

1. How do the Ialma components know each other and decide to create a Galician folk band in Brussels?

We were born in Brussels; we are daughters of immigrant parents. All immigrants share common experiences and, when you are abroad, music becomes the easiest denominator that gathers us together. We all met when we were children. We all danced.

Very often, we had visits from Galician teachers who taught us folk dance. Once we were visited by Carlos Xosé (Cantigas en Santiago) and said: "To dance this type of music you also need to sing. Who wants to sing?" The girls who volunteered that day ended up creating IALMA.

After that, in one of our parties, Didier Melon from La Première RTBF ("Le Monde est un village") came visit us and proposed us to make a record. He made the very first recording of Ialma, one we don't have. Later on we were discovered by EMI who made our first record. That was 20 years ago.

Brussels saw the birth of many folk groups. CAMAXE made a record. OS PUNTEIROS DE BRUXELAS made a tape. However, the first time we heard the sound of the bagpipe it was from a flamenco band, "FLANDRIA TROPICAL".

We also received help and were influenced by Galician folk bands that visited Belgium: Fuxan os ventos, Xocaloma, Saraiba are just a few examples. Brussels hosts a folk and jazz festival, BROSELLA, -this year celebrates its 42nd edition- and on its first edition, it hosted a Galician folk band already!

2. You are the second generation of Galician immigrants who came from a very difficult historical context. We imagine you have very present the hard times they had to go through in a foreign country, getting used to a different culture and language. However, you were born in a democratic and multicultural country. How do you understand Galicia from that perspective?

For us is like having two cultures. You have a richer perspective because you learn from both cultures and are able to value each of them equally since you know them both from the inside; You know their differences and similarities. To be born and grow up in Brussels, capital of so many cultures, means you will be influenced by many of them, not just the Belgian one. Nowadays, to be Belgian means exactly that.

Life is communication, exchange, approach of different people coming together... as much as in music as in language; in all those gatherings, celebrations, gastronomic events ... That's the beauty of it all!

There are people who feel like a foreigner as much as in Belgium as abroad. We feel we belong both here and in Galicia. Our parents transferred us the memories of what they lived, of the hard work and all the sacrifices they made so we could have a better life. They also talked to us about their

resistance and fight. Our parents' fight for democracy; for democracy in general. Children from all regions in Spain used to gather at "Federico García Lorca's" club. We wore red handkerchiefs, learned revolutionary popular songs and listened to Dolores Ibarruri... That's how we used to spend our Sunday mornings. A memory very difficult to forget is when the Spanish Embassy in Brussels was set on fire. Apart from the resistance, we also learn to celebrate life. Events usually ended with the sound of the bagpipe, Galician or Asturian, for a huge percentage of all the immigrants who arrived in Brussels came from Asturias. It was only at the end of the war when nationalities started to gain importance.

Almost all Galician Centers that exist in Europe were created after Franco's death, not in the 20's and 30's, as it was the case in Latin America. One of the reasons for why this happened is because, in Europe, emigration happened a bit later. The Brussels Galician Center was born in 1979 and was one of the first ones of its kind in Europe.

The best way in which you can keep a language alive is by singing it. If it wasn't for the singing, immigrants abroad wouldn't speak Galician. For some, this was an insult and used to tell us: "Speak Christian! You don't know how to speak!". Many people were ashamed of speaking Galician and only did they dare to speak it openly after the centers were opened and they had the chance to gather with other Galicians.

A great Belgian songwriter, Wannes Van De Velde, who passed recently, remembered that in Antwerp there always was a piper at the harbor to welcome Galician immigrants. Back then, most galicians arrived by sea, and since Antwerp is so cold and foggy, they might have felt really warm when they heard the sound of the pipe at their arrival. IALMA made a tour with Wannes Van de Velde and during that tour, he told the story of the Amberes' galician piper many times!

3. How do you think that the new Galician generation lives the emigration?

There are different generations.

There are third and fourth generations that were already born in the country, sons, and grandsons of Galicians. And there is also a younger generation that is arriving now. The fourth generation is losing the sense of Galician identity. On the one hand, this happens because the Galician centers are closing -it's a pity, but that's how it is-. On the other hand, children no longer gather; there no longer exists the necessity of gathering together because they are fully integrated in Belgium, which is also very nice. They are Belgians. Nonetheless, when they go to Galicia on holiday, they feel Galician. Something always remains.

Some of the young people who arrive now remember the way our parents were. Some of them they desperately want to play the pipe (laughter). They feel profoundly Galician but on the need to find a job abroad, regardless their academic achievements back home.

They gather differently: They use social media; they don't need the centers any longer, as they meet and gather in bars. They are immigrants who travel a lot. They are not the type who remain in groups of 30-40 in the same country. They are lucky enough to know some foreign language and move from country to country more often. Before, we traveled to Galicia once a year... If we could. Nowadays it's much easier to travel. In the old times, it was really hard to be an immigrant. These days it's sad to see that many educated people have to leave because their country doesn't offer better possibilities. We know women who have advanced studies that in Galicia had to survive cleaning in a pharmacy. Here in Belgium, they are treated as important scientists.

4. Which role do you think that music has in the perpetuation of Galician culture? Do you believe it's easy to understand outside our borders?

Galician music it's very rich. Many would love to have as many varieties and same rhythm, melody, poetry... it is very powerful! Galician music makes you vibrate and invites you to laugh, share, participate ... it's a music that speaks directly to you, that gets inside you and express much more than what we think it does; this music unites peoples across borders and does not understand of differences. It's influenced and influences many other music styles. Any human being can feel identified with it. It reaches everybody. One only has to see how people vibrates in our concerts with our songs!

We have sung in Galician and connected with many different people all over the world. A nice example is when we visited Taiwan and we sang in front of 10.000 people and we saw someone in the public carrying a sign that read "Ialma, queremosvos" (Ialma, we love you!). Soon after we got off stage, our record had already been illegally recorded and people were selling it in the streets at 1 euro!

Galician bands can go and play anywhere in the world. Galician music is quality music.

5. In your music there is a lot of *morriña* (homesickness), but also of positivism and hope. What message do you want to send out with your new album "*Camiño (From Brussels to Santiago)*" to Galicia and to the today's Galicians?

We believe there are reasons for self-esteem. We believe that it is worth knowing who we are and where we come from, keep the identity and, without fear, perform as Galicians across the world, because we are neither more nor less than anybody else.

morriña (homesickness) is transmitted to us by the old people who talk to us after the concerts. People to whom we give the chance to recover their memory, and with whom we keep in touch.

But even we talk about this memory in the concerts, we want to go further. We want continuity, implication, positivism and hope, to live in the present. We want to improve and brighten up the world.

This project is like a mission, a mission of transmission. We want that when the concert finishes, people feel strength to move forward, to follow the way.

One of the most beautiful anecdotes was an Arab girl who always laughed at her grandmother when she sang in the kitchen and, after listening to us she said that she would ask her grandmother to teach her some song. Well, although we talk about Galicia and we sing in Galician, in the concerts we invite all people to connect with their roots and to appreciate them. From our being we sing to humanity.

6. Let's talk a little about the role of women in the music world. Is there equality in the industry? Do you see many differences with your fellow men?

Of course, it is not easy to be a woman and be an artist. We have sons and daughters, work, homes to take care about and a lot of responsibilities.

IALMA is a project, with a mission, vision and ideology, and there have been many changes in IALMA. But there are many IALMAS around the world: fighter women, full of dignity, women who value very sincere things, who transmit joy, passion and great truths.

On the way we have met women of great strength such as Manou Gallo, Ghalia Benalí, Lucilla Galeazzi, Leila Amezian, Uxía, Guadí Galego, Mercedes Peón ... women who didn't have an easy beginning, but after that they went forward unstoppable. They are examples for all of us.

We have always got along with the musicians, because the musicians - who in "*Camiño*" are always Belgian: Walloon and Flemish - love our music and the way we have to value the work and share. Every time we go to sing is a journey, it's like going on vacation, even if it's close by, and we want to enjoy it.

Someone told us that we should wear shorter skirts and larger cleavages. It is a problem that all women on stage can suffer. It's not easy to explain. But we don't step back.

We already had experiences that are not nice to talk about, in which we had to intervene with no concerns. We don't lose dignity. We can lose concerts, manager, musicians ... but never dignity. We never give in to blackmail. We are united and do not falter. If we have to haul someone over the coals, we do it together. There are no excuses.

7. You work with refugee children. Music can be curative, and it is a universal language and a meeting place between cultures. Do you see the connection between the history of these children and that lived by our Galician ancestors?

As we say in the concerts, those who leave their country looking for a place to live and raise their children were called emigrants eighty years ago, today we call them refugees. The story is the same. All non-voluntary migration stories are one only story. There are no nationalities, there is injustice and longing for hope.

"*O cantar do refuxiado* (The song of the refugee)" is the story of all who flee from war and repression in search of a future. It is the story of those who have to leave their land, not because they want to, but because they are thrown out. Exactly the same story as that of our parents.

It is a song that talks about our ancestors and talks at the same time of a topical issue. We contribute as we know to send a message that reaches all people. A message of strength, a message of solidarity, respecting who we are, respecting humanity.

8. You talk about tough times... Do we have reasons for being optimists?

Although these are difficult times, and some try to emphasize fear, we believe in humanity; we believe in people, in happiness, in goodness and beauty. We contribute as we know, singing and smiling.

There is nothing better than feel the flow of the audience when they listen to our music and they clap. It is enough to feel the optimism resonating everywhere and not just in the stage.

The paths are narrow, but they exist. We have to walk over and over again to make them wider. Although we advance slowly, we keep going ahead.

There is a lot of good people in the world, even though that bad hearted people make much more noise.

IALMA is surrounded by good people and we consider ourselves very gifted for being called by other artists to sing together!

The title of our new project "*ALEGRÍA e LIBERTA*" (HAPPINESS AND FREEDOM) is a proof that we firmly believe that is worthy to be optimist. This work is done in Italian and Galician with Lucilla Galeazzi, an incredible woman who many people admire and who, 20 years ago, was already a veteran who said "*nenas, nunca nunca paredes de cantar...*" "Girls, never ever stop singing..." and that's what we do.

9. How is being welcomed this tour? What do you expect from the visit to Scandinavia?

We've been working in this tour for a while now.

Eva Omagbemi, manager of several bands in Sweden, heard our music in a life show called "Le Monde est une village" in the Belgian radio. After that, Eva asked to an Austrian friend of hers about Ialma. Her friend called us from Austria to ask us if we would like to play in Sweden... Even before we started the tour there we were already contacted by Galician people -Casa da Cultura Galega en Copenhague- in Scandinavia!

What do we expect? In a country where people has the reputation of being so fond of music, we expect to contribute with our history, mission, project and happiness. Wherever we go we don't just bring music; we bring history and the project of everyone who preceded us, on behalf of whom we speak.

We hope you like it and you enjoy as much as we do.