

## **Musical Archeology**

by Vanesa Cortés Rodríguez

When you ask a question about yourself, the process of answering is similar to pulling on a thread: you pick it up until the answer appears tied at the final end. What are the things that make us the way we are? More specifically, why do we like the music we like?

If I thought in a scientific way, the "things" that make you a special and unique being include your culture, childhood traumas, the people around you, and the genes you have inside. For me, music is a big influence: it affects my personality, way of thinking, feeling, dressing, expression, and dance.

This carries me back to the first time I pulled on the thread: when somebody asks me what kind of music I like, I never know what to answer. I say... a little bit of everything, right? This kind of question makes me feel lazy to answer. It is obvious that I cannot like everything, since there are infinite things I do not know. I do not like many things I already know. It is necessary to set limits.

I wanted to write a super wise and serious text about music made by women -or by bands where there are women- but this is not my strong point. I decided to talk about the bands that have influenced me somehow - both girl and boy bands.

I kept pulling on the thread. The story starts with me around 12 years old, sitting in front of the TV and being a hysterical Spice Girls fan dying to have Mel B's afro hair. Those five canned girls were able to move so many emotions in me with their damn sticky songs! I am sure people from my generation are ashamed of admitting how much they liked them, but there is nothing bad in

## dig me out

it; it is just another stage - a bad and vulnerable one, perhaps. Strictly speaking, they did not make their own music. All of them, however, had the message of strong girls who rock the world - breaking guys' hearts and being super bad. Okay, now comes all the criticisms about their looks, that they are not good 21st century women role models, and so on. Yes, the Minister of Health and Public Works should forbid them but they were the first women - at least the first I can remember - who influenced my mind in this way.

Some years later, despite the incessant pestering of my older sister forcing me to stand the Brit-pop glories, I became a fan of the cheesiest band in the world: The Corrs. Perhaps it was an inner riot, a fall of musical taste. They are not the paradigmatic girl band, but well, they were almost all girls, besides sisters. What can I say, at least they composed their own music. I felt great listening to them and liked them so excessively that I dyed my hair black to be as languid as they were.

Maybe I should call this piece "how-strongly-I-am-influenced-by-the-aesthetics-of-bands-where-there-are-girls", right? Because, regarding content, proper content, The Corrs did not have much. I know I have a strange filter, but due to reasons I still do not understand, I am a visually impressionable person.

There was a turning point inside me. Now that I have grown up, I see it clearly: from being an influenced teenager that dances to Wannabe, to becoming an adolescent who thinks that no one can influence her. It is a step in self-development.

I started to be interested in musical archeology. With the recent-born Napster and CD recorders, the world turned to be more polite and more illegal. I spent evenings listening to The Doors whilst doing my homework, scared because of the dark melodies and lyrics and shivering because they were so intense. I danced in front of

## dig me out

the mirror listening to ABBA's greatest hits: those disco songs, those voices, that hairstyle! I also thought that Freddy Mercury's "eses" were the best-pronounced consonant in Rock history. I guess it was because of his teeth, but I never heard anyone who pronounced them as good as he did. These inspiring figures were not all girls, I know, but it is important to mention them.

So - apart from being visually impressionable - I also look like a superficial chick with all those comments about teeth, hairstyles and so on. In my defense, just in case I should defend myself against something, music is an art because of what it makes you feel - you cannot describe that in words. Equally as important as the melody and lyrics is how an artist dances, what they wear, or what they say in interviews. You cannot separate a part from the whole!

During my transition from high school to university, I mixed styles: Ladytron, Mónica Naranjo, Chicks On Speed and Peaches with the TV show Popstars' albums. What do all these people have in common? Well, nothing actually. I like Ladytron, for example, because they are electronic and elegant; they use reverberating voices and they are dull. I like just a few Mónica Naranjo's songs, but the ones I like, I like them a lot; they are hymns! That shocking voice... Chicks On Speed and Peaches were born with the style of so-called Electroclash, along with Miss Kittin and other male members. I like their naturalness, freshness, spontaneity and that they keep everything above board: saying things off the top of their heads, raw and without processing. They focus on their aesthetics and, of course, electronic music is cool!

Jumping from band to band, I came across the band that was - and it still is - one of my favourites: Le Tigre. I discovered them on a compilation of cool hits from an undefined year and instantly fell in love. I learned all their albums by heart and went

## dig me out

literally mad. Practicing musical archeology I found their roots in the Riot Grrrl movement and fell in love with Kathleen Hanna, Bikini Kill and that entire constellation. I began to be interested in feminism. At that time I had no idea what feminism meant. As a bookworm, I researched the evolution of feminist theories, queer theory, and the DIY and punk attitude in all sources that digital life could give me. No matter how hard I tried, I could not understand the vast majority of concepts, because they were too weighty. My knowledge was full of black holes. (If you really want people to understand what you are saying, and to make sure knowledge is not lost, use an easier language. I am sorry for the academic sphere - maybe the point is that they do not want to be understood).

Music is also a way of discovering role models and of influencing behaviour. This is a great power. It is also scary - because we do not notice when it happen to us.

Like a hurricane Madonna appeared in my life - not that chick from the 80s with a fake or drawn beauty spot, I knew about her from my childhood. I never felt that passionate about her before. She might be good and bad at the same time, but no one can deny that she is an icon. Although she is not a great singer, she is the show. She has the best people around her and the best want to be with her; she is ambitious to the extreme. I like her because she catches my eye and makes me feel good. We can also include Kylie Minogue -who is the second best after Madonna- in this category, and throw away Britney Spears (because she does not deserve to be here). Talking about Madonna reaches the top of my favourites.

Finally, I come to the end of the thread.

Writing this down is an excuse to say something more important: I feel I am made of two parts, sometimes more. In my life, contraries live together - science and art, superficial and wise,

## dig me out

serious and casual. The music I like is a reflection of this. I can like the most committed songs and the most ludicrous; the way someone dresses or how they pronounce "eses"; the silliest details and the most crucial ones. All of them are valid. Taste is irrational and the most important thing is if it makes you happy.