whole school sing it?

AB: Yes. I still know it. I have to say it wasn't too bad. We were twelve years old probably. As much as it came out of nowhere, I must say it wasn't terrible.

CF: And the school... how did the classmates receive it?

AB: Ah, great fans, all of them.

CF: And then you didn't make music anymore?

AB: No, still when I was in middle school, we could choose an instrument to play. And I was always very interested in music. But I didn't have.... Maybe I didn't even have the patience, really, to learn an instrument. I had the idea to start playing guitar, and my dad, who loves music and also puts some pressure in general, immediately bought me a guitar. And that put so much apprehension in me that I stopped right away. I didn't continue. As much as he was trying to be supportive at his best ... But, I didn't even know how to hold it and so I was already feeling too much ... yeah ... Then I wasn't going to class and I probably didn't have the patience to sit down and learn it by myself at that time. And since then I haven't...

CF: Until recently that you went to Australia, right?

AB: Yes. I have a small keyboard that I have had with me for a few years which I don't know... I mean, I know two or three chords. We have instruments in the house, so sometimes, I would strum but just... without learning. Just listening only to the sounds produced by the instrument. And always by myself, not in an improvisational context or with other people. Instead, last summer I was kind of in the same situation where... I was in a house where there were a lot of instruments all over the place. There were also more percussions, which is maybe what attracted me a lot. And then there was just a sense of freedom and a sense of play in making music. It was a group of people who all felt that way and so it was very... playing together was a game. There was a lot more going on and there was no pressure. And everyone felt

motivated to play a lot more. I felt that I had [developed] a slightly different musicality only after doing it for a few weeks.

CF: Did you feel changes in your musicality compared to when you had started?

AB: Yes.

CF: So, did you feel encouraged by the absence of social pressure, let's say? From the absence of pressure in the sense, at least if I'm reading it right, the fact that you don't have to demonstrate an achievement or respond to specific expectations? Or is it more the pressure of being pushed by others?

AB: In my opinion it was that, but also I didn't have the awareness that I was capable of having that kind of musicality in me. I didn't know that it could be so pleasant... just that music was so beautiful to listen to and to play. I didn't know that it was in us. Instead, it was already in us and we are not particularly... We are not exceptional cases, I don't think. It was that plus the surprise... plus the fact that it was an environment that really helped this discovery. The part that surprised me the most was just discovering that it was possible to play like that.

CF: What about your experience with the workshop instead? How was it like?

AB: It's very similar actually. But ... I too felt a lot the playing (as in game) and this sense of exploring sounds. And also ... there was more of an element of listening to others, almost a coming together of each individual person. And then it was a little more aware that everybody was exploring something new; that there wasn't really a starting point, a common inspiration, but everybody had their own path that then intersected with the others.

CF: Looking for mediations with each other's sounds?

AB: Yes.

CF: And the relationship with Raymond's instrument, how did you experience it? From the outside it looked like you appreciated it.

AB: I enjoyed it very much, yes! I had no expectations really, though.... Fun and also... I had a lot of respect for that instrument. I was almost getting to know it more than playing it. It was like the sound was coming from the instrument as much as from me.

CF: Do you think that not knowing the instrument made it a little easier for you to explore its possibilities?

AB: Yes, definitely.

CF: And do you think you would have had the same exploratory attitude if you had a slightly more traditional percussion instrument?

AB: No, I don't think so because I would have had maybe some subconscious references. And also... that particular instrument had so many elements to discover that probably.... There were lots of obvious elements to discover... So it was particularly an exploration.

CF: Are there any non-musical sounds that you particularly like or feel particularly attached to for whatever reason? A sound that you say, "Oh, this is really cool!" Or, I don't know, you hear a sound and it takes you somewhere else.

AB: Eh, maybe people's voices. The human voice. Just from the point of view of sound, isolated from the person. I notice that I always listen to that. Especially when... I have a friend in particular who does a lot of noises. It's just part of her way of expressing concepts. And since then I listen a lot more when people make random noises in the middle of their sentences. I think that is a sound that really interests me. I always notice that it really interests me.

CF: What's interesting about it?

AB: Maybe there's an element of ... just random. The fact that it's a total improvisation with a random sound. Because often it's not a repetition of a sound that has a meaning attached to that particular noise, but it's kind of random. But also the fact that it is understood by the interlocutor shows that there is actually meaning. So it's a very... almost a primitive expression of the language. I think it's the melody of these noises more than any other element that interests me.

CF: What about the sound of machines, objects, things like that? Do you ever find yourself making sounds randomly? Like banging on the table while making things, or while you're cooking, if you like to bang the spoon to hear what it sounds like? Things like that?

AB: Maybe walking on a floor. The rumble of footsteps. Even on the street actually, I often listen to the sound of footsteps.