# XABIER ERKIZIA

## Common sounds

*"This is what is unique and exceptional about music: transmitting and interpreting it form a single act. A book or a picture can be kept in a library or in a museum after they have been interpreted, but this is another quite autonomous act that has nothing to do with merely conserving it. Music is not like this. Music is sound and exists in the moment that it is played, and in the moment that it is played you cannot avoid interpreting it." Alessandro Baricco,* Hegel's Soul and the Cows of Wisconsin.

The paths that musical creativity have followed, at least in certain directions, have changed a great deal in the last few decades, although in the midst of the revival phenomenon, this often doesn't seem to have been the case. The methods and processes of working with sound have multiplied and expanded in many ways and we are faced with a situation and a sound map that is more varied than any that we have known before. Perhaps there would be no harm in saying, as we have understood musical creativity in the traditional sense, that it will never again be like it has been up to now. However, if we follow what Baricco suggests in analysing this diverse situation, there are some things that don't change when we observe where music comes from, and although, when he says this, he is referring to classical music (or to what he defines as highbrow music), we could think the same about any contemporary musical field, and if we consider it in a broad sense, when we are referring to sound creation as well.
If we accept that music is created and becomes alive in the very moment in which it is played and, as a result, if we understand interpretation as the practical exercise of the personalisation system that each author works on, we will be able to take a significant step towards understanding many phenomena that occur in the world of contemporary musical creative activity.
One of these, that in principle may be a fundamental result of this, is the phenomenon of the characteristics that condition interpretation. That is, if the interpretation is the result of the system that personalises the interpretation of each individual, and if in turn the personalisation of the creator and, in actual fact, his/her personality provides a response to what happens around them, something similar happens with the partnership between creator and environment to what occurs with Baricco's association between transmission and interpretation. They become one.
In other words, we should consider that music and creative artists are conditioned by the characteristics that they have all around them.

However, unfortunately, very few people have reflected in depth on this relationship. This does not mean that there has been no interest in this subject but, on the one hand, we should accept that, apart from the campaigns that the main marketing systems are carrying out, music in itself is not what consumers and most creative artists are interested in. Perhaps, as I said at the beginning, because we have never experienced a period that is exactly like the one we are currently going through.

As far as music is concerned, whenever we want to talk about it as an artistic discipline, first of all, there are certain characteristics that we should bear in mind. We cannot talk about music without knowing what music basically is, and although at the present time everywhere in the world we all may know what music is, in actual fact, as far as art is concerned, the boundaries and the concepts are not so clear.

What is sound art at the present time? What are the boundaries between music and sound art? How do artists relate to their environment? How does their environment condition them when they come to create work? What inspires them to take these decisions? Why do they create?

In one way or another, especially at the moment when projects and experimental research are being carried out and regarding the creation of experimental music or sound, there are certain characteristics that we have not been aware of up to now. One of these, especially up to now (and this is still the case) and one of the subjects that has conditioned the world of kinds of music that use electronic instruments, has been the technical field. Nevertheless, we can consider these innovations to be an imitative exercise. In other words, the artists that are scattered all over the world today have characteristics in common. That is, the tools that are used in the creative process, for example, computers, mixing desks and other audio tools, are almost the same for most artists. As a result, if we leave the technical field that electronic music has been responsible for up to now to one side, and if we lay even greater emphasis on those points that they have in common, we will be focusing directly on the artist: what are the differences between artists?
When we raise this question, we will undoubtedly conclude that we are talking about the relationship that each creative artists has with their environment.

Every creator or artist, and when we say this we are referring to both improvisers and composers, forms their own personal relationship with their environment. For some of them, such as in the case of improvised music, this environment refers to the musicians who take part in the improvisation, in others it refers to the relationship that is formed with space, and above all, of course, to the social, economic and political realities that coexist in each country. However, to do this, we also need to bear in mind the special characteristics of this community, at least if we want to provide coherent in-depth analysis of this situation.
At the moment, some of the realities in this network have still not been analysed. For example, most of these musicians communicate over the Internet to form a small but far-reaching, powerful, dynamic community. This characteristic, if we bear in mind the speed and accuracy that digital communication provides, except for the reality of certain individuals, has changed the conditions of the entire community, and at the same time has created other virtual and concrete realities.
In this sense, nomadism is another special phenomenon to be taken into account. Although it is a minority field, these artists currently have the chance to present their work all over the world using the dynamics of this network, and as time goes by, for many of them it has become their reality and their environment. As a result, these kinds of conditions, instead of leading us to look towards certain specific cultural references, may reveal new multicultural forms, or if they don't, they may display cultural neutralisation processes.

In order to analyse this situation the *Common sounds* project was set up to find out more about the context that these creative artists work in and to learn more about the special characteristics of what they have in common. *Common sounds* is a project that emerged after an in-depth analysis and reflection process on the contemporary creativity of experimental music. It is an attempt to communicate from the inside to the outside, that aims to go in depth into an artistic reality that has rarely been analysed.

In actual fact, experimental music is a field that has reached a level that was impossible to imagine until very recently, or perhaps the most daring comment we can make, without any doubt, although in the last few years it has aroused a certain degree of curiosity for a number of reasons, is that it is a field that the world of art should take into account more often.

This initiative aims to draw attention to the various centres of creative activity, and to provide in-depth analysis of the relationship that this extensive community of artists has with each other and with their environment. It aims to take a far-ranging look at this network of artists, and create situations in which they can share experiences with other creative artists that work in a wide variety of situations and contexts.

By taking an analysis of specific situations in each country that the project is going to be carried out in as a starting point, *Common sounds* aims to provide a powerful wide-ranging discourse that will propose new channels for getting to know this broad variety of realities better. It not only hopes to be useful as a device for artists to get to know each other, but also hopes to be a tool that can be used to analyse and research into this artistic field, and provide new channels for research into contemporary musical creative activity.

XABIER ERKIZIA is a musician, producer and reporter. His work is based on research among different people, sounds and formats, such as acoustic, individual and group installations and collective improvisation. He has performed his work in several countries in Europe and America and has published several records. He runs the ERTZ Other Music Festival www.ertza.net and acts as a coordinator in the AUDIOLAB sound department at Arteleku.