



# Artistic Beginnings in Co-Creation



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## Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

by Birgitte Holt Nielsen,  
Project Coordinator, Figaros, DK

Over a period of 16 months the companies, Musictheatre Figaros (DK), Compagnia Teatrale l'Albero (IT) and Companhia de Música Teatral (PT) have joined our forces and dedicated ourselves to an inspiring process of training and investigation into the field of music for and with children of early years. The funding from EU's Erasmus+ program has been invaluable for this Small Scale Partnership as the support has enabled us to dig deeply into our practice in order to develop tools and methodologies through a truly co-creational and artistic process.


Another invaluable support has been the fact that all three partner organizations are active and committed members of RESEO – a unique European network for arts education and creative learning. Sharing this base has been decisive for the good co-operation throughout the whole project.

With this booklet we wish to share our personal experiences, built up during the ABC-Project in order to inspire other practitioners in the field of music education to create meaningful, inclusive and artistically qualified meetings between the youngest children (0–4 years), their families and their carers and educators.





# The Why's and How's of ABC



The project ABC-Artistic Beginnings in Co-Creation was created because of a shared insight from all three partners into existing difficulties when it comes to recruiting educating artists from the sector of classical music and opera for inclusive community projects.

We find that traditional arts education doesn't fully equip professionals for this kind of work, which requires continuous learning, self-reflection, improvisational skills and the ability to connect with diverse communities. In order to bridge this gap all three partners have built up a practice of training our (often freelance) artists for the tasks we want them to carry out for our companies. In order to broaden and develop this practice the ABC-project crossed borders of many kinds – geographic, educational, artistic, cultural – and the opportunity of learning from each other became very valuable.

By sharing expertise and testing co-creational methods, the partner organizations have developed stronger connections with local communities and improved the way we engage with early childhood music education. We believe in the power of artistic expression and excellence as an important factor in the process of making cultural life open to everyone and bringing people together.

The training part of the project consisted of three trainings (over 3-6 days), one hosted by each partner organization in its own local/national context. Each partner sent three participants from their own ranks (closely connected freelancers as well as a staff member) for each training visit. The trainings were based on the hosting partners' own practice and consequently they were all different. However, all three trainings built on the same foundation of improvisation, co-creation, reflection and artistic excellence and there was a great focus on keeping an open mind in order to inspire and create a meaningful progression in as well the methodology as the artistic expression.

The first training session took place in August 2024 in Loulé, in Portugal's beautiful Algarve region. The second was held in November 2024 in Matera (Basilicata region) renowned as the 2019 European Capital of Culture. The third and final training occurred in March 2025 in Ebeltoft, a little idyllic market town in Denmark.

In the following chapters you will hear the diverse voices of the three partner organizations and participating artists when we invite you into the workspace, process and reflections of ABC.



# The partners

## Companhia de Música Teatral

Artistic creation is the heartbeat of Companhia de Música Teatral (CMT). Starting with music and seeking interaction between various languages and possibilities for artistic communication, CMT has built a pathway to the discovery of what it calls “the development of artistic-educational constellations”.

The philosophical matrix of CMT is defined by the creation of relationships between art and education, and by the articulation of academic research, artistic production, training, technological creation, community involvement and the promotion of the importance of musical experience and the arts for social and human development.

CMT has made a decisive contribution to a diverse and comprehensive cultural offer: CMT’s repertoire is a kaleidoscope of shows, installations, workshops, medium- and long-term projects, training activities, publications in various formats, participation in research projects and presentations that have national and international academic scope.

## Compagnia Teatrale L’Albero

L’Albero is an all-female artistic team based in the southern region of Basilicata (Italy). Since 2010 L’Albero has focused on theatre training, production and social and cultural innovation projects, using the language of opera and theatre as its main tool to transcend knowledge, places and contexts, engaging in an ongoing dialogue with diverse individuals and communities, particularly on the methodology of co-creation with communities. Through its work, which starts locally but has an international perspective, L’Albero experiments with new languages and co-creation formats, developing skills in artists and cultural operators to work in an inclusive and accessible way, creating participation processes that engage subjects and communities often far apart in terms of age and physical distance, always trying to use opera as a language at the centre of a multidisciplinary and international process. Since 2021, the focus has been on proposing activities for children (0-6 years) and their families, working on activating services, modifying spaces and identifying pathways to make it possible for families with such young children to feel a welcoming space.

## Musictheatre Figaros

Figaros is a professional touring opera and music theatre company in Denmark, performing around 100 shows annually across the country for both adult and young audiences.

Besides stage productions Figaros runs an education and outreach department, KulturCentralen, offering cross-artform activities for all ages. Its outreach activities includes workshops, early-years concerts, and rural engagement, working with families, children (0-10 years), elderly care homes, hospices, and hospitals, often tailoring projects to local needs.

The field of early years (0-3 years) has a special focus – among other things with a special format “BabySymphony”, designed in cooperation with Aalborg Symphony Orchestra with the objective of creating a meaningful access for babies, toddlers and their families to classical music.



# Three countries – three contexts

## Portugal

Music, like other forms of Art, has little space in the public school curriculum in Portugal (public school is attended by 79% of students). Only in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of Basic Education (ages 10–12) are there specialist teachers teaching the compulsory subject of Music Education. In the early years (ages 0–3; 3–6; 6–10), music is not taught systematically, and is delivered by generalist teachers with little training in this area.

In Portugal less than half (48%) of children under the age of 3 attend daycare. This number rises to 95% in preschool (ages 3–5) and nearly 100% in basic education (ages 6–15). Recently, the number of foreign students has become significant. In basic education, they represent 9% of the total student population, and there are students from more than two hundred nationalities.

In this context, the training of music teachers responds only to a small fraction of the need to provide regular and high-quality musical experiences from early childhood onwards. For more than twenty five years, CMT has been leading initiatives and conceiving training models to empower educators, teachers and artists to help bridge this gap. It is this know-how that we bring to the ABC project.

## Italy

The context of Basilicata is one of inland areas, with a significant problem of depopulation and involvement numbers. The bracket 20–40 year olds is almost nil in terms of numbers relative to the entire population, especially the upper educated. Basilicata has only in the last 20 years experienced a professionalisation of the cultural professions, our own organisation (now managed by the second generation of Lucanian female artists) stems from a desire for cultural decentralisation from Rome. The Lucanian context has lacked institutional cultural bodies and culture departments for over 15 years, but has experienced a 'European' spring thanks to the European Capital process in Matera in 2019. In this context, L'Albero operates by bringing innovation in the practices of cultural involvement and participation in absence of tradition, the past, and the frequentation of cultural venues, which over the years have led us to dialogue with Europe and export co-creative practices and methodologies with non-professional communities.

## Denmark

In the field of music education Denmark has a strong tradition of music pedagogy in the field of early years, delivered from the publicly funded music schools. But since the price of enrolling your baby or toddler in a music school is relatively high, other measures and programs are needed in order to include low-income groups. In the performing arts both independent and public theatres deliver performances for kids where music is most often part of the aesthetic language.

However, creating artistic experiences with music for early years with a more co-creational angle is less common and this is the field that we are researching into with the ABC-project.

In Denmark 97% of children aged 1 to 6 are cared for outside the home in daycare institutions, childminding schemes, or private childcare arrangements (the latter also often supported by public money). This is due to the high employment rate of both parents in a family. Thus the most direct way to access the children with culture offers very often goes via daycare systems and much less by reaching out to the families.



## Three trainings – three programs

### i.Lab Arts For Childhood, Immersive Training

Loulé, Portugal — July 29<sup>th</sup> – August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2024  
Presented by Helena Rodrigues, Artistic Director

This training, which is one of the regular course activities that CMT offers, included the participants in a formative process in the field of art for children, emphasizing practices addressed to 0-3 years old. The course welcomes participants that are motivated to contribute for better care in childhood, working across several professional contexts. Awareness of the need to care (for the environment, for babies and people in general) encompasses all action. The drive for this training is to cluster people and cluster artistic practices aiming to promote wellbeing and harmony in society.





It is an immersive course, which means that participants “learn by doing”. Trevarthen’s ideas on communicative musicality and Gordons’ music learning theory contributions inspired the course design.

Participants are involved in artistic experiences that lead to the presentation of a final performance. Personal development and collaborative processes mediated by artistic tools are at the core of all the training.

Four leaders and a team of the closest collaborators of CMT contributed to the development of activities during a week of intensive work (about 40 hours) from Monday to Saturday. This comprised a range of artistic workshops, with a strong emphasis on music, movement, visual arts and theatre, as well as conferences. The sessions utilized both traditional and alternative sound resources to explore voice, movement, bodily expression, and creative composition. Awareness of the importance of playing is embedded in all the artistic work.

The formative process culminated in a performance and a collective reflection about all the experience. The integration of the presentation of a play of theatrical music for families with babies at the end of the training is one of the unique features of the course.

This training program is also an artistic residency, associated with the new creations in progress.

Furthermore the 2024 edition served as a kickstart of the ABC-training program and contributed to the professional development of 6 artists from Denmark, Italy and Portugal with a special interest in artistic creation for infancy.

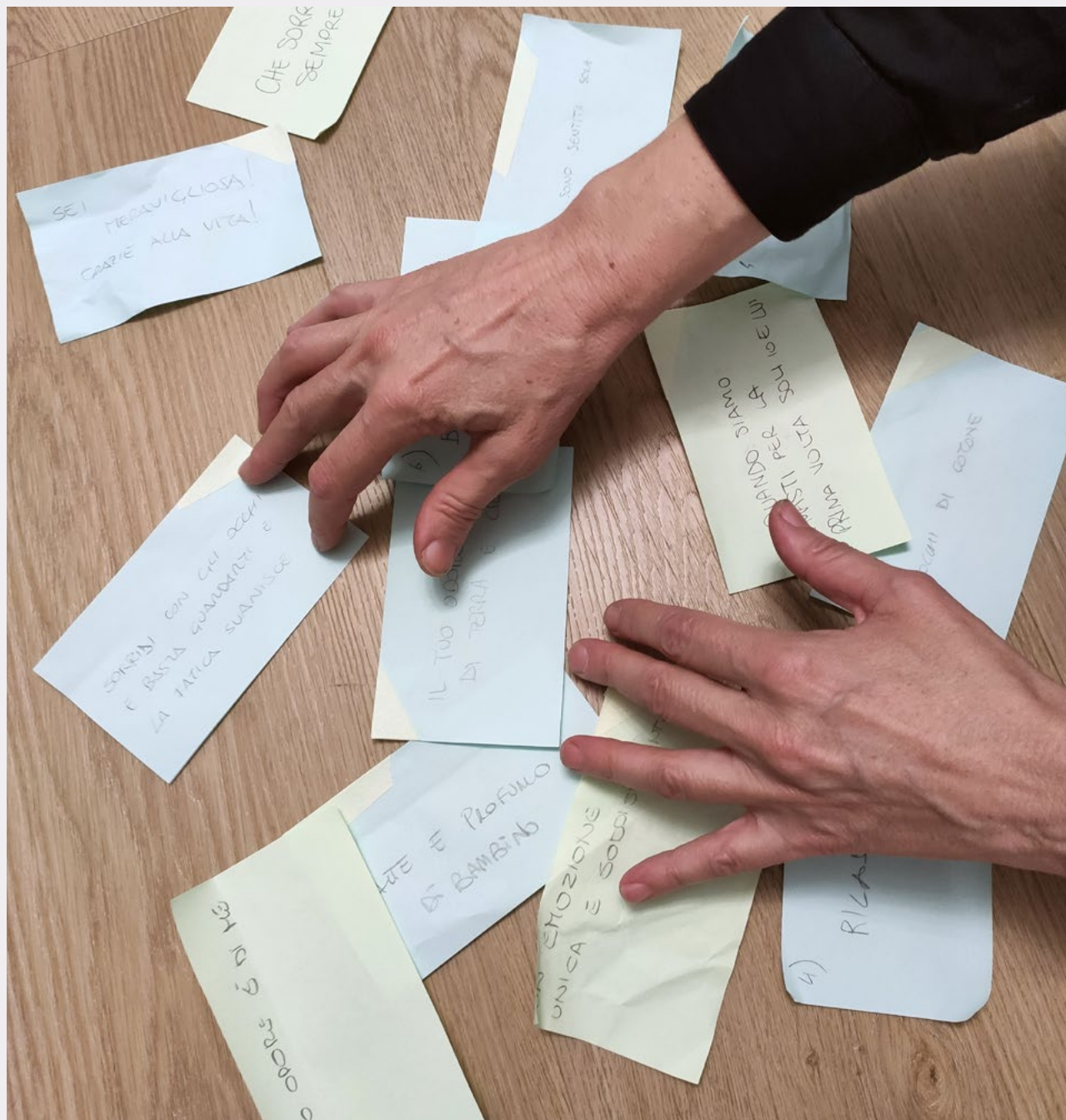




# Co-Creation in Early Childhood

Matera, Italy — November 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> 2024  
Presented by Vania Cauzillo, Artistic Director

The three-day training 'CO-CREATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD' hosted in Matera brought together artists, project managers, and consultants from ABC project partner organizations (L'Albero – IT, Companhia de Música Teatral – PT, and FIGAROS – DK) and hosting one RESEO's participant. The program was structured around practical and reflective sessions, with the overarching aim of deepening participants' engagement with co-creation practices in early childhood and community-based opera. The training content and design were rooted in the ABC project pillar of accessibility, belonging, and co-creation, with each session tailored to address one or more of these pillars.





## Day 1 – Co-creation through Music and Storytelling

The training opened with a hands-on introduction to “MammaMusica” (Laura Sacco), involving live interaction with mothers and infants (0–1 years). This offered a direct experience of early musical stimulation and community bonding through music — fostering belonging from the first months of life.



The afternoon, led by Vania Cauzillo, focused on the co-creation of narrative frameworks. Participants explored how to collaboratively shape a story that reflects a community’s identity and voice. The session integrated digital tools to enhance storytelling, connecting with the ABC principle of co-creation and setting the foundation for accessible narrative methods.

## Day 2 – Impact and Creative Frameworks for Community Opera

The morning was dedicated to impact assessment and evaluation (Carlo Ferretti), addressing the aim to sustain artistic practices through informed reflection. Collaborative methodology used by L’Albero’s projects was introduced to enable artists to co-design impact measurement tools, sensitive to different cultural and social contexts.

In the afternoon, Vania Cauzillo presented a series of case studies from L’Albero, offering both inspiration and practical frameworks for co-creating inclusive projects. This was followed by two engaging and participatory activities centred on the theme of co-creation and inclusion. The first was Cards for Inclusion, a card game designed to help the arts sector creatively explore how barriers can be removed: the game encourages participants to think outside the box and come up with imaginative access solutions. The second activity was a narrative game conducted via WhatsApp, where artists received a series of guided prompts from facilitator (Cauzillo). These messages invited participants to explore the city of Matera individually, while remaining connected through a shared digital storytelling experience.

## Day 3 – Accessibility and Inclusive Practice

Thursday began with an emotional and intimate lullaby co-creation session between mothers and ABC’s artists, led by Vania Cauzillo and Laura Sacco. This practice emphasized the significance of musical storytelling from the earliest stages of life and served as a deeply accessible and inclusive activity.

The afternoon training, led by Sabrina Barbante (Movidabilia), focused on accessibility in communication. Artists were equipped with strategies to make their creative environments and communication more open and welcoming - advancing the accessibility objective of the ABC project.

The training closed with the “Silence City” experience, a creative promenade through the Sassi of Matera. This experience highlighted the interplay between place, silence, sound, and community identity - bringing together all three ABC objectives in a symbolic wrap-up of the training.

The training was rooted in co-creation, learning session, participatory observation, and experiential learning. Artists and project leaders from each partner organization not only explored Albero’s community opera methods but also engaged in peer exchange and contextual adaptation. A key result of the training was the testing together of these approaches with families in partnership with Laura Sacco (Crescendo). Matera training served as an opportunity and practical laboratory for innovation, aligning with the ABC project’s vision of creating inclusive, impactful, and culturally embedded artistic practices.







# Voices in Co-Creation

Ebeltoft, Denmark — March 6<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> 2025

Presented by Birgitte Holt Nielsen,  
Artistic Director and CEO, Figaros

The last ABC- training was hosted by Figaros in the beautiful little harbour town, Ebeltoft.

The program developed further practise, based upon the experience built up in the group during the two preceding trainings.

Based on the objective of learning through sharing and testing, we chose to focus on presenting and experimenting with different ways of shaping processes and artistic expressions with the whole group.

All three partners were involved in leading sessions, based on their own practise at home. The training started with a welcoming evening session, catching up and sharing how the results had been utilised at home in different ways by each partner.

The morning of day two contained a performance of “PaPI Opus 10” by Companhia de Musica Teatral with a small group of local children and carers and the ABC-group as audience.





This was followed by group reflection sessions and discussion about how to create artistic formats able to perform and interact into daycare, hospitals and other places in a meaningful way.

The afternoon session was a long creative improvisational workshop, including the whole group of artists in the task of creating an interactive format to present to local families the next day.

Day three was full of meetings, interactions with local families and invited specialists as well as reflection sessions in the group.

In the morning a group of families with children from 3 months to 4 years was invited to be part of the workshop, devised by the team the day before. The workshop was shaped as a small interactive performance, including non-verbal parts as well as songs/music from the three countries represented. An impressive start was the “Silent Orchestra” where silence was demonstrated as a humoristic but also meaningful component in the way we experience music. Later the group also shared the great variety of musical skills that are represented in the ABC-group.

Later in the day the focus was on the voice – and methods to create courage and motivation to sing. Denmark has a long tradition of community singing and new formats for singing together in groups were developed during the Covid Lockdowns. These formats focus less on choir skills and more on sharing life-moments with others – even strangers – by singing.

Invited voice coach Susanne Vinther demonstrated her methods of motivating people inhibited by “voice shame” to sing and after this followed a public event where families were invited to a “Singing Café” with



songs from a multi-cultural perspective. This session was led by singer and conductor Johanne Baadsgaard Lange and contained lullabies, singing games and children’s songs from Portugal, Italy, El Salvador and Denmark.

The final day consisted of a morning session where drama exercises, led by Astrid Guldhammer, were used as a tool for reflection on the experiences during the training, before a more verbal sharing and reflection session marked the ending of the ABC-trainings.



# Exercises we used

## Warm Up's

In order to open the door to our laboratory a tiny bit and give an idea of the methods used, this chapter presents a few exercises that have been used in the ABC training.

### 1. Body and Cooperation

Led by Astrid Guldhammer in Ebeltoft (DK)

#### Blinded rhythm box

The participants are divided into 2 even groups.

Group 1 stands well-spaced on the floor move with their eyes closed and grounded feet.

The task of Group 2 is to act as “movement starters” for the members of the other group – without talking – giving designs by sneaking silently around and starting a movement of one bodypart of a person. Afterwards moving on the another person. The participants with their eyes closed may only change the movement if a new “movement starter” changes it.

Thus, they can end up with quite a complex series of movements that must be performed by head, arms feet (no walking), waist etc. The “sneaking movement starters” can only start or change ONE body part at a time (or else it will be too difficult for the blinded half!)

After approximately 3½ minutes, you change roles.

The length of the chosen music will decide the length of the exercise. After the first round the groups swop roles.

(Suggested music: The girl from Ipanema with Getz and Gilberto and Águas De Março with Elis Regina (but anything with a slow tempo can be used;)

From playing with vocal sounds to interaction with babies.

### 2. Playing and Interacting

Led by Helena Rodrigues in Loulé (PT)

#### Playing with vocal sounds: solos with vowels

After having done a vocal warming up, play with vowels.

You can explore dozen of ways how to play with vowels.

You can play with A, E, I, O, U and with different intonations of that vowel.

Examples:

- a. Imagine you are an “A”. Move as an “A”. Stop and become aware of possibilities of behaving as an “A”.
- b. Imagine you are an “I”. Move as an “I”. Stop and become aware of possibilities of behaving as an “I”.
- c. Do a speech 1 minute long using just the vowel “A”.
- d. Do a speech 1 minute long using just the vowel “I”.

Move on to:

#### Playing with vocal sounds: duos with vowels

Meet a colleague. One of you is an “A” the other is an “I”.

- a. Dialogue just by using the sound of an “A” and the sound of an “I”.
- b. Talk with each other and reflect about the experience.



# Co-Creation Exercise

Led by Vania Cauzillo in Matera (IT)  
– including mothers and babies

These two exercises are excerpts of a full participatory workshop co-creating lullabies:

## 1. “Words Memory Map”

Approx. 15 minutes

The facilitator gently invites the parents to respond to a series of reflective prompts. Each question is read aloud slowly and clearly, then displayed around the room on large sheets of paper. Participants are invited to write their responses on post-its and place them near the corresponding questions. While they do this, the singer softly hums or plays, weaving in familiar tones or melodies that fill the room without overtaking it. There is no rush, and no need to explain the words. This silent exchange creates a visual and emotional tapestry — individual memories forming a collective portrait.

## 2. “Inventing a New Lullaby Together”

Approx. 15 minutes

With the post-its now forming a wall of tender, evocative words, the facilitator invites the group to explore them aloud. The singer begins to pick out a few of the words and gently repeat them, transforming them into short melodic phrases. Slowly, a lullaby is born — not from scratch, but from the shared emotional language on the wall. The group hums, sings, and plays together, guided by the facilitator. Parents are offered egg shakers or small bells to participate with their babies. There is space for silence, space for vulnerability. If someone prefers to listen rather than sing, that too is welcome. The lullaby grows organically, carried by the energy in the room.

**If you are curious to find more examples you are invited to investigate by following [this link](#).**



# The voice of the artists

Companhia  
de Música Teatral

## Mariana Caldeira Pinto



I am Mariana Caldeira Pinto, a performer and music teacher developing interdisciplinary artistic work. I believe connecting different art forms enhances skills in children and those engaging with my work.

The ABC project validated my practice, exposing me to international approaches to early childhood art and new creative paths. Meeting Compagnia Teatrale L'Albero and CrescenDO broadened my perspective — L'Albero's accessible performances inspired me to rethink my approach, while observing Laura's work with newborns and mothers was deeply enriching.

Working with Figaros Opera in Denmark allowed me to present a show to children who didn't speak my language, proving that communication transcends words. The artistic work in Ebeltøft, particularly the Cafe Concerto concept, was captivating and influenced my work in Portugal.

Today, I integrate sign gesture interpretation and shameless singing techniques into my practice, ensuring my art remains inclusive and meaningful to all.

ABC residences were opportunities to create and to test *PaPI Opus 10*, a new CMT's solo performance for early childhood that definitely benefited from ABC inspiration.

Companhia  
de Música Teatral

## Mariana Miguel



I'm Mariana Miguel: overall a pianist, but also a percussionist and creative artist. I'm interested in interaction and collaboration with people, artists and audiences. I collaborate with CMT in several of their artistic-educative constellations, taking roles as a facilitator, performer and creative.

The ABC project resonated with me particularly through the performative events we all took part in. I felt them as practical proof that language, background and cultural barriers can easily be overcome through a practice of communication and a common goal: co-creating meaningful artistic experiences for the little ones.

Specifically, I valued these different tools: using movement and a big artistic team, with a common musical theme, in Loulé; visiting and inhabiting outdoor spaces creatively, in Matera; and using drama, voice and language, in Ebeltøft.

I feel that some of this has been building on my past experiences and professional background, enhancing it, but that it will also take some time to translate it all onto my practice.

I have now been working on a new solo performance (*PaPI Opus 11*) for early childhood with CMT, which definitely benefits from these experiences at ABC.



Figaros

## Connie Pilgaard Nielsen



I'm Connie Pilgaard Nielsen, and I'm a freelance musician, performer and creative artist. I have been working with different creative expressions of stage art for more than 30 years. Nowadays I spend a lot of time touring with different bands and doing different musical projects for younger kids. As an artist I'm searching for the space of openness where improvisation is at the core.

Being a part of the ABC training has been absolutely inspiring for my work. The opportunity to meet and work with brilliant artists across Europe, has made a huge impact on my way of creating new artistic material. During the trainings I've got some great tools – like how to use body, voice and awareness to deeply connect with the audience, and how to find a creative expression which comes alive no matter culture and language.

During these trainings I felt the importance of having like minded people to connect with and develop from. It has been a great pleasure to participate in the ABC trainings.

Figaros

## Johanne Andersson



My name is Johanne Andersson, and I am a cellist, performer, and sound artist.

I work across many genres, but my heart beats strongest for creating music together with the very youngest.

What has made the greatest impression on me has been the creativity and ideas that arise when we create in the moment, together.

In Loulé, I rediscovered the importance of playing and exploring with an open and non-judgmental mind.

In Matera, I became aware of the importance of reflecting on one's own practice and all the blind spots we have as human beings.

And in Ebeltøft, I was blown away by how so many creative competencies worked together to create a small piece of magic.

I was deeply inspired by the *PaPI Opus 10* performance and have since incorporated interpretations of elements from the performance into my own practice — especially in terms of how one can create inspiring “moments of magic” with simple but powerful means.

L'Albero

## Alessandra Maltempo



I am Alessandra Maltempo, co-artistic director of L'Albero. I work in theatre education and in facilitating participatory creation processes between artists and communities. In particular, over the course of my 20-year career, I have consistently explored methods and practices for using theatre and music as tools for well-being and healthy development – especially for children and adolescents.

The artistic residency in Loulé with Companhia de Música Teatral was especially inspiring for my work. The idea that the training of artists and educators should begin first and foremost with artistic practice makes all the difference. In Italy, institutional training is still far too theoretical, and the arts do not yet occupy the rightful place they deserve in daily education, except within therapeutic pathways.

What I've taken from the ABC project into my everyday work with children is the impulse to more deeply and effectively integrate the language of theatre (body and voice) with that of music (singing and instruments), but also – and above all – with the visual arts.

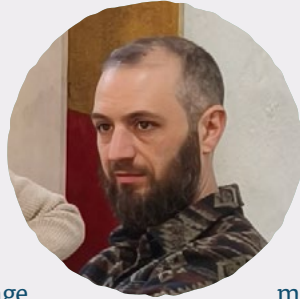


## Claudio Cauzillo

I am Claudio Cauzillo, a musician, naturalist, and artistic director of a collective of busker musicians. I am also part of the cast of “Onde”, an opera for children aged 0-3 years. My background blends music with environmental awareness, aiming to create unique artistic experiences that engage audiences through diverse musical expressions.

The most significant experience during this project was the opportunity to explore new artistic environments across Europe. I had the chance to learn innovative working methods and witness the power of co-creation in a collaborative setting. This exposure broadened my perspective on how music can be integrated into various cultural contexts and how creativity thrives in an international exchange.

During the training sessions, the moments of creative brainstorming and sharing with the public were especially impactful. I was also deeply inspired by the connections made with local communities, which reminded me of the importance of art as a social connector.



Being in the process of internationalizing my personal projects and having recently started working within the field of music for children with “Onde”, I was able to apply the skills and insights gained directly to my current work. This experience has shaped my approach to future projects, and I plan to continue integrating these practices to enrich my artistic endeavors, making them more inclusive and globally relevant.

L'Albero

## Graziana Palazzo

I am Graziana Palazzo, a performer, singer, and facilitator with a background in opera and education. My main practice is singing in different context and intersectional artistic projects, exploring how sound and presence create deep emotional and physical connections.

One of the most impactful moments for me was experiencing how non-verbal communication – the “silent orchestra” moment- and improvisation exercises could create instant connections among us (as facilitators) and participants (children and parents).



A key learning from the training was the importance of having a basic design and using improvisational tools to generate presence and engagement in a workshop setting. Starting with a clear structure gave me a sense of direction, while improvisation allowed space for spontaneity and connection.

I also realised how valuable it is to re-propose a “design” that works - as a format to return to, experiment with, and refine over time. Repeating and trusting a design helps build confidence and opens up opportunities for deeper exploration within a familiar frame.

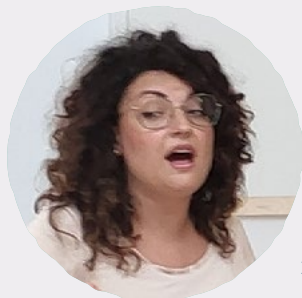
After ABC, I soon incorporated these insights into “Onde” (musical performance for parents and children aged 0-3) to pause longer in the silence. Looking ahead, I aim to deepen my practice in light of what I learned.



L'Albero

## Laura Sacco

I am Laura Sacco, a singer, music therapist, and early childhood music educator. I train professionals working with children and disabilities and I am the regional coordinator for Basilicata of the national programme *Nati per la Musica*. I have been working as a music therapist and music educator since 2008, and I run a studio in Matera called 'crescenDO', where I focus on postnatal music therapy and music education for parents and children aged 0-6. In 2024, I began a new professional journey with *Onde*, a musical performance for parents and children aged 0-3. I initially joined the project as an educational and pedagogical consultant and later took on the completely new role as performer.



The ABC training came at exactly the right moment: enlightening and inspiring, it allowed me to meet fellow professionals and artists involved in musical theatre for early childhood – a world I had never encountered before. In Portugal, with Companhia de Música Teatral, I worked deeply on body awareness and expressiveness. While my studies have always focused on voice, performing required a different kind of physicality. Learning to let my voice 'inhabit' my body, to *become* body, helped me see myself from a new perspective and discover my own way of being.

Improvisation sessions with Paulo Maria Rodrigues and Jorge Parente were intense and transformative. They were essential in supporting my creative process and shaping a 'new me' as a performer. Sometimes, my educational practice tends to 'impose' creative boundaries in order to follow a specific theoretical and methodological framework. The ABC experience taught me that creativity must be free, that there are many ways to reach educational and artistic goals, and that music can 'travel' in many forms. Being confined within a 'perimeter' restricts musicality and communication with children.

I will carry this experience with me – in my work and in my heart.



## Skills achieved





# Challenges

As part of this project we decided that each partner would create pilot activities in their own local setting in order to test and refine the trained skills in “real-life” and as part of the companies’ daily practice.

We set out to create a path to reach families in areas with limited access to artistic experiences, focusing on the very youngest children. While our shared ambition was strong, the process revealed a range of challenges — structural, institutional, and practical — that shaped the course of the work.

Engaging with this age group means meeting them where they are: often within the routines and environments of the daycare system (as it can be rather complicated to access the families directly). This makes access heavily dependent on collaboration with daycare professionals and local authorities, which require time, trust, and persistence. Progress sometimes moves slowly, and we navigated through multiple layers of communication and administration. At times, a lack of clarity around who held responsibility in the cultural and educational municipal bodies led to delays or uncertainty about how to proceed.

These conditions called for great flexibility from the artists and organizations involved. Building relationships and mutual understanding became just as essential as the artistic content itself. It was a learning process that required us to adapt and translate our intentions in ways that made sense to those outside the cultural field.

The nature of the target group also brought unique challenges. Very young children express themselves through subtle, often non-verbal cues, making it difficult to apply traditional evaluation methods. This pushed us to reflect on how we define and observe impact in early childhood work, and to remain responsive to forms of engagement that are less visible but deeply meaningful.

These experiences have deepened our understanding of what it takes to build sustainable connections between art and early childhood and shown that this is a common experience in our three countries. It highlighted the importance of continued dialogue, patience, and cross-sector collaboration.



# The impact on our practice

## Companhia de Música Teatral

ABC project offered insights on what has to be done concerning professional development of educators and artists, yet. It also nurtured perspectives on how to involve families and community in art for childhood. To exchange experiences with foreigner colleagues, the supportive atmosphere and the spirit of the three beautiful places (Loulé, Matera and Ebeltoft) were very much helpful to release new ideas.

ABC project also provided the opportunity to work with two young Portuguese artists on the CMT's *Portable Play to Play* cycle (PaPI). This set of music-theatre pieces has been specially designed to be able to tour easily, inspiring carers and promoting access to culture since infancy.

Two new PaPIs (*PaPI Opus 10* and *PaPI 11*) highly benefited from the inspirational ABC atmosphere. Moreover, *PaPI Opus 10* was presented during the Ebeltoft training. Its success contributed for confidence and empowerment of our young artists and confirmed its relevance on promotion of wellbeing in around a wide variety of cultural venues, theatres, crèches and kindergartens.

## L'Albero

The project had a strong impact on our organization in three key areas.

- First, being part of a prestigious European cooperation increased our visibility and recognition within the professional artistic field.
- Second, we succeeded in initiating a local network of key stakeholders for artistic creation, named *FEED*, which has already held three public meetings.
- Third, the piece developed within the project, *Onde*, was selected by *Visioni di futuro, visioni di teatro*, Italy's leading 0–6 performing arts festival in Bologna.

Lastly, we expanded the impact of our training activities, engaging local artists more actively than initially planned, strengthening the local creative ecosystem.

## Figaros

This project has had an important impact on the way Figaros create our outreach strategy. The trainings have strengthened our courage to trust in the power of our artform instead of relying primarily on the more music-pedagogical approaches. Training our (connected) artists to develop new methods and more diverse skills in creating both contents and communication towards the early years segment has strengthened both the quality of the workshops delivered during the project and the potential outreach after the project is finished.

For the company this makes it possible to delegate more responsibility to the artists themselves and become more mentoring instead of participating ourselves in everything. This rings-in-the-water effect is a very important in order to broaden the impact further than a small theatre company can manage.

The pilot-workshops in local areas have made it possible to test the new skills at the same time as building up news relationships in the two very different municipalities; Syddjurs, which is a rural area and Aarhus, a big city where activities have been made in housing estate areas. These relationships will be built upon in our future practise.



# Recommendations

## to new artists/companies who want to approach this target group

- Be prepared to spend a considerable amount of time and energy on researching for opportunities of cross-sector partnerships and cooperation in the planning phase;
- Rely on the power of music in creating close relations to the babies/toddlers;
- Be clear in your communication so that you balance expectations between artist and parents and/or carers every time you meet with them;
- Look for international inspiration and partnerships. Verbality is less important for this target group and therefore work across borders is natural;
- Work closely with educators and families, building relationships with early years professionals and caregivers to ensure the work supports developmental needs and feels relevant to children's daily environments;
- Children's reactions are spontaneous and unpredictable, so embrace improvisation and flexibility: cultivating improvisational skills allows to respond in the moment and co-create meaningful experiences;
- Avoid oversimplifying or 'infantilising' content, instead, create poetic, layered and emotionally rich experiences that encourage deep engagement;
- Collaborating with artists from different fields and contexts can generate new ideas and provide fresh perspectives on how children interact with the arts (it is particularly suggested to benefit from European exchange frameworks).



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