



WE INTERVIEW...

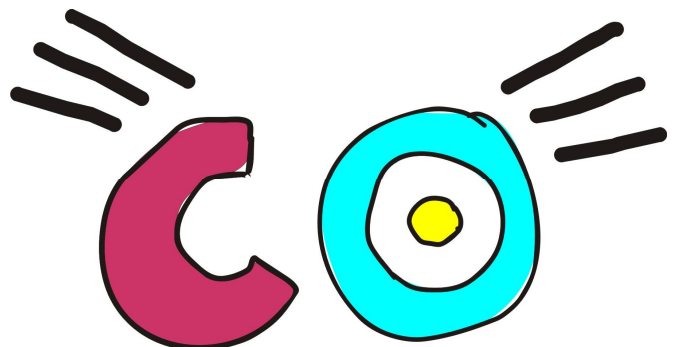
SUSANA SEIVANE

- bagpipe player -

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Education and Culture
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Susana Seivane is a Galician bagpipe player. She was born in Barcelona, Spain in 1976 in a family of well-known Galician pipers and musicians, the Seivane family. She started her musical career at the age of three and when she was 9, she moved to Cambre (A Coruña) with her family and soon she gained respect and admiration of all the professional pipers and all those people connected with traditional Galician music. She has created her own style, synthesized with the style of pipers from the past. She is accompanied by a very young group of musicians, who offer innovation and originality to her performance.

In 1999 she edited her first record "Susana Seivane", based on traditional themes and compositions of Galician artists, and that led her all around the best stages of National and International Folk, obtaining great success and highly favourable critics. It was edited in Europe, USA and Canada. With her second album "Alma de Buxo" she was consolidated as a Galician artist within Folk panorama. As an innovation, in this piece of work she introduced instruments such as drums or an electric bass guitar and she enriched her record with her own compositions. In her third album, "Mares de Tempo", she took a step forward and introduced a new instrument: her voice.

In 2001 she was one of the finalists in the Indie Awards, the prestigious awards which the Independent Music Association of the United States (AFIM) grants each year, in the category of best artist in Contemporary Music worldwide.

Press

- "Her way of understanding bagpipes, far from being experimental or liberalising, is demanding of tradition" *El País*
- "Susana Seivane, caste bagpiper: Although the Galician tradition was always at the centre of Susana Seivane's musical life, this muse of bagpipes injects a renewed and innovative colour to her songs and records. Susana Seivane is an inspired and inspiring muse, espe-



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How did you start in the world of music?

I started when I was little, when I was about three or four years old. I started because of the influences from my family. My grandfather, Xosé Manuel Seivane, started making pipes in 1936 and he transmitted the love he felt for the bagpipe, for Galician culture and music, to his children (my uncles and to my father) and to the third generation, which I belong to. I was surrounded by music, but the truth is that I had it in my blood, that's why I started at such an early age. In fact, one of my favourite games, besides playing with dolls like all girls, was listening to music, Galician folk music or pop music. I listened to music on the radio, on records, (you probably don't remember them!) and I would play the songs I heard on my bagpipe. I had a very good ear for music. At that age, I couldn't manage a normal bagpipe, a standard pipe, so, on my fourth birthday, my family made a small one for me.

Do you think you were a child prodigy?

Well, that's what they say, because nobody knows anyone before me ...a little girl, only three or four years old, who started playing an instrument that requires a strong lung capacity. There is a story which happened a short time ago. I was about twenty years old when someone called me from Teresa Rabal's programme. Have you heard of it? A programme made with and for children and they said that they wanted to contract me because they had heard I was a child prodigy who played the bagpipe and my assistant told them that maybe I had been a prodigy but now I was already 20 years old. Ha, ha, ha.

Did your parents give you any advice concerning your career?

Yes, my parents and other members of my family, because I have played the bagpipe all my life and I started to dedicate myself to it professionally around 1997/1998. The people who most supported me in taking that step were my family and members of the Galician folk group, *Milladoiro*. In fact, one of the founders of *Milladoiro*, Rodrigo Romaní, produced my first record. Then, we produced my second record together and he





has always been present, in one way or another, in all the four records I have released. So, in answer to your question, I can say that my family has always encouraged me in my profession.

What would you like to be if you weren't a piper?

When we're little, we all want to be a lot of things. When I was a little girl I wanted to be a detective, a policewoman or a teacher. I've always liked all things related to teaching and, in fact, later on in my life I studied paediatrics, so if I weren't a piper (something I think I was bound to be), I would probably work in teaching.

How has your music changed from your first record (ten years ago) to this last one?

Well, we started preparing my first record in 1997/98 and it came out in 1999. It was, let's say, a more traditional record, if we refer to the instruments that accompanied the bagpipe. As more records came out the music became more modern. My way of playing the pipe didn't change, but the instruments accompanying the pipe did. After the second or third record, I chose instruments which could give my music more intensity and bluntness and make it sound more contemporary, instruments like the drum or an electric bass guitar, but I have never forgotten the importance of the

Galician traditional instruments, like our percussion.

In your musical compositions, there is a mixture of styles. Why?

That's something I like. I like making music in that way. I have never forgotten tradition and the roots of Galician music. I always listened carefully to the old pipers, I paid great attention to the way they played the bagpipe and interpreted their music. My 'model' was my grandfather, Xosé Manuel Seivane, but nowadays, as a professional piper who is able to play the music I want to, I like to mix it with different musical styles. I think it's a way of enriching our music and that's why I like doing this. In my music you will always hear other musical styles, like pop, funky...

What do you get out of singing in your concerts?

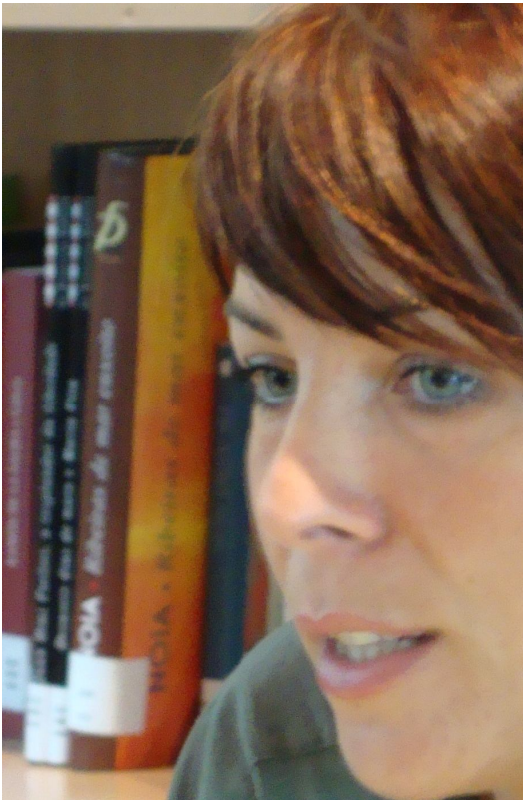
Singing is something that I also like and I've sung since I was a child. I didn't sing much on my first record, I backed *Sonia Lebedynski* up. She is the singer of *Fía na Roca* and then after my second record I started singing more because my friends from the profession encouraged me, people like *Uxía Pedreira*, *Uxía Senlle*, *Guadi Galego*, *Mercedes Peón* and the truth is that when we play live I love singing and I really appreciate it. In that way, the concerts are a little different, you don't just play the bagpipe all the time and I also rest from playing it and just have fun singing. I ask the audience to sing along with me and I really enjoy it.



You had to choose among a lot of musical themes in your last record and renowned professionals collaborated with you. How would you define the experience?

Well, it was a very nice experience. My last record came out in last June and it's called *Os soños que volven* and, in some way, I wanted those dreams to come back, those melodies that have accompanied me since I was three years old, those which I have played all my life. That's why I say that this record is the soundtrack of my life and nearly all the themes are the ones I played then, I mean they're traditional and I felt like modernizing them so they could sound more modern and contemporary. I really enjoyed myself playing them, because they were melodies that I played when I was younger. When we were making all the musical arrangements I came out in goose pimples because I remembered my childhood...they brought back a lot of memories of my childhood. I was born in Barcelona and I lived there till I was 10 years old.

My



parents met there and decided to stay. They got married and my sister and I were born. Well, all those sensations of my childhood there came back to me with this record. I was also homesick for Galicia because we always spent all our summers in Ribeira de Piquín, where my father's family lives. The



truth is that *Os soños que volven* made me feel a lot of different sensations and brought back really beautiful memories. It's a record I have always wanted to make.

How is Galician music valued abroad? Do you notice any difference among countries with a Celtic past and those which don't have a Celtic past?

We have many more concerts abroad than here in Galicia or in Spain and I must say that in all the countries we have visited our concerts are really successful. The people like Galician music a lot. I couldn't name any country in which I have played that didn't like our music. I suppose that our music seems exotic to them because they love it. In the last 6 or 7 years I have had many concerts in countries like France, where I play the most. I sell a lot of records there. My concerts in France are always full. I think Galician music is very popular in foreign countries.

What is your relationship with other Galician folk artists like?



Fabulous! It couldn't be any better. A lot of artists have collaborated in all my records, for example, the people I mentioned before, *Uxía Senlle*, *Uxía Pedreira*, *Guadi Galego*, *Sonia*, *Olga Kirk* and members of *Milladoiro*. Rodrigo Romaní collaborated in the four records, members of *Berrogüeto* and *Pulpiño de Viascón*...I'm really lucky to have my friends working with me on all my records.

What do you think of the illegal downloading of music? Do you think it affects folk music?

In my opinion, this practise is dangerous. It's a way of making music disappear. What I most hate are all the 'mafias' involved. Nevertheless, it's unusual with folk music. I think the people who really like folk music are loyal to this music and they prefer buying the original CD with its booklet because they know a lot of work has been put into them and we take great care over all the details. The booklet has a lot of information and photos of the artist and people want to have the original CD. So I

think that there aren't as many illegal copies of folk music as of other styles of music.

What role do women represent in Galician music?

Women have played and they still do a crucial role in Galician music, like in nearly all aspects of life. In the past there weren't many women pipers, well...I think there were, but in a more chauvinistic society, as it was then, they were looked down on. It was unusual for a woman to play the bagpipe. People didn't think it was right. They only played the tambourine or other instruments of percussion. Now I remember a story about groups who go around the villages compiling melodies from the past to learn them and then play them. Well, in some of the places they visited they were told that in a certain house there used to be a woman who played the bagpipe and because of this the people believed the house was haunted. I also think there was an oral transmission among generations that was really important for the musical heritage that exists today. For example, my great-



great grandmother's case (my grandfather's grandmother). She didn't play any musical instruments, but she sang very well and she was really committed to Galician folklore. My grandfather learnt a lot of songs from her. She sang traditional songs to him, songs that she had also learnt and he played them on the bagpipe.

Besides traditional music, what other kinds of music do you like? Is there a moment for each type of music?

Yes, I think there are moments for listening to different types of music. Well, in my



case, anyway, I listen to a lot of different types of music. If you refer to the different moments of the day, it depends. If you feel sad, you feel like listening to a certain type of music and if you feel happy, you want to listen to something more cheerful or livelier. What I most listen to is folk music and to music from all over the world. It doesn't have to be Galician music. From Galicia I like *Berrogüeto*, *Milladoiro*, *Budiño*...there are a lot of groups that I like...*Espido*... and from abroad, my favourite folk groups are *La Bottine Souriante*, *Shooglenifty*. They mix their own traditional music with electronic sounds, with dance music... Groups like *Shooglenifty* really get you going, when they play live. I like *Kila*, too. Other styles I like are rock music, funky, *Alanis Morissette* and *U2*. I'm going to their concert in San Sebastián in September. I already have the tickets! I like *Jamiroquai*, too. I listen to different kinds of music. Ah! I see a girl with a Beatles T-shirt! Yes...you, you! I have all their records. I participated in a project... the celebration of the 40th anniversary of their break-up. It's a record in solidarity with 'Médicos sin Fronteras' and all the earnings will go to this NGO. A lot of

Spanish artists participated, people like *Miguel Ríos*, *Paco de Lucía*, *Pereza*, *Guaraná*, *El Canto del Loco*, really well-known artists. Each one is going to sing his/her version of one of *The Beatles* songs. I was asked to prepare a version of the song, 'Norwegian Wood'. I sang in English (imagine it!), but it turned out nicely. We played the bagpipe and at the end of the song, a Galician waltz. We gave it our personal touch and it sounds really nice. The CD will be available in summer.

Can you tell us why your web page is translated into Breton?

Lately, It's where I play the most. My web page is translated into Galician, Spanish, English, and into French, not Breton, although the greeting is in this language.



It's just my way of showing them my affection in return for all their support. They love my music and we have many concerts there.

What do you think of learning foreign languages? Why is it so difficult for Spanish people to learn English?

I think it's difficult because it isn't taught to you at an early age. I started studying English when I was in 6º EGB. I was 11



years old. I think I started too late. Studying a foreign language is fundamental and I didn't realize it until I started travelling because of my work. The people who come to my concerts really appreciate it when you speak in their language and they can understand what you're saying. So, in my opinion, it's very important. In fact, later in my life I studied English on my own and a little French, too. I'm not very good at any of them; a little better in English because I studied it later in High School. So, take this into account because later on in your life, it will be very helpful.

Do you speak any foreign languages? Were they useful for your career?

I've already answered you. I speak a little French...just enough to communicate with the audience of my concerts in France. I speak English better because I studied it

longer. I speak English in some of my concerts and even if I have to improvise, I can!

You have always participated in the defence of the Galician language. Because of this, you were awarded the Xarmenta Prize in 2008 in Bierzo. What did this prize mean to you?

Well, I was really surprised because I didn't know prizes were awarded for speaking the Galician language. Speaking Galician is something natural for me. Although I was born in Barcelona and lived there for 10 years, I was educated in Galician by my father, not by my mother because she's from Andalucía, but speaking Spanish isn't a problem for me, either. All my mother's family are Andalusian. I believe that defending the Galician language is fundamental. If studying a foreign language is important, normally languages that aren't in danger of dying out, we have the obligation of defending our own language, the one we have in our blood, the one that's part of us. We have to fight in defence of our language, so it won't die out.

Your family workshop is highly valued among bagpipe craftsmen. What is its secret?

You should ask my family and see if they reveal the secret to you! They are the ones that make the bagpipes, but I think the



secret is that they have made bagpipes for many, many years. I've already told you that my grandfather started his first workshop in 1936 and since then a lot of studies and investigations have been carried out to improve the bagpipe. In the past, the pipes were really basic. They weren't well tuned and there weren't any craftsmen who made bagpipes, so the person who had skills as a carpenter, cabinet maker was the one who made them. He did what he could. There



weren't any specialist in those years. Nowadays things are different and all the new technologies are used in bagpipe making. In concerts today, a bagpipe isn't the only instrument on stage. Well, in my case, anyway, other musical instruments, like an accordion, a piano or a guitar can share the same space. So, in my opinion the secret is in persistence, investigation and in getting up every day with the idea of trying to improve everything that has to do with the bagpipe as an instrument. The craftsmen in my family's workshop are always "racking their brains".

Do you participate in the design and in the process of making bagpipes?

No, the truth is I don't. The third generation, which I belong to, are more interested in performance. I used to work in the family business because it's nice, not only to play



the instruments, but also to know how it's made and how everything works inside. I give my advice about the design of the bagpipe or about the windbag, but it's something they do much better than I do.

Our school is taking part in a Comenius project together with Poland and Lithuania. Were there any similar projects when you were a student?

I'm glad you have asked me this question because I wanted to comment on this. It's something I find really interesting. When I studied (and it wasn't long ago!), we didn't have any projects of the kind and it's a good experience for you to get to know other cultures and have these exchanges because



Maths lessons, English lessons, Galician lessons...are important, but learning about other cultures and other societies is an enriching experience.

Do you believe that these types of projects are a good way for students to improve their English? Do you think they help in other aspects?

Yes, I do, because you get to know people from other different cultures and you realize that yours isn't the only one in the world. With these projects, you also improve your English because it's the language you must use to communicate with the other students involved in the project.

Have you ever had the chance of visiting Poland or Lithuania because of your work or in your free time?

No, I haven't. If my Geography doesn't fail me, the closest I've ever been to these countries is Germany, where we went on tour. When I go to either one of them, I'll tell you about it!

Would you like to visit Poland and Lithuania?

Yes, I'd love to. Travelling and taking my music to other countries is really gratifying. It's great to see people from other cultures showing their enthusiasm when we play our music.

How do you think the recent death of the President and other important people from his party will affect the Polish?

The situation seems chaotic right now, but I think his brother will become President or that's what they say. I really don't know what's going to happen. No idea! I'm not really up-to-date in international politics.

If you could make a wish knowing that it would come true, how far would you wish your career to go?

I'd like it to continue in the way it's going right now. I could never have imagined all the things that happened in my career after my first record was released in 1999. It was the right moment because folk music was becoming very popular then. It was a boom in those years. Do you remember *Hevia's* song? It was the soundtrack for that year's Spanish Tour. Suddenly, all the record companies, the multinational countries became interested in folk music and in Galicia because they realized that there were really good pipers, singers and tambourine players here. After my first record (1999), I immediately began to go on tours abroad and we were really surprised that people liked our music so much and all the music critics spoke really well about us. It was a great success. So, I'm really happy that my career is going so well and I hope it continues to do so.

Let us ask you the last question, as inexperienced interviewers, is there any question you would like to answer which you haven't been asked yet?

I've been interviewed many times and I've been asked all kinds of questions, some really strange ones, so I think I've already been asked all that there is to ask and I've already answered all that there is to answer.

