

Interview Transcript – Cassandra

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English Translation

CF: The questions are all about your musical history, your relationship with music. So a routine first question is: what kind of music do you like and what kind of music do you listen to?

C: Literally everything. And I'm not just saying that. Because, maybe, I start listening to, I don't know, stupidly, a tarantella, two seconds later I'm listening to heavy metal. So even as languages, I'm not fossilised on Italian or English, but I also like to listen to foreign music, whether it's Japanese, whether it's Korean. To say, the ones that are most hip, but also.... I listen to a lot of bands from Mongolia, Indian in general, that area there, also African. I literally listen to everything.

CF: When you say Mongolian, when you say Korean, more popular stuff, do you mean K-pop?

C: Yes, K-pop mostly, but also rap, because I listen to quite a bit of rap as well. Also it's fun for me to hear how different countries, different nations, sing Italian arias, so mostly how the sounds change in relation to pronunciation.

CF: Instead the stuff from Mongolia, India, is it more classical Indian music, traditional stuff?

C: Not only. Mostly I listen to a band... as far as Mongolia is concerned, now I don't want to get the nationality wrong, I hope not... a metal band called The HU, which combines traditional instruments from their culture along with metal. I like this mix, so I listen a lot.

CF: In your opinion, is there a common thread linking these different musical interests, or do you look for something different in each music?

C: There could potentially be a common thread, because I find myself very often listening to ethnic bands. I call them ethnic bands, I don't know if that's right. For example, Norway? I'm not sure. Anyway, they also did some soundtracks for Vikings, Wardruna, where they use a lot of vocalisations, they take texts, maybe stories of old myths, old legends. They are a mix between contemporary music, so sounds maybe a little bit more rocky, and ancient instruments like a lyre or those... as an ignorant person... those weird little guitars from their areas.

CF: And this common thread that you potentially recognise, what might that be?

C: The more particular sounds that you don't hear in the usual pop music, like K-Pop, which are nice, but after a while they all sound too much the same and I get bored.

CF: So an element of variety? Of surprise? How would you define it?

C: Yes, a surprise. Something to discover different instruments too... although I don't understand anything about them... but different sounds, different sonorities. Or even just rhythms that aren't the classic ones you hear in songs on the radio.

CF: In what situations do you listen to music?

C: Almost always actually, because when I'm on the bus I listen to music, when I'm walking on the bridge [the campus] at the university I listen to music, when I'm waiting for someone I listen to music, when I'm doing the housework I listen to music. Even when I'm studying, sometimes to stay a little more focused, to not fall asleep I try to help myself by listening to music.

CF: What kind of use do you make of music, how would you define it? In this case you said that you use music to keep yourself awake, so to focus. In this sense I mean "use"

C: In those cases, I go for music... Either ambient music - when I'm studying for example, so quieter sounds that have elements that make me focus, so maybe the sound of a forest for example, and there's that little chirp every now and then that keeps me vigilant - or maybe if I'm doing certain studies and I just need a background, I'll go and listen to classical music, for example.

CF: Are there other situations, other types of use you make of music?

C: Yes, also as a pastime, just for the sake of listening to something, because I like to stay active in terms of sound: if there is too much silence I get restless or bored.

CF: Do you use music as an emotional regulator?

C: Yes, also. Especially when I'm very nervous or angry, I try to calm myself down through music. If I need the energy to go and do a certain thing, maybe [I feel] a little bit of fear, if I need courage, I try to use certain songs that inspire me to go ahead and overcome the obstacle. Whether it's, stupidly, for an exam or whatever.

CF: So something that takes you out of an emotional state you're already in?

C: Yes, but also within an emotional state.

CF: You mean something that goes along with it?

C: Yes, also. Especially as I study theatre, music is fundamental, because if I have to study a certain piece, whether it's a monologue, whether it's a dialogue. In order to understand 100 per cent the emotional state of a character, I also use certain soundtracks, certain music, which help me to see all the nuances I need.

CF: Have you ever done music, studied an instrument, sung, taken lessons?

C: So, whatever... Like everybody in middle school, I studied the flute, the recorder, I don't want to get it wrong. But I remember little and nothing. I tried strumming piano, thanks also to my sister who is self-taught. She also took lessons, and tried to teach me the guitar, both classical and acoustic, and the piano. But I feel awkward, so I can't. I freeze. I also sing. I firmly believe that I can't sing. I sing in extremely private situations, very often when I am alone at home. Mostly, I try rap, for my breath, to keep my breath in shape I use rap.

CF: You've never taken lessons with a teacher?

C: I did two lessons in theatre this year, because we had a singing teacher with us, but in just two lessons we did very little. The only thing I've noticed is that I have breath [stamina], the only thing.

CF: You said two things I'd like you to elaborate on: one is about you feeling awkward. Was that about singing or playing?

C: A little bit of both.

CF: In what way? What's your feeling?

C: I don't feel up to playing instruments, let's put it that way.

CF: What do you mean by feeling up to it? Do you not live up to some expectations?

C: It's more of a mental thing. Because I've always dealt with musicians, who went to conservatoire, or at least people who know about music and play one or more instruments. When I try, I feel intimidated. As a result, I have difficulty understanding even the stupidest thing in the world because I get performance anxiety. As a result, I feel extremely awkward and can't stay focused on what I have to do.

CF: And is this performance anxiety you feel due to social pressure or to expectations you have concerning what you should achieve?

C: A mix of both, plus maybe social pressure.

CF: How would you define social pressure? Someone who puts social pressure on you or society that expects music being something precise?

C: The latter, the latter, exactly. Again for the reason I had to deal with a lot of people going to the conservatory. So if you were talking about music you also had to be careful with the words. To say the right thing, not trying to express yourself casually, trying to make yourself understood by getting terminology wrong. Consequently, I was left with this thing of: "You're ignorant, it's not for you, forget it."

CF: And the other thing was that you're firmly convinced you can't sing?

C: Yes, I'm firmly convinced I can't sing at all.

CF: Where do you think this believe comes from?

C: I don't know, but I don't... how can I put it? Always a bit about the social anxiety thing, let's put it that way. Anxiety anyway of not feeling up to... I don't think I have a particularly graceful or decent voice to be able to sing, let's put it that way. So I always go for the spoken word, rap. It's less melodic, I don't know if that's the right term. I'm ashamed and I'm afraid to take excessively high notes, for fear of getting it wrong. Or anyway I feel that I'm going out of tune, even though I don't understand anything about it, so it can be I get it in tune. As a result, my voice chokes and I start lip-syncing. I fall silent.

CF: In situations where you have to sing in front of people, because when you are alone...

C: Yes. Alone, I enjoy doing also variations. Maybe I start with a song that's extremely low and then get to a song that has very high, high notes. For example, I don't know... even, stupidly,

Disney songs. There are some princess songs that have very shrill voices let's say, and I try to see if I can get to that pitch.

CF: When you're alone.

C: When I'm sure I'm alone.

CF: Do you take it as vocal training or as actual singing?

C: In what sense?

CF: This thing of wanting to reach the heights of Disney princesses.

C: Whatever, that's to say the simplest thing. Even listening to Arisa's songs. Even, stupidly, once I tried to do the magic flute... the witch. I said, "who knows maybe..." I couldn't do it of course. Both to find out how far my voice can go, because I still haven't understood how far I can go, either down or up. And also to play a bit. So it has a dual function.

CF: And instead this experience with your sister, trying to teach you a little piano, a little guitar, how do you remember that?

CF: I'm more relaxed, she's my younger sister, so.... Sometimes she tries again because she wants to teach me. But then, it's me who feels awkward, I just leave. I feel less anxious with her, also because we put it as a game. So maybe she tries to teach me even, stupidly, an arpeggio, putting it as a challenge. Or to show me if my hand is wide enough like hers, or trained enough to be able to do a certain thing, especially with the guitar. But it's always a few moments. At most it must have been an hour, not more.

CF: Can you remember the most remote memory you have of music? The first time you thought or realised music existed, or a really primitive experience that contained music and that you remember? Your first memory of music or containing music.

C: Yes, we always listened to a lot of international music at home as a child. If I have to think of a very early one, Adriano Celentano comes to mind, who we listened to quite often.

CF: At home?

C: At home.

CF: With your folks?

C: Yes, but besides that also, stupidly, when... like in the movies... when you're preparing the Christmas tree, maybe as a background to create an atmosphere, you put the CD of Christmas music on. Or... well... if I really have to think of a very early memory... I was watching The Prince of Egypt. I was little, maybe first year of kindergarten or something. I was strongly touched by the opening song.

CF: That you heard at home?

C: Yes, I heard it at home, I was watching [the movie].

CF: How do you remember that?

C: It had affected me in a positive and negative way at the same time. A strange mix because I was strongly fascinated by that soundtrack. So from the way... if I remember correctly, Zimmer had composed it, I don't want to say something stupid... he had managed to mix the sounds of

the... I don't even know how to explain it. Because seen through the eyes of a child, the fact that certain sounds corresponded to certain actions impressed me a lot. Plus the voice of the singer, whose name I can't remember, had me a bit bewitched. And the fact that I was able to understand the Italian lyrics, the Italian part of the lyrics, where the mother is abandoning Moses in the waters... there I remember that I burst into tears and I started to have shivers of admiration for the performance in general. So both for the music, the choir and the singer. But at the same time I felt bad about what was happening. Because it was like I was there, I don't know if I can make myself understood.

CF: Did you strongly identify with the situation?

C: Yes, but not on the mum's side, because I was small. But on the side of the child who was being abandoned.

CF: A strong memory.

C: Yes. [LAUGHS]

CF: What about the others? The fact that you listen to Celentano, you listen to Christmas music, are they always related to your family? Are they good memories?

C: Yes, this one is also a beautiful memory... this one of the Prince of Egypt, as disconcerting as it may seem. It's a strong memory, but when I think about it, I think back on it with love. Because it was one of my first approaches to cinema. I was really small. One of my first approaches to cinema that I remember. Concerning the music, even in the slightly sadder memories, there is always that note of melancholy and pleasant feeling. Whether it's Celentano, whether it's, stupidly, Christmas music, or even Mozart, because at home we have Mozart's CDs, classical music in general. Also Pink Floyd, or Dalla. A bit of everything. So I've always been, even Tarantelle. I've always been surrounded by sounds. And when I think of music, the first place that comes to mind is always home. Because even when we had to go on trips, we always brought CDs or cassettes to listen to in the car.

CF: Are there any sounds you particularly like, or objects to which you are particularly attached? Or that have a sound that evokes particular memories, emotions for you?

C: I've never thought about that, honestly. So. I've noticed, over time, that a lot of songs I like have cries. Just vocal sounds, like Michael Jackson, those...[SINGS] Those silly things. Very often I like a song... even if it sucks... but I like it or I like to listen to it because it has these cries. Or some...I have to think about it.

CF: So, you're attracted by...it's just in the singing, though you say, just in the music... the fact that you're interested in these moments, these non-textual vocalisations...

C: No, actually even in theatre. Surely [you know] Living Theater. We saw some stuff in class and since I was distracted... I was minding my own damn business.... and I'll be honest, when the performance we saw on video started, if I remember correctly, it was... I always get the name wrong. Whatever, anyway. They had all started making vocal sounds, using just the voice, and I noticed it, by accident. The video was very old, you couldn't really see the mouths moving

from a distance. And they had managed perfectly to reproduce the bomb alarm, the one announcing the bombs. From there I was glued to the screen the whole time. Another thing, also the rhythmicity. So percussion, a lot. In fact I wanted to study drums, I'll be honest. But they didn't teach it in my area when I was little, I gave up on it. This. Or the sounds of lyre. Instruments that trace back to that sphere of shamans, mystical places, there's always that little detail that makes me say: "This song yes, because maybe it reminds me of something else". Even in electronic music like house music and things like that.

CF: What about non-musical sounds, sounds of everyday life? Engines, home items?

C: More than motors, living in the country, maybe the sea. So connected to the sea because I have it in front of my home, or the sounds of water in general.

CF: And what makes you curious about these sounds made with the voice you mentioned earlier?

C: That you can do so much, imitate so many things with just your vocal cords. So the fact that you can play with your voice to create something else that maybe isn't... For example, for a while... I tried but couldn't... beatboxing. Being able to create music that doesn't even sound like it's made by a voice, it sounds like digital sounds by simply using the vocal cords and the mouth according to how the tongue or the lips are placed. This experimentation attracts me, it sounds silly.

CF: Are you attracted by the technical possibility of being able to do it as a kind of empowerment, as your own capacity to be able to do it, or are you attracted by the expressive potential of non-textual, non-verbal sounds?

C: Both, because on the one hand I would love to be able to do those things too. Whether it's beatboxing, whether it's imitating the sounds of bomb sirens or any other kind of sound. And on the other I have a deep admiration for those who can do it. So they're... like for example ethnic music, where there's just the voice and they do simple vocals, I'm entranced for hours. I can listen to them on repeat for hours and I don't get tired.

CF: So I understand that, it's more the technical part that intrigues you, the fact that you'd like to master those techniques...

C: Yes, probably so. I think it's unconsciously trying to pick up even the slightest technicality so I can try to do it myself, it may be. I've never really given it much thought.

CF: But what is it about the sounds of water that you...?

C: First of all, water relaxes me so much. Then how can you also play with water, depending on...? For example, if there is a small stream, the sea, the sea when it is calm, when there is high tide, when there is low tide, the different intensities a wave can have depending on where it breaks. If there is high tide, rough sea, and it breaks on the rocks, it makes a certain sound, which can also sound like thunder. If, on the other hand, there is low tide, the sea is calm, it breaks on the same rock, it is like when you make the water move in a half-empty plastic bottle. I enjoy hearing how even water... even a bit like voice... you can play with it to create different sounds or at any rate, different listening experiences using the same thing. These are

things I do instinctively. Maybe if I have a half-empty bottle of water and I'm lost in thoughts, the first thing I do is fiddle with it to hear how the water bangs against the walls of the bottle. But I've never asked myself so much about it.

CF: The last question. You can really say anything, don't feel you have to give the right answer, don't think you can offend me in any way. I want to ask you about your experience with the workshop. What do you think, what's happening, what do you think is happening in you and with others, I mean. What do you think about this thing we are doing?

C: Start from a premise: I'm playing and I don't feel inept. That already means a lot. Many instruments I had never seen. I had never heard of them. Some I had, maybe from my mum's stories, which were stories she had heard from her grandparents, etc. etc. Living in the country, Mum would tell me about people playing leaves. These were things I also saw very often in films, especially neo-realist films. It happened that if the film was set in the countryside, there would be someone who would literally play whatever. Many of them, as I said, I had never seen before and I was very curious especially about the one there with the walnut that makes, like, a cricket noise, fantastic! I used it at home when I brought it, I went to bother my cat and also my sister. It's a very stimulating experience, as far as I'm concerned, because literally... a bit like the talk I was giving about creating sounds or something with a half-empty water bottle... to be able to create a sound, even to imitate a sound that I can hear from the balcony of my house in the summer, whether it be the cry of a cicada or a chirp, with very 'stupid' instruments... readily available, whether it be a leaf, a balloon, a piece of cane rather than a tin of beans...It literally opened up a world to me because I didn't think, in the first place, that I could do it myself, I'll be honest.[...] Most likely when the workshop will end... apart from missing it... I'm not saying this as a flattery...it's a different way of living the university too. It's not just lecture: learn, learn, learn, do the project, do the paper, do the essay, do the thesis. It is also a different way of approaching music. It's a part of music I've never studied. Even in anthropology...When I did cultural anthropology we never talked about things like that, sociology never talked about things like that. But it was always something I was curious about. I couldn't find any material of course, so I would probably go and do more research, like I did when I did my dissertation for the three-year course and I looked up the work that Scaldaferri had done. A world opened up for me. So I was glad that I managed to find out about it in time.