

Femme Genial / Femme Musical

Laura Viñuela interviews some members of the bands Chiquita and Chatarra, Nosoträsh and Pauline en la Playa

In 2001 I presented my MA Thesis about Spanish female pop and rock bands in the 1990s. I was looking for bands which had edited at least one album and which followed the Beatles' model, that is, a self-contained group of musicians who composed and played their own songs. With these criteria I found five bands: Bestias, Pussycats, B-Violet, Nosoträsh and Undershakers and, luckily, the last two were from my hometown, Gijón. This allowed me to interview them and to establish a relationship that has lasted along all these years. Taking part in the project Dig me out has offered me the chance to go back to the topic of the situation of women in Spanish popular music almost a decade later and to discuss this issue with the musicians themselves. The three interviews that follow offer different points of view: Mar and Alicia Álvarez chat about their joint experience from their former all-female band Undershakers to their present project, Pauline en la playa; Cova de Silva offers the point of view of a consolidated band with a stable trajectory, Nosoträsh. Finally, Chiquita y Chatarra, Amelia and Patri, give the perspective of a band in its beginning which, sometimes, finds itself in similar situations to those lived before by others.

The interviews were done during June and July 2008 and are excerpts of longer conversations in which many issues related to the experience of being women musicians were debated. Anyone familiar with feminism in general and feminist

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musicology in particular will easily identify well known themes such as the work/music/life balance difficulties and the group-support needs that follow motherhood, the presence of a glass ceiling or the doubts about one's own abilities related to the subtle strategies adopted by the patriarchal system to undermine women's self-esteem. But, key among all this, is the issue of the construction of gender identities and the struggle between the strict criteria that the hegemonic discourse tries to enforce on women and their resistance to accommodate to them. Thus, the fact that the category "girl group" or "all-female band" is imposed from outside and not considered important or, at least, a main feature, by its members, is frequently highlighted in the interviews. However, the impossibility to ignore this reality is also evident and, as a consequence, women musicians must find strategies to deal with it. As Mar Álvarez puts it, they are forced to "play their game", but at the same time they refuse to follow the rules. There are, nevertheless, difficulties in this process of resisting a fixed gender identity. The straightforward positions for women musicians are either to accommodate to traditionally feminine values such as "sensitive", "naïve", "loving" or "delicate" or to be considered as leaders of some feminist cause, thus facing its negative consequences. The interviewees have rejected both options and have tried to follow a zigzag path, negotiating between asserting their position as women musicians against patriarchal stereotypes and avoiding the labelling of their actions as a political stance. It is also relevant to take into account that all-female bands confront patriarchy in the most direct way, because they undermine its most effective strategy to maintain the status quo: the promotion of rivalry among

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women, which prevents them from taking advantage of the power of group action. Any woman doing an activity in a visible place of the public realm, generating her own discourse and entering traditionally masculine fields such as technology and artistic creation is subversive and dangerous; but she is the most dangerous if this is done by a group of women who establish between themselves a professional relationship and a friendship, since they might act as models for other women.

Women musicians acknowledge the existence of gender differences and develop strategies to overcome the possible barriers and to resist the identity constraints put onto them. These strategies often relate to the postmodern sense of parody as a political weapon, treating their situation with irony and, sometimes, also with rage, and this can be heard in their words as well as in their music. In these interviews they talk about the struggle against patriarchy and its gender categorizations, although this is not always formulated as a clear feminist and political position. They are fighting for their freedom to do what they want with their lives and their music and for their right to be listened to with the same respect and interest as male musicians are. Reading the interviews as a whole gives an interesting insight to women's experiences in popular music.

Jumps Without A Net

Laura Viñuela interviews Mar and Alicia Álvarez from Undershakers and Pauline en la playa

Laura Viñuela: What did it mean for Undershakers being an all-female band?

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Alicia Álvarez: The whole development of Undershakers was very closely related to the fact that we were all women, but it was something external to the band, due to how it was perceived from the outside. I mean, everybody thought of it as an all-female band except us, who just saw it as a band. We understood it as a joint experience as friends, as something we did because we enjoyed it. I guess there are cases in which people start as "let's create an all-female band and do this kind of stuff", but Undershakers ended up being what it was due to its own development, it wasn't planned from the beginning. In the end we had a quite aggressive attitude on stage that I do think responds directly to the fact that we were women and people were not taking us seriously, so we had to show a strong and hard attitude.

Mar Álvarez: And that's why we started rehearsing a lot and caring a lot about how we sounded and about playing well and we did many hours of rehearsing. More than I think we would have done of in other circumstances. The good thing is that we had a great sound. We did wonderful live performances because when we rehearsed we took it totally seriously. We had the concept of a professional band, we were being paid and we had to do it well.

Alicia: Because we weren't conscious of the fact that we were women until idiots started coming up and saying nonsense to us. Inside the band it was not an important thing. Now, doing retrospective analysis, you do notice, but during the development of the band we didn't even come to the point of "we have to look angry when we get to the venue so they take

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us seriously". We were surprised about critiques such as one in Mondosonoro, which called us "Venus", and we were amazed. Because after having rehearsed for so many hours, travelled to some lost place, carried up and down the damned amps and having almost electrocuted ourselves five thousand times in the shitty practice room, the last thing you expect as a musician is to be catalogued as "funny", "youthful" or "Venus". What you expect is an acknowledgement of your work.

Mar: What we really wanted was for people to say, "Wow, these girls really know how to play!" And that ended up being so important that we ended up playing their game. What you get from it is that you play better and, yes, you have to play well. But when you are twenty maybe playing well shouldn't be the main thing; you play in a band because you want to have fun. And when I look back or compare our experience to that of younger people with their own projects, I find that theirs is more relaxed, less serious, that they can fail... We were always on time, having slept well, sober, really centered in playing well. We took everything very seriously and now I think that maybe it would have been nicer to have a crazier attitude. But, on the other hand, maybe being so serious at that time led us to set up Pauline en la Playa and to pursue a professional musical career because Pauline began when we had songs that did not fit with Undershakers. Alicia and I were the composers and when we started listening to different music and doing different things, composing for Undershakers was almost an effort, something forced.

Alicia: The idea behind Pauline en la Playa was different, mostly because of the creative part, it responded to a need to do different things with bigger goals. We got in the

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Creative Music School in Madrid and we learned a lot, and when you learn new things you want to use them and pursue them further...

Mar: And we met lots of musicians who played instruments we had not come across until then. And we got nuts, in a good way, and we recorded an album in which we introduced all the arrangements we could think of... just to take them all out in the following one.

Laura: Which music inspires you to write songs?

Alicia: With Pauline it's mostly women musicians, I don't know why. But not all-female bands, some soloist musicians, singer songwriters..., like Joanna Nilson, Christine Herst, Suzanne Vega... because if you take a look, "all-female bands" usually do very concrete things, mostly punk.

Mar: Yes, if you take out the Breeders or Elastica or people who have managed to free themselves from that kind of thing. Here in Spain I think it's all very radical. You have either Nosoträsh, which play a very feminine pop in the sense that everything is linked to being women, the lyrics and so on, or Las Perras del Infierno, with that thing of being sexy and wearing miniskirts and a dog collar.

Alicia: Exactly. And Pauline makes feminine music because it is made by women, because it has evident references about women, but it is not thought for or directed to women. And it has never exploited the fact of being women.

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Mar: But it's true that, when you think about it, it has lots of hints. You speak in a certain way or have a certain way of telling things...

Alicia: But it's something we have never exploited. I guess it has a lot to do with how each person understand the whole issue. You either flag it up or take advantage of it or, since everybody perceives you as such, you grow comfortable in that role. I think we haven't done any of that, we have just made music.

Mar: And we are the first to be surprised when we read things about us because, at this point, we think we are in a position in which all this should be clear already, that it should be overcome. But nowadays the allusions are still...

Alicia: Yes, similar to those with Undershakers. For example, they try to link it to childhood, to something naive. Because you are a woman and talk about ordinary things, what you do is defined as homely which, in the end, is the women's place... And it's very curious because we took the name, Pauline en la Playa, from a film by Erich Rohmer, a man who has spent eighty years making films about domestic, homely, daily life, and when he, as a man, talks about that, they say "Rohmer's realistic cinema depicts the most personal and sincere reality", but then we do "children's stuff". Simplicity in a man is lack of adornment and in a woman it's candour. And they always want to take it to the naive and innocent side...

Mar: And no matter how many years go by, no matter how many albums you release, no matter what kind of creative turns you

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take... it doesn't matter at all. Some written account always ends up in your hand that makes you say, "I can't believe it! Again! It has happened again!"

Alicia: Furthermore, we have lots of songs that make reference to sex, explicit sex. For example, "Mi bañera" (My Bath-tub) is an open ode to masturbation, to sex with oneself. And "Circos de intimidad", (Circus of Intimacy) in our last album, talks about a sexual encounter. And it's very funny that this is never pointed out by the music press.

Laura: Did you perceive any differences in relation to being women between Pauline en la Playa and Undershakers?

Alicia: When you are no longer an all-female band, theoretically, things like those we faced with Undershakers, when everybody's position was very clear, should stop coming up. But with Pauline we've found many more subtle things that always take us to the same conclusion. For example, the timetable in a music festival or the way a concert review is written makes us wonder, "If I had a moustache and a dick, how would we be treated? In which place would I be playing? Would I play at 5 p.m. or maybe at 8 p.m.? Would I be on the cover?" Of course, there's always the possibility that I may think we are awesome but we actually are not worth a dime. But to give you just one example: we went to Benicassim and played at 5 p.m., the typical time for Spanish bands in this kind of festivals, in a tent where it was incredibly hot, at siesta time and when, obviously, people usually come to the venue much later... but we filled up the place! Well, the review in the festival's magazine the next day was totally absurd, again about "their delicate voices" and so on. Come

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on! We filled up the place and that is unique! How come you don't highlight that? I'm a journalist and I know the heading has to show the most relevant information. And what is relevant? That at 5 p.m. Alicia and Mar Álvarez filled up the place. Yes, sir, they have very delicate lyrics, but they filled up the dammed place! And so I ask myself, if Migala or Astrud or whoever filled up the place, what would be highlighted the next day? That they filled up the place or that their lyrics are very funny? And then you go on reading and see that it was written by a man and I wonder what would a woman had written. And that's another issue, there aren't many women in music journalism, most writers are men.

Mar: And men don't take women's things seriously and this happens in all areas. They don't give you credit. Sometimes you are talking about your thing and the gesture of the man next to you is so condescending... And you see it in all of them. You see it less as time goes by, however, because now there are more women playing in bands... and we have lived through that process. Slowly, women began to play in bands and we have seen how, at the beginning, there were no women doing things onstage whereas now there are some. It might be only one, but when we started there were none. And still, when we go to play with our band or with the guy who plays with us, they still address him. Even if the two of us are the band and we are going to play, they address him about the technical issues.

Alicia: And that's because music is a masculine and masculinized world, and women in this world have to adopt masculine roles in order to survive. And this is awful,

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because it doesn't give you space to act as you would in a normal situation.

Laura: What do you think about women's networks in music?

Mar: I think they don't exist. The only network we have is with the other all-female band in Gijón, Nosoträsh, with whom we have always got along very well, we are friends and we have helped and supported each other.

Alicia: Yes, but it is due to our friendship, not as a political stance. Actually, the ones who helped us an awful lot, were men. Dr. Explosión, Mocking Birds... the ones who provided practice room, amps, instruments, who came to see us play, who took us as the supporting band... were men.

Mar: Actually, what we found when we met other all-female bands was suspicion and competitiveness. Even ourselves, when we went to see them it was like "let's see who are these B-Violet. How well do they play? Well, I think our drummer is better". And we compared ourselves with them.

Laura: And do you think that there are two all-female bands in Gijón because the city was musically women-friendly?

Mar: I think we were quite equal in the environment of the bands. Gijón has always been an easygoing place, in which everyone has respected everyone, with different musical styles but where people have treated each other well.

Alicia: In this city there has been a network between all bands, with people supporting each other, an open network,

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and it has been very helpful. And today, still, if someone calls you because a band needs a guitar, there's always someone who will lend it to them. In this sense there is a network. But not a women's network, that doesn't exist.

Mar: What is happening now, with internet and myspace, is that, suddenly, women are flourishing, they have found a place to express themselves. And I love to see 17 or 18-year-old girls opening their myspace and making songs and uploading them and expressing themselves a lot. I'm very envious of that because when I was 17 we did not have that space. And from there, many contact us to tell us that they like us. But then, that doesn't go anywhere. I mean, you see women moving, but nothing generates from there.

Laura: And do you think the existence of women's networks in music would be good?

Alicia: I have doubts about that, precisely because, in the end, you still are an all-female band.

Mar: Yes, in the end it's a burden and you create a ghetto. The network might become an independent entity, doing its own things and gathering its own people and living on its own feedback and ending up out of the world.

Alicia: Yeah, because I don't think it would be like other women's networks that can help you entering the labour market, for example, and achieving, in the end, integration. I think that the burden of all-female bands, in this case, is that they are all-female bands. The problem is that they reach a point where they can't go any further because they

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are an all-female band. And there has to come a time in which a change must happen, when nobody considers weird or strange an all-female band, I mean, when only the music is judged. So I think that the only way to help integration is precisely to end the fact of being an all-female band. The thing is not to reassure the tough attitude we talked about before, of being hard and strong or having to impose yourself, because that is terrible. Each one should have the opportunity to develop herself in her own way and have the attitude she chooses to.

Mar: But of course, as long as there are still barriers and problems, a support network is good, because if you are facing problems you need to have a place to go for help and you need someone to help you. But it has to push you forward, not have you talking about how hard everything is and going through the problem over and over.

Alica: And then, you don't need to place yourself in a ghetto, because you already are in one, because you are a woman and you are in that "all-female bands" ghetto, whether you like it or not. Actually, I think that what could be very effective would be setting up secret networks, in the Masonic way, when they existed but nobody knew. Thus, you'd have the good part of the support and you'd avoid the ghetto part.

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Sailing Across Decades

Laura Viñuela interviews Cova de Silva - Nosoträsh

Laura: How was Nosoträsh born as an all-female band?

Cova de Silva: We started as most bands do: a group of friends get together to make music and, in this case, we were all girls. Montse and I had played before in other bands and we all lived in a music making environment, although our activities in this field were mostly support tasks, which is a very feminine role; things such as "I'll give you a lift" or "I'll help you move the amps", that is, "I'll make your life as an artist easier". But we didn't feel fulfilled with that and we wanted to experiment the nice and fun parts of making songs, of going onstage to play. And I think it was important that some of us had played in bands before to encourage us. So it was a group of friends living in a musical environment who decide to take action in a different way and to set up a band and enjoy ourselves. Then, once we started, there was also some kind of pride in being all women whom we still wanted to promote and so now, if we can work with a woman, we'd rather give her the opportunity instead of a man. Because we are under-represented, because we are used to a certain type of communication between us, because we think it'll be easier to work with her. And in any case, we always look for someone with whom we can connect well, who can

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understand us and not behave as a typical macho. We prefer sensitive and respectful people who can work as a team.

Laura: Which kind of perception do you think the audience has about the band?

Cova: When we started the band we distributed the instruments randomly among ourselves. We took decisions on the go and based them on what each of us felt like doing. This was very important, not only to do what each one was good at, but also what she wanted to do. We used to get together in a place in the city outskirts that we shared with other bands and the aim was to have lots of fun playing and trying to make songs. This was the spirit of the band. Our concerts, especially at the beginning, were quite punk in the sense that we wanted to make songs and play them as best as we could, and the sound and performance were very amateur. We said it was very "fresh" ... hah, hah,... and I think that the audience thought it was fun, both the songs and that boldness we had. Although we were also very criticized because of that, maybe because some expected us to play better or to give better shows. But in that sense we were always very sincere and we showed what we did and we were hired anyway, so I guess people liked it. And we always had a big public. Even in times of crisis for the musical industry, in comparison with other bands, we always had a lot of people coming to our concerts.

Laura: Do you think the musical scene in Gijón was women-friendly?

Cova: Yes, there was an important musical scene and the independent pop bands were, especially, women-friendly. For

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example, the band Penelope Trip was interested in having a female drummer, because that's what was done in England at that time and it was very cool. I volunteered, because I went to their concerts from the beginning and I liked what they did and that was important too, but they also were very clear in their preferring a woman at the drums. And even if it was only because of an artistic pose, they were already trying to adopt a different perspective to the common one in Spain at the time. So, in independent pop, we've always had open-minded male friends, colleagues and partners who saw women mostly on equal terms. And of course, the support of everybody's family was very important too. My parents had already seen me practicing masculine sports such as canoeing, where we had a very strong feminine section that won lots of medals and in which we were all very motivated and empowered. And my family was very used to us doing things out of the ordinary with a strong motivation which reinforced us and had positive consequences for our lives. I think all our families accepted the band. Now that I'm a mother I appreciate a lot the patience my parents had with my sister, my brother and me. I value that a lot, that they believed in our possibilities and gave us the opportunity to do different things that were not mainstream.

Laura: Talking about family issues, you've just had a daughter, how do you deal with the family-work-music balance?

Cova: It's complicated, but if your motivation to have kids with your partner is that you really want to live that experience and bring a child to the world and grow with her, then, although motherhood has hard moments, you deal with it much better. It's hard and you have to consider if you can

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still do everything or not and if maybe you have to change your goals. You might not be able to get involved in a thirty-show gig around Spain, as we did the last time we released an album. The goal now is to go on playing but rehearsing a lot for the few concerts we give, and then maybe play only five times along the year but make those five concerts something special. And that way you still do something you like, you enjoy it and you do it as best as you can. In my situation, the support to take care of my child, be it from my family or otherwise, it's very important. Sometimes it's difficult, not so much regarding the balance between places and timing as the feeling that your situation is not always understood. I mean, someone who is not in your situation will not understand your needs or the fact that you have to say no to some things. But I think the band is making an effort and things that may not be understood now will be in the future. And it's also important to take into account that for them it's also a change, because they were used to count on me in a different way and now they can't. One of them, Natalia, the singer, is now pregnant and she'll find herself in my same situation. But if you get along well with your partners in the band and there's respect and understanding, there shouldn't be any problems. Now we are three in the band and we are doing quite well, we are very used to be together and know our highlights and our weaknesses. So being able to put up wisely with our respective personalities, is very important.

Laura: Although there have been changes and you are now less people than when you started, your project goes on and it's the all-female band with the longest and steadiest career in our country.

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Cova: Yes, because in this band it has always been important to know exactly our goals, our amateur-pseudo professional way of working, which is doing things the best we can but taking into account our situation in a practical way: none of us is a professional musician and none of us makes her living from music. And when these elements are clear, it's much easier to understand the band. And those who don't get it, burned themselves up in the end, and those who do, go on. Our idea is to continue to be moved when we do a song and to enjoy ourselves when we play it live. That is crucial for us.

Laura: In which sense did you feel different treated because of being women musicians?

Cova: For instance, when we started playing and we had to do the sound checking before the show, we didn't know many things about the instruments themselves, about how to arrange the amplifier or how to tune the drums, and those are things you learn along as you play. That lack of self-assurance happened not because we were women, but because we were not professional musicians, but it's true that it could be interpreted as a feminine attribute by the people around us, who were usually men (P.A., lighting or monitor engineers). Probably an amateur boy-band wouldn't be treated as patronizingly as we were. Then, slowly, we learned quite a lot and due to that knowledge and the fact that we are still here, that we had the unconditional support of a record company and of some festivals such as Benicassim, and due also to our albums and our songs..., we've gained some credit and more confidence to say what we want, and others have also

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got used to respect that. In spite of this, when we record albums, even in our latest album, we still get carried away by our lack of self-confidence and we limit ourselves, probably because of gendered socialization, when we try to do things our own way. Someone who is a session musician might tell you that something doesn't sound right because it's been studied that it has to be done in a different way, and you say "well, even if it doesn't sound right, it 'sounds', and I like the way it sounds". That it sounds right is one thing and that you like how it sounds is a different one. But when it comes to defending that, it might be easier for a boy than for a girl. Because maybe with a girl it's interpreted as "she doesn't know" and with a boy it's "that's what he likes". And we can also engage in this role, "maybe we don't know, maybe we want this but we really don't want it". Even if we know that we want it! And in our last album we had two producers, one who understood better our musical concept and other who understood music from a more classical and academic perspective, and I remember that the producer who supported our idea was capable of transmitting it and imposing it, while for us it was very hard. That's why I think it would be great for Nosotrësh to produce our next album ourselves or with a woman producer. Because all our albums were produced by men and we are very proud of the result, but we also think that we can now decide how we want an album to sound thanks to what we have learned from the previous ones, and there are women who can do that job and would connect perfectly with us. Of course, this is my idea and it doesn't have to be like this at all, but I'd like that.

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Laura: Your band calls to a very feminine universe, from your songs to the name of the band. Which consequences has this had for you?

Cova: Right now there are still very few bands in which women take part, but it's not as rare as it was before. And maybe there's no need to be called Nosoträsh anymore, because our name, at the time, was a vindication. The idea was that since we couldn't play because we were not musicians, it was just "us" doing "trash", in the sense of "junk"; and also doing punk, playing as we guessed it should be done, more or less. Right now I think that we should take out the "trash", because we have to affirm ourselves in the music we do, which reaches many people, and in that we have a very loyal audience and we don't do junk anymore, although it was fun when we included it. We could leave it as "Nosotras" and continue to vindicate that we are women because I think that's still necessary and it's always good. Our songs relate to the private universe, to the domestic, because even if women are in the public space, we still spend a lot of time in the private space. And when you have a child you spend even more and it's hard to adapt to that new situation. But it's true that it reflects that world in which women still live, even if we are also doing other stuff. That's why, among other things, some people included us in what is known as "shy pop" or "childish pop", which is a tag we like but with which you have to be very careful with. We've reached some public and we haven't reached some others and there probably are many we'll never reach. I've heard once a guy saying he didn't listen to us because "Nosoträsh do women's lyrics" and that he didn't identify himself with them. We've

..... "Nosotras" in Spanish is the female form for "us".

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found all kinds of things. But our music reflects very hedonistic aspects of life, things that can be enjoyable for both men and women. If we enjoy a cup of coffee it's the same for both, isn't it? The thing is that maybe lots of men grow up with some cultural values, in which many things are taken for granted and others are to be valued and sung. And maybe because women only found some space and time recently, we value them more because we've never enjoyed them before. So there are some things that only our generation and the one before us has begun to enjoy and these are new experiences for women and we have to sing them because they make us feel really good.

Laura: What do you think about networks between women musicians?

Cova: Here in Asturias there are clear collaboration networks, and from the beginning Undershakers and Nosotrash have had that network established. Out of Asturias there are some contacts and a special communication with women in other bands. I think that in the field of pop there has been communication, but the fact that you do one type of music or another is still a barrier. And that may be good, I mean, maybe we shouldn't establish relationships with each other just because we are women who make music, we should do it if it's interesting for both bands: you do pop, I do rock, you do country... But it's always interesting to share experiences and probably if we all got together to have a coffee or a drink we'd end up laughing a lot, because it's true that it creates many ties and links, and this is interesting. We establish networks in our field of action: when we go to concerts we talk to people; Malela, for

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example, works a lot with online networks, I keep a blog and I communicate with our fans through it. However, computers, at least for me, are a pending subject, as they are for many other women. We are not digital, we are still analogic.

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Now Sounding*

Laura Viñuela interviews Amelia and Patricia from Chiquita y Chatarra

Laura: How was Chiquita y Chatarra born?

Amelia: When I was 16 or 17 I had a band in Madrid called Las Truchis and we were punk, totally tough. Then I set up Subbuteo with a girl called Estela, with more machines but it still was a disaster. We had an extremely worn out keyboard and the band stooped its existence because Estela's keyboard was stolen. And then Patri and I were in Asturias all fed up and wanting to do something.

Patricia: I remember that once I was playing records in a pub and somebody brought me a demo CD of Subbuteo and I loved them and organized two concerts for them.

Amelia: Then Patri and me, decided to do it the easiest and simplest possible way: bass, drums and voice and that was all, because the other attempts had been catastrophic. We also tried to do cover versions and that was also impossible, so in the end we had to take out things. And that's when we decided to do our songs with what we easily have at hand. We like different music styles but with a bass and a set of drums there's not that much that you can do.

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Patricia: And we are not a brainy band either. We start playing and sometimes songs come out and some other times they don't.

Laura: Which has been your trajectory since you started the band?

Patricia: Three months after we started a friend of ours who organizes concerts hired a band to play and we took the opportunity to play as the opening band. And we went on from there. I remember Jorge [Explosión] saw us in that concert and asked us if we'd like to record a couple of songs. So we did record some tracks and that encouraged us and, as soon as we made some money, we started recording the album. Then we stopped for a while because Ame got pregnant and when we came back we decided to edit the album and keep on playing.

Laura: Do you have plans for the future? Have you thought about doing a gig?

Patricia: Not now. We play mostly in Asturias and, since we are our own managers and we are a bit inexpert... we only do very few things. We played in Madrid, in La Coruña not long ago, in Santander, with Manta Ray in Barcelona.

Amelia: We played with Tres Delicias in Gijón also. Mostly in Oviedo, Gijón and the surroundings. You can't make a living out of this, but things come up and you earn more than you expected. I'm so surprised. We edited our album with the money we earned playing. We work in other jobs so we can live

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and pay the rent, but music sometimes brings us extra-money, which is great.

Laura: So you edited your own album. Didn't you try to contact a record company?

Amelia: It was a totally craftwork thing, with Patri getting in the workshop to print it. And if we did it once we can do it twice. I'm very happy with the album.

Patricia: It's done and it's cool to see the things you are doing, materialized. Actually, we didn't even think about sending anything to record companies, but I guess it was because of our lack of knowledge. Next time we'll see. We want to go on with the band in the future but we have no expectations. We make decisions as things happen. We don't want to go in search of a company.

Amelia: No, because I think that in the end that attitude is paralyzing. Life, work and everything are stressful enough, we don't want this to be stressful too because it would be impossible to hold on. Playing can be lots of fun, but there are other things behind it that are very tiresome. So let's take things nice and easy and let's play.

Laura: Is there any particular reason why you are two girls? Did you decide it has to be that way or was it casual?

Amelia: I've always played with women. I have thousands of male friends who play but, I don't know, playing with them never happened, don't ask me why. And I like better to play with women, I like the way they make music, more elegantly, I

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think, with all my due respects, of course. There are men and male bands that do cool things, but what it is closer to me is... I'd rather play with the people I know, girlfriends, etc.

Patricia: Well, that's true, I don't know if it's a general thing, but all women I know let themselves go a bit more, like "let's play and see what happens". And if you play with male musicians they are all so brainy, even if they are self-taught they take the instrument and want to learn to play well and structure the songs. Which is another way of making music but, I mean... they are more interested in playing well. I think that's why I used to tell friends at night, in the bars, "we are going to set up a band", and they didn't take me seriously. But then we did it. Ame had never played the drums, for instance. It was a bit like "let's start here and see what comes out". It's a less self-conscious thing. And let me compliment my band partner: she sings, does voice melodies and makes songs in two seconds... because we are just a duet with drums, a bass and that's all...

Amelia: In the end you have the important things: melody and a song, and the rest doesn't matter. Because if you don't have the song, it doesn't matter how you try to embellish it. And that's something which was great from the beginning, very primitive, just a skeleton and that was it. Now we are introducing songs with a guitar, she plays the drums and I play the guitar.

Laura: And how do people take the fact that you are women?

Patricia: Some people give it more importance and others take it more naturally. Those who give it more importance I've

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always perceived it in a positive way. They find it curious that we are two women and we've never felt attacked. At least I have never felt attacked.

Amelia: Yes, and they see us as somehow strong and so on... if we did folk maybe it would not be the same. And they tell us things like "shit, you sing like a truck driver, that's cool!"

Patricia: Like when I was told "it's so cool, girl, you two have such a cunt!" I couldn't believe it. Because some people can't get rid of stereotypes over and over and can't see women in any other way, you know. So you have to be like the idea they have of a truck driver in everything you do.

Amelia: As if you have to maintain a concrete attitude and you have to be bad or extreme.

Patricia: Or that you are a bit like a man, that you are not feminine because you do that music... But anyway, it's the same in everyday life: it happens with the band and it happens at the bakery. The only weird thing I saw was when they tried to equalize my amp. In the sound check they patronize us a bit, but I wouldn't dare to say it's because we are women because we really don't know much. Now we are getting to know more, gradually, because we play more often and we know how to ask to technicians, how we want our music to sound like and we know how things are called and we can ask for them and so on. We were a bit exposed before. I remember when I was saying in sound checks "I want this down or this up" and they said no until some other guy came and said "I think she's right" and then they would do it.

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Amelia: Or they'd put the bass down a lot and the voice up a lot... and that was it, you had to fuck off and play like that.

Patricia: But I think now is not so bad. For instance, Mar [Álvarez] told me stories about when they played and it was much worse. And of course, because on top of being all women they were successful [Undershakers and Pauline en la Playa], the sayings went like "they are somebody's daughters, they are somebody's girlfriends, they are fucking someone from this band, they know somebody else...".

Laura: Would you quote women or men as your musical references?

Amelia: We have lots of different women as references. I love diverse ways from La Lupe to MikaMiko... I like a lot a French group I discovered a few days ago, Les Parisiennes. You never stop discovering things! I also like Adriano Celentano.

Patricia: I love postpunk bands. The Slits for me are "the all-female band". They were the punkiest and most feminist thing in the world without even wanting to.

Amelia: And also Red Aunts, a band which was very important to me in the 90s and which has now turned into Two Tears.

Patricia: And the Au Pairs, and all the soul bands of the 70s...

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Amelia: And Wanda Jackson, I love rockabilly. And I like mostly what women do. And they are the great forgotten. For example Lilian Wright was a very good trumpet player.

Patricia: It's a weird thing. I think before the 90s it was more natural. I mean, there were less women but it was not considered so important to be an all-female band. There were all-female bands and all-male bands and that's all. Until the Riot Grrrls appeared it wasn't such a guerrilla thing. And I may like more or less what the Riot Grrrls did but I guess they needed it. They lived in the US in the 90s in a terrible macho rock environment. But I think that in the rock field, especially for men, it was even counterproductive. I remember when I brought Partyline to play here. Allison [Wolfe] is the one who started Ladyfest in Olympia and they really are into the Riot Grrrls movement and, of course, I promoted them as such in the flyer. But there were people who advised me not to do so because it could be a reason for rejecting them. And I didn't believe that but it did actually happen. Some people came to tell me "No, this all-girl thing is not for me..."

Laura: And how do you balance music with your personal and family lives?

Amelia: For me, with a small child, it's very tiring but it's fine, because you want to do it and you don't care, you just do it. Some days you are very tired but, in general, it's ok. And now he's already a year and a half. At the beginning it was more complicated because we had concerts and we had to think with whom to leave the child and also "should I go? Should I stay?" Because one feels guilty, I don't know if it's due to our education or what: "Am I doing the right

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thing? I should be with him more". But then I always justify myself in the same way: I spend more hours at work than doing anything else so, if I can work... what I'm not going to do is to deprive myself of something I like.

Patricia: But I remember the last time we went to Madrid, we had a scene that broke my heart. She drove all the way down there, we played on Friday and on Saturday we were tired, and when Ame phoned her boyfriend and asked him about the baby, suddenly her eyes were filled with tears and I thought "Oh, my God, I'm a tyrant! I'm dividing her family life! Bringing her here to play rock!"

Amelia: (Laughs) No, I also need those getaways. But it's always the same, when you don't have it you want it, and when you have it it's like "I need a break".

Laura: And did your families like the idea of you playing in a band?

Patricia: My mom doesn't care at all, like "well, she's doing her things". And I played her the album once and she didn't like it at all. She likes cheesy songs and so she doesn't understand it. But now she likes it better because I appear in Qué, the newspaper she reads, and, thus, she gets a different impression of what we do and likes it better. And she kind of wants to go to the concerts, but then, they are always in late hours. And I don't invite her either because she doesn't show much interest...

Amelia: Well, my mother always thought I was going to quit and she was very worried. She was always asking me, "hey,

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daughter, when will you quit rock?" I was even driving with her a few days ago and she said to me, "Are you still playing that guitar? What's up with you? Now you have a son!" I mean, she's the regular kind of mom.

Patricia: Like that day we were going to play as the opening band with the Buzzcocks. I called Ame and she told me she had a terrible tonsillitis so I was a real tyrant and told her "then we'll get you some penicillin and we'll go and play", but it happens that she's allergic to it. So, I came out of school, went to the supermarket and bought one pineapple thinking "I'm gonna stuff her up with Vitamin C" and went to her house to persuade her... And when I arrived I met her mother in the elevator, and she is very impressive because she's a very tall woman, all glamorous and with a very strong character, and she looked at me up and down and said, "No rock, do you understand?" (laughs) And I was thinking "Shit, girl, shit!" And then Ame was really very ill. She couldn't sing or say a single word.

Laura: Do you think there are women support and collaboration networks? Do you think they are necessary, a positive, thing that should be promoted?

Patricia: I think that, as an idea, they are ok, but they can also lead to marginality. Because they might constrain you, and that is dangerous, or as a result you might be defined as the bearer of some cause which is not yours. You might be stuck as an all-female band and that's it. And then you end up being put together with some kind of musicians which have nothing to do with you and that's where you stay. I have been lectured sometimes by friends like "thank God you are here to

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save who knows what", meaning that every all-female band's approach to music is more easy-going than a male band and that we are also punkier and thank God for that. They even consider us as representatives or leaders of something, and that's not what we pretend, it's not our responsibility. It's as if they put a burden on you. I think that instead of helping you, they represent another barrier and you have to carry that on you too.

Amelia: But I think all that is always secondary, you know? Because in the end, if you want to play and make songs and you want to get pleasure with what you do, I don't know, it's not so important. The key thing is the band's personality and the music you make.

Patricia: Well, when I chose bands to come here and play concerts, it really was important because I wanted to have some all-female bands. And I brought Partyline or Two Tears because I like them. But you don't have to be struggling all day long, either in rock or in the bakery. The women issue, at least that is what I do, I live it in my private life exactly in the same way. If you don't want to be struggling all day you have to deal with it a little bit. Machismo and struggling to be a little bit of a feminist are always in your mind, but you don't have to raise your fist very high or bring out any flags.

Amelia: No, you have to do things. And live your life the way you want it.

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Mar Álvarez and Alicia Álvarez compose music, play instruments and sing among many other things. In 1995, they founded the all-female garage-pop group Undershakers. They started their parallel project Pauline en la Playa in 1997 which fusions pop with a variety of musical styles. They have already released four albums with Subterfuge Records.

(www.paulineenlaplaya.com)

Chiquita y Chatarra is a punk duo founded in Gijón, Asturias, in 2005. Amelia (singer and drummer) had already been a member of Las Truchis and Subbuteo, while Patricia (bass) participates in the local musical scene as a DJ and an occasional promoter of concerts. They have released their first vinyl record Chiquita y Chatarra in 2008

(www.myspace.com/chiquitaychatarra)

Covadonga de Silva is a poet and musician and plays drums in one of the most interesting all female groups in Spain Nosoträsh. Nosoträsh started their career in Gijón in 1995, and have released a good number of records. Her latest album Cierra la puerta al salir (after leaving, close the door) was released by Elefant Records.

Laura Viñuela is a musicologist. Her research is focused on feminist studies and popular music. In 2003 she published La perspectiva del género y la música popular: dos nuevos retos para la musicología (KRK Ediciones, Oviedo). In 2005 she launched her own firm, ESPORA, a gender consultancy which she directs with her partner Gloria Rodríguez Hevia.

(www.espora.es)

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ESPORA is a firm centered in promoting equal opportunities for women. Her philosophy is based on flexibility and mobility. It was created in 2005 and has collaborated on a number of projects with different organizations, firms and institutions to develop a variety of feminist actions in the fields of research, education, and other specific projects.
(www.espora.es)