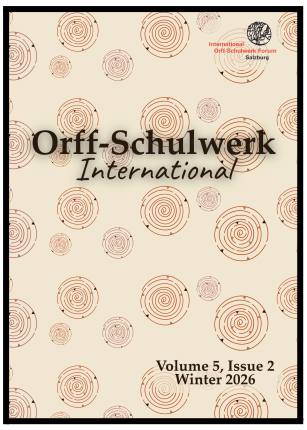
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COMPILASCÌON. Autobiographical Storytelling and Collaborative Scriptwriting Blending Theatre, Music and Dance

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Marta Gilmore & Ersilia Prosperi

"Soar above dogs, cats and birds,
the odds and ends of the past, friends and dreams."
— Wisława Szymborska, *Writing a CV*
"*We are young people dancing with the moon and the stars*."
I Tempestosi, *Compilascìon*

Introduction

Compilascìon is the result of a deliberately slow process of collective research, developed within a theatre, music and movement workshop with a group of adults with disabilities resulting from neurodevelopmental disorders. At the heart of the project lies a process of collective creation based on memory and autobiographical storytelling, explored through various artistic languages and the continuous interplay between theatre, music and movement.

This article follows the structure of the presentation we gave at the IOSFS Convention in Athens in July 2026, addressing the same experience from two different yet interconnected perspectives. In the first part, Marta Gilmore traces the process through which memories and autobiographical material took shape in a collective script. In the second part, Ersilia Prosperi focuses on the musical process, tracing the group's development as a choir and the way in which individual and collective musical skills emerged and developed within this narrative framework. The conclusions are co-authored.

PART I — *Compilascìon*: a mixtape of our lives

Marta Gilmore

Who we work with: Polo Lumière and Casaletto

Our association, the Centro Didattico Musicale e Teatrale (CDMT) is active in music, dance and theatre education, and rooted in the Tufello neighbourhood and Rome's Municipality III. Since 2021 we have been collaborating with the Polo Lumière, a centre dedicated to promoting the health and socio-cultural inclusion of people with disabilities; and a well-established organisation in our local area, recognised by local residents as an open and accessible space. The Polo, established through a memorandum of understanding between Roma Capitale and the local health service, is aimed at adults with disabilities resulting from neurodevelopmental disorders, in particular intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorders, and integrates social, health and socio-cultural interventions through various programmes.

In the neighbourhood, everyone knows it simply as *Il Casaletto*, named after the residential facility where some of the people taking part in our workshops live: an old country cottage

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around which the city has grown and which today stands out like a small farm amidst the neighbourhood's social housing blocks.

Over time, our collaboration with the Centre has grown, alongside the mutual respect and trust we share with its team. Today we run various programmes, including the theatre, music and movement workshop at the heart of this article, led by the authors together with Eleonora Tregambe, who specialises in creative movement and *DanceAbility*.

The long-term commitment and teamwork

The first thing we wish to emphasise is that this workshop has been a space of immense professional and personal growth for us, in which to experiment with methodologies and approaches no different from those we would have adopted with a group of neurotypical people, save for a few differences that have made it a rare and precious space.

Crucial to this was a different pace; a veritable ode to the slowness of processes, certainly necessary given the group's great neurodiversity, but which may perhaps offer food for thought regarding the pace of work to which we are normally accustomed, dictated by the rhythms of the school year. By contrast, with this group we had both the need and the privilege of being able to manage our time free from the pressure of an annual deadline. This meant that the production of the final presentation – which itself was divided into two stages, an initial launch in the form of a workshop and a theatre debut almost a year later – coincided with a lengthy process of skill development on many levels, allowing us to experiment with different approaches, to proceed with great care and to navigate various points of friction between the realms of research and practice.

Two further elements helped to make this experience unique. The first was the teamwork, which enabled ongoing dialogue between us, the Polo's educators and the various professionals involved in the project, offering invaluable support in guiding the group, managing any crises and identifying needs and resources. The second was the opportunity to share experiences with the group outside the weekly workshop, organising outings and trips to encounter other organisations within the Italian theatre scene. Among these, the most significant was attending the performance of *Don Chisciotte ad Ardere* by Teatro delle Albe, as part of the Ravenna Festival , which enabled our group to take to the stage in a major international production and to experience the excitement and wonder of this occasion.

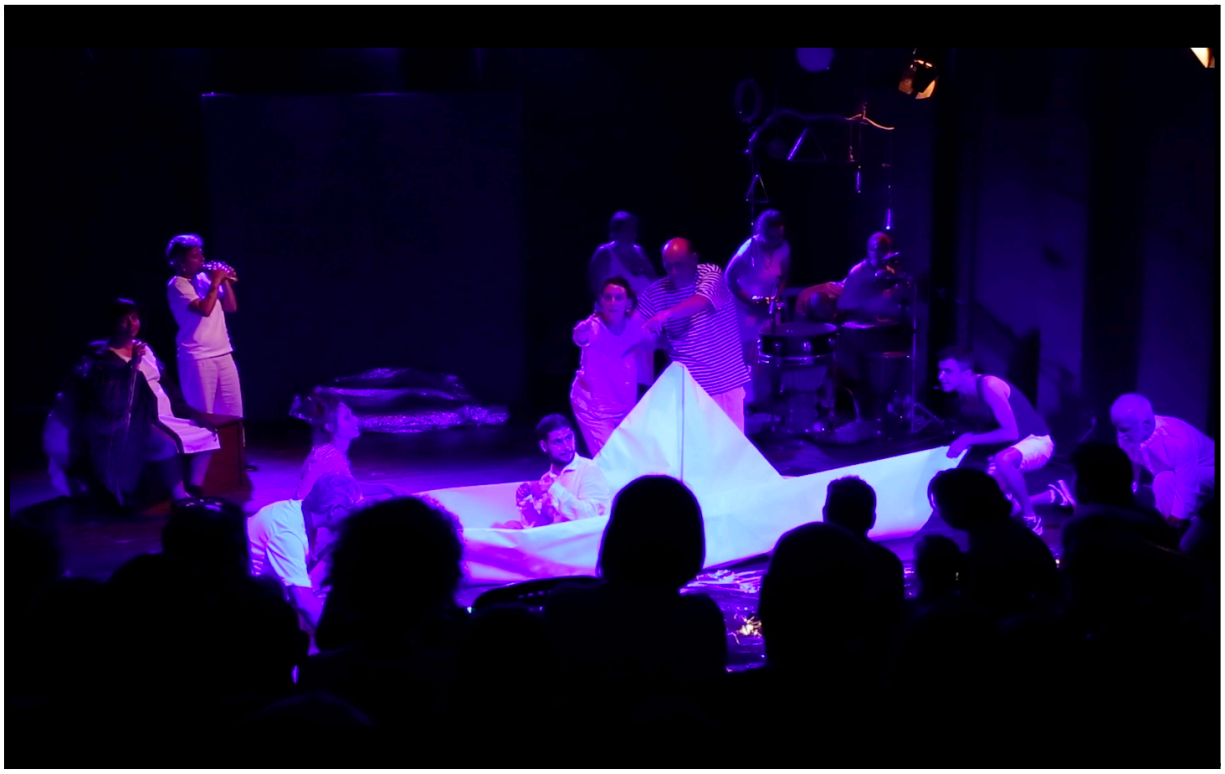
Where we come from: Inside *The Tempest* and *The Tempestosi*

We began working with this group in 2021. They were introduced to us as adults diagnosed with moderate-to-severe or severe neurodevelopmental disorders, with an average age of around forty-five, including three younger women and girls. Many of them had known each other all their lives, having navigated the local support services together since their school days. Four of them live together in the group home within *Casaletto*.

We therefore joined a group of around 8–10 people (the composition has varied slightly over time) with a very long history behind them: friendships, romantic relationships, break-ups, conflicts, alliances and sub-groups. It was an extremely lively but also very conflict-ridden group: the first meetings were characterised by outbursts of anger, mutual rejection, crying,

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shouting, and stubborn silences. It was no coincidence that we decided to begin by rewriting William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which we then called *Dentro la Tempesta***.** Since then, the group has been known as the Tempestosi.



Dentro la Tempesta, staged at the *Teatro Fortezza Est* in Rome in June 2023

At the end of that two-year experience, we asked ourselves: where do we want to go from here? That's when we decided to move towards an original collective writing process centred on self-narration.

We felt that this tempestuous galaxy, where every person was a world unto themselves, was something worth trying to tell – as a human experience, as a wealth of lived experiences, beyond the lens of disability. In short, to try to create a narrative framework in which each person could share their own life story, so that the audience might see themselves reflected in it.

Stage dramaturgy as a process of collective writing

Whilst this was the starting point, we had absolutely no idea – nor did we feel we needed to have one from the outset – as to how we would go about creating this theatrical, narrative and, above all, poetic framework. The approach we adopted was that of *devising theatre* or collective stage writing, where, starting from a set of questions, material is gradually produced through a process of improvisation and shared creation, centred on the performer's authorship. This means constantly seeking, together with the actors and actresses, a space of connection and resonance between themselves and the themes or stories being explored, encouraging them to experiment independently, to produce their

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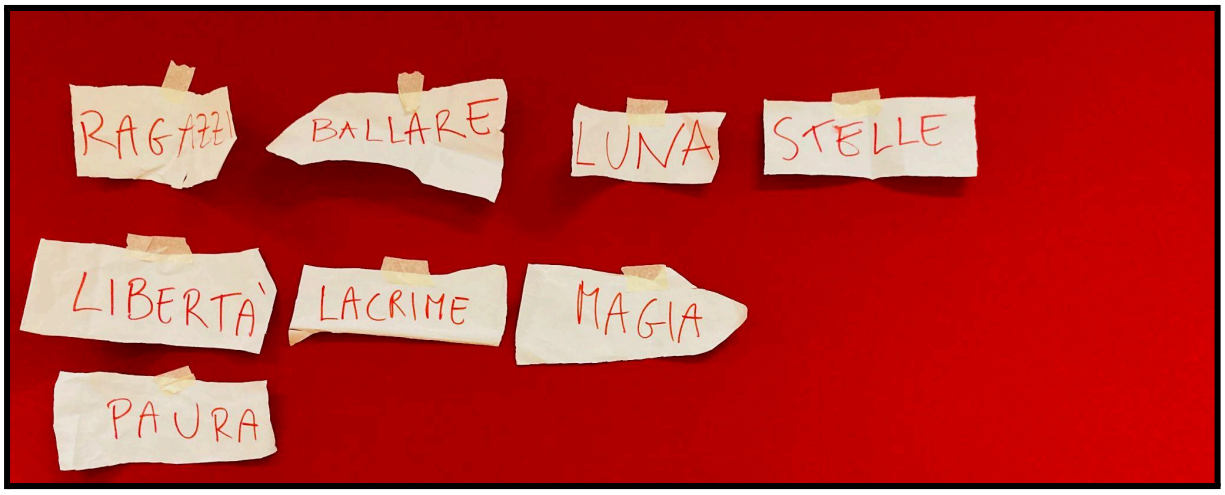
own material and content, and, on a more subtle level, to inhabit those spaces of uncertainty, stumbling and 'crisis' where one gently shares a little of one's own fragility. Thus began an initial phase of very open exploration. We proposed short solos, brief autobiographical accounts, improvisations and moments of sharing in a circle, without yet knowing what form the material gathered would take. The primary aim was to bring certain themes to the surface, in the belief that, in the early stages of undertaking a project of this kind, something very precious can emerge instinctively.

During this initial phase, a number of recurring themes emerged: memories of school and relationships with classmates, both in terms of camaraderie and friendships as well as conflicts – there were many accounts of fights, both giving and receiving, but also episodes of bullying and exclusion – the cruelty and, sadly, the violence suffered; and then the first loves of childhood and early adolescence; but also the courtyards and neighbourhoods of Rome, group games in the local parks, friends from the neighbourhood and those met on holiday, seaside homes, and pets, especially dogs. And since this is a rather 'stormy' group, we've also explored the intense emotions of a storm: fury, anger and fear – the things that make us angry and those that frighten us.

How *Compilascìon* came about

At the same time, I was keen to experiment with poetic language and verse. I thought that an accessible way to approach writing in verse would be to start with song lyrics, so I asked the participants to bring along their favourite song. A wide variety of songs were brought in: theme tunes from 1980s Japanese cartoons, Italian singer-songwriters, Mina, and Måneskin. We printed out all the lyrics and asked everyone to choose a few words they liked. We cut out the words and ended up with a pile of them scattered across the floor, which could be picked up and rearranged freely. Playing with this jigsaw puzzle, the chorus of our song emerged:

We're young people dancing with the moon and the stars
Tears of freedom
We're the most beautiful actresses in the universe
La- la- la – lalala!



Detail of the word puzzle from which the song's chorus was born

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With this chorus and other verses scattered here and there, along with all the notes I'd jotted down during our initial explorations, Ersilia composed the melody during an afternoon we spent together at the piano. Initially, our only aim was for it to be 'singable' enough so that they could sing it together without sounding too out of tune. We had no idea how far they would go from then on! With the melody ready, I was then able to write the rest of the lyrics, drawing on the notes taken during our explorations and taking care to ensure there was at least one verse that told a story about each of us.

And so our song came into being, becoming the actual *title track* of our album; an album that took the form of a sort of theatrical 'concept album', where each person telling their story is a track on the track list, and all of them converge and are contained within its final track: *Compilascìon*. This was a tribute – deliberately written in phonetic form – to the track lists we used to write by hand on audio cassettes back in the 1970s and 1980s, the years in which many of us (students and teachers) grew up.

Returning to the song, what we didn't realise was that it would become the dramatic thread running through the show, the element that held together the collective dimension of 'us' – that first-person plural that recurs in every verse – and the individual dimension of the stormy supernovae who, within this community, find a space to tell their stories.

To give an idea of just how much this song underpinned the storytelling, and how much this meta-musical dimension – which emotionally connects the song to memory, to nostalgia and to the emotions experienced – has permeated and facilitated the subsequent process of writing the script, we have included the full lyrics here, and from this point on I will use them as a starting point to give some examples of how we explored the various theatrical languages to drive the narrative forward.

We are young people dancing
with the moon and the stars,
tears of freedom.
We are the most beautiful actresses in the universe,
la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la.

We're brave; we no longer worry
about the nasty things people might say about us.
We're different, we're all diverse,
we're different, we're made of verse.

We're angry, furious, tempestuous,
lightning and thunderbolts against injustice.
We are encounters, greetings and smiles,
we are different, never to be mocked again.

We are the emotion that suddenly overwhelms us,
we are the fear inside the lift,
trains of thought like a song…
We are wonderful, wonderful thoughts!

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We're young people dancing
with the moon and the stars,
tears of freedom.
We're the most beautiful actresses in the universe,
la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la.

We are young people dancing



A dance piece for two performed in space

If the refrain stems from this image – the young people dancing beneath the moon and stars – the first key to unlocking the dramaturgy is precisely that of dance, which runs through the entire work as a practice and is here made the central theme. From memories of the carnival celebrations of Massimiliano's childhood, we arrive at Floriana's shame at having been caught in a sudden bout of bleeding during the secondary school camp party, just as she was dancing with the boy she was madly in love with – the very same boy who used to defend her from the bullies who would put pins under her chair and crumble her snack. And from these stories – who amongst us doesn't remember the first slow dances in secondary school? Who hasn't felt, at that age, that they wanted the ground to swallow them up in shame? – we move on to Aureliana's solo, as she dances wildly alongside the whole choir. And as she hurls every word towards the audience, the choir behind her repeats it, amplifying it: thus returning that 'we' which allows us to say 'I' and be heard.

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Here are Aureliana's words.

My name is Aureliana
I like dancing
I don't get anxious
I don't get stressed
And who cares about the others?

Aureliana's protest dance is abruptly interrupted by a fake power cut, which, after a brief bit of hidden theatre, allows us to move on to another dance in the dark, holding small torches, whilst Cristiana sings the song's chorus, accompanied by Ersilia on the trumpet.

We're the most beautiful actresses in the universe – La la la, lalala
One day Matteo wrote on a sheet of paper: "Once upon a time there was the knight Lancelot who fought a dragon. Richard Gere." So we tried to give Matteo a space for fulfilment – whilst at the same time seeking an aesthetically satisfying way to express his imagination. Initially, we tried to stage the clash between Lancelot and the Dragon by forming the dragon's body with the chorus members: a single, huge serpentine dragon battling Matteo, happily dressed as a knight and armed with a wooden sword. The scene was visually striking, but in the end we felt we were infantilising the group.

One of our objectives was precisely to move away from a certain form of belittling: the disabled person – all the more so if they have cognitive and relational disabilities – being treated as an eternal child. Instead, we placed great emphasis both on creative and performative autonomy – from the music to stage presence – and on fully embracing one's own age and the years of life lived. For this reason, a long snake making dragon sounds – whilst amusing – did not strike us as the right approach, so we experimented with a shadow play: Eleonora manipulated the coloured silhouette of the dragon, and Matteo fought against this shadow whilst the rest of the group illuminated the two silhouettes with the same fairy lights they'd used for the dance.

We're different, we're all diverse, we're different, we're made of verse
To transform the following verses into stage material: 'We are brave, we no longer worry/ about the nasty things people might say about us/ **We're different, we're all diverse, we're different, we're made of verse**' – we drew on childhood memories and created a piece combining music and movement based on *tableaux vivants*. We wanted to convey the sense of this poetic diversity: we are made of – verses. But also of a past in which diversity was sometimes the subject of discrimination, to be brought back to a simpler dimension – that of having all been, actors and audience alike, children dressing up for carnival, or youngsters going on a school trip.

We asked the participants to bring photos from when they were young, both individual and group shots. Here too, personal histories and family circumstances – having parents or siblings still alive, and other factors – shaped the diversity of the material we received: some brought entire albums, others two photos taken from Facebook or a single photograph, perhaps not even from their childhood, still framed and taken from their bedside table.

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These photos gave rise to some very heart-warming moments. At the same time, we introduced an exercise on *'tableaux vivants'*, starting with reproductions of famous paintings featuring particularly interesting compositions, depicting individual figures or group scenes. By studying the postures and details of the paintings and working to bring those still images to life – what happens just before the moment is frozen by the painter? And what happens immediately afterwards? – we introduced the possibility of telling a story through a dialogue between the body and the projected image.

This gave rise to a sequence of choreographed movements accompanied by Ersilia playing the trumpet live, using just a few symbolic props: Zorro hats, sticks and Barbie dolls. Each moment of the free-form dance in space, characterised by a different musical energy and a different use of the props, ends with a pause in which the whole group strikes the pose seen in a photograph of one of the protagonists, which is simultaneously projected onto the backdrop. The photographs initially form a sequence of close-ups, but their reproduction is echoed by the chorus, which multiplies them, with every member of the group repeating the posture and expression of the person in the photograph.



On the left, a photograph of Matteo as a child; on the right, the group recreating it in space during the preview held in November 2025

To create this sequence, we had to draw on a wide range of skills, from listening to the piece of music and the different qualities of movement it might evoke, to the balance of the bodies in space, the precision of the reproduced image, and the spatial orientation required for the reproduction of the group photographs. Added to this is the fact that there are two

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performers: Nicole and Giulio, who, during the sequence, accompanied the sound of the trumpet and their fellow performers' movements on percussion and the piano respectively. It is one of the most complex moments, exploring other dimensions of autobiographical storytelling and, in its own way, touching upon the mystery that every person embodies – much like the image of these little girls and boys in yellowed photographs, smiling at the camera or, rather, looking away with a sulky expression.

We're angry, furious, tempestuous

From the last group photo, a dance of rage unfolds in which the group seems to hurl something at the audience, like participants in a riot. Short, dialogue-driven scenes with a vaguely comic flavour then take shape, in which, in turn and with the support of their peers, each person acts out what infuriates them, almost always linked to the violation of personal boundaries: entering without knocking, invading private spaces, talking over others, preventing them from singing, touching personal belongings. There are also lighter moments, such as teasing *la squadra della Roma* [the football team *Roma*], but the recurring theme always centres on respect for one's personal space. This leads into a musical interlude – which Ersilia will discuss – that perhaps represents one of the most significant achievements of the entire journey.

We are encounters, greetings and smiles – we are the emotion that suddenly overwhelms us

Cristiana has a beautiful voice and is a natural singer. At the microphone, she speaks of her love for singing, the online lessons she took during the Covid pandemic – when we couldn't even hug one another – and how much she likes herself just the way her mum made her, before bidding farewell to the audience by singing her favourite song, *At Last* by Etta James, whilst her companions move around the space, hugging one another at every encounter: *We are encounters, greetings and smiles...*

Giulio and Francesco are then left alone, each telling two juxtaposed stories that do not interact directly, yet constantly resonate with one another, as if this too were a form of narrative polyphony. Francesco recounts episodes from his own childhood that relate to the way he observes and interprets the emotions of others. The theatre, his great passion, becomes an emotional grammar made up of glances, laughter and small details. Francesco always wants to make people laugh and is obsessed with jokes, which he rattles off one after another; and so, almost without giving it a second thought, he recalls an episode from his childhood, when he managed to make his father laugh.

At the same time, interspersed with the sound of a triangle, Giulio also tells a mirror-image story: *the emotion that suddenly overwhelms us*. During rehearsals before going on stage with *Dentro la Tempesta*, Giulio would sometimes find himself so overwhelmed by emotion that he would burst into tears, thinking he wouldn't be able to carry on. It was very difficult for him to accept the idea that there is no such thing as the 'wrong' emotion on stage, especially when it is so overwhelming. We haven't yet fully grasped this possibility: that of being moved in front of an audience and feeling not only entitled to it, but right at the heart of what we're doing. It's an issue that concerns the whole group, from various points of view: learning to be present with what's happening, without shying away from the emotion but also without flaunting or manipulating it.

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We are fear…
Talia's solo, on the other hand, introduces the theme of mourning. Talia grew up in Mexico and recounts her memories of *the Día de los Muertos*, a festival which she describes as 'sad and happy', during which loved ones who are no longer with us return to celebrate alongside us. The group joins in her story by singing *México lindo y querido*, whilst Talia and Giulio dance a *pas de deux* at the centre of the stage – a moment that brings them immense joy and helps them overcome the emotional strain of the previous scene. The scene concludes with a group moment in which everyone enters carrying a small candle representing the gift they would like to give to a loved one: a pack of cards for Dad, a plate of pasta with sardines for Mum.

Death is an important theme for our group, made up of adults who, in most cases, have already lost one or both parents. For those of us who are not fully independent in an ableist world, the loss of those who look after us is an enormous blow, as are illness and our own fragility.

This scene, which is somewhat the dramatic climax of the piece, leads us towards the finale, where Nicole initially entered the scene, asking to speak to the doctor because all this darkness had made her anxious. I play the 'doctor' – a key figure for users of a service such as the Polo: I engage in dialogue with Nicole, initially to listen to her anxieties, gradually to share my own, and finally to prompt the audience to reflect on their own. This very contemporary theme, 'total anxiety', as Nicole calls it, allows us to share our anxieties with one another – from delays on public transport to utility bills and unpaid fines, from the hoover to the future.

Until Aureliana steps in to list the final source of anxiety: 'the fear of the lift'.

Inside the lift
The whole group steps into an imaginary lift, confined within a small area: a square marked out with tape in the centre of the stage. A choral movement sequence begins, led by Eleonora, in which each person, pressed up against the others, repeats the gesture of the person next to them, like a rippling echo, whilst I, at the microphone, mark the ascent, imitating the voice of an artificial intelligence or a loudspeaker in a public space. At times, the lift comes to a standstill. The group goes through various states: anxiety, shortness of breath, boredom, being too close to others, waiting, fear, the need to go to the toilet.
For many of our students, the lift is a real-life experience, linked to accessibility, independence and even claustrophobia. But in the performance, it gradually becomes something else, until it shatters an imaginary glass ceiling and we find ourselves on top of the world. From there, it's a short step, and each of us takes it in the direction we choose, breaking through the imaginary walls of the lift and scattering in every direction. We finally take up all the space we're entitled to and dance on a stage that has become the sky, as light as dragonflies.

Here we are: we are young people dancing with the moon and the stars, tears of freedom. Ready to sing our song, *Compilascìon* – which until that moment had emerged in fragments along the way – from start to finish, all together, with a collective voice that encompasses them all, bringing the journey to a close right where it began.

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PART II — *Compilascìon*: from a song to the birth of a choir
Ersilia Prosperi

The musical journey – the first steps
Whilst so far we have mainly described the process through which autobiographical material took shape in the script, I would now like to revisit this same journey from another perspective: the musical one. The creation of *Compilascìon* coincided, in fact, with a gradual shift in the group's relationship with music and, in particular, with their own voices.
At the start, my aim was relatively simple: to learn, memorise and sing the song *'Compilascìon'* together, whilst managing to incorporate it into the performance without losing the theatrical focus. But little by little, as new scenes, new memories and new material emerged, the musical work also expanded, and new objectives and possibilities came to the fore.

When we started, singing together presented several challenges: shifting from one tonal context to another, simultaneously repeating the same melodic pattern at the same pitch, and waiting for the precise moment to start singing or playing. Over time, the group has developed a greater ability to breathe in unison, follow the conductor's cues, respond to dynamic instructions and use their voices to express different musical intentions and styles.

Learning to sing together
Our initial work on the song began with 'Macchia', a puppet the group was already using in their theatre work to memorise their parts. Sitting in a circle, Macchia was passed from one person to another, and whoever caught it would sing their line of the song; we then repeated the same game, adding the melody. This simple exercise allowed me to observe how confident each person felt using their voice and what their relationship was with timing and waiting.



Singing the verses of the song whilst passing the Macchia puppet

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We then began to sing whilst walking freely around the space, without a set direction. The aim was also to make the act of singing feel more effortless, seeking the same naturalness with which one might walk down the street humming or whistling a familiar tune.

The work developed from a set of practices linked to the Orff-Schulwerk idea, using rhythmic and melodic patterns, movement through the space, *stop and go* exercises, and following the piano, trumpet or percussion. Gradually, we delved deeper into vocal work on arpeggios and melodic patterns introduced by the piano or a solo voice and then repeated by the choir. It was precisely during this work that I began to recognise musical abilities and skills that had hitherto been largely unexpressed, upon which it was possible to build further.

Listening before singing

A significant change took place when I introduced an exercise inspired by Edwin Gordon's concept of *'audiation'*, asking the group to mentally visualise a melodic phrase before singing it.

The melody would be presented and then left in silence for a few seconds, with each person asked to continue hearing and visualising it in their mind before reproducing it. Sometimes we used neutral syllables, at other times the names of the notes; only later did we return to the song's lyrics. For several months, every *Compilascìon* rehearsal was preceded by ten minutes of this exercise.

Alongside the collective work, there were also very brief individual moments – almost like micro-vocal lessons within the workshop – which allowed us to devote a few minutes of specific attention to each person and the characteristics of their voice, their difficulties and their strengths.

Silence thus became part of the musical work: a time to listen inwardly before producing a sound, to let the ear rest, to clear the mind of other sounds and intrusive thoughts, and to prepare the breath.

The individual voices within the choir

This process was not the same for everyone. Aureliana, for example, tended almost always to come in early at the start, beginning to sing a few seconds before the rest of the group. It was essential to learn to follow the conductor's cues, keeping the attention on my gestures and waiting for the right moment to come in without rushing ahead. In the finale of *Compilascìon,* when we sing the song that gives the show its title, this process becomes particularly evident: I stop playing and let silence fill the space for a few moments, until I have the attention of the whole group; then, after a collective breath, we all start again together.

Giulio, on the other hand, has a lovely voice and good intonation, but at the start he sang very little. As the work progressed, not only did he begin to use his voice more, but instrumental skills we didn't know he possessed also came to the fore. In the sequence of *tableaux vivants*, he joins the small musical ensemble on the piano, keeping the beat whilst the trumpet improvises phrases of varying speed and duration, adapting to the interruptions required by the scene. Nicole also joins the ensemble, playing the snare drum and cymbals

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with her sticks, demonstrating a natural ability to alternate between her right and left hands and to slot into the musical flow.

Building the choir also meant creating the conditions for different skills to emerge and find a practical role within the show.



The group explores the song using the instruments

From individual singing to collective vocals

Another significant milestone was the work on *México lindo y querido*, which accompanies Talia's account of *the Día de los Muertos*. Her autobiographical recollection led the group to grapple with a different language, a 3/4 time signature and a musical world new to the one they had explored up to that point.

The scene begins intimately as I accompany Talia's story on the guitar with short melodic fragments inspired by ranchera music; then Cristiana, the group's most confident soloist, joins in, and the song initially emerges from the dialogue between our voices and the guitar. Subsequently, the whole choir joins in, producing a marked shift in energy. The individual voice does not disappear into the collective one: the two dimensions alternate and support one another.

Within the choir, some members – such as Francesco, Floriana and Massimiliano – possess particular vocal confidence and a remarkable ability to memorise lyrics. Their presence therefore provides support for the rest of the group at times when shyness or insecurity arise.

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Towards polyphony

Over time, the work has begun to extend beyond its initial musical objectives. One of the most significant developments arose precisely from the *Anger Blues*, the musical segment that follows the scenes in which each person acts out what makes them furious. From that work, we subsequently moved on to *Tempestosi*, a new song in which we began to experiment with three-part parallel polyphony, using simple harmonisations built on major, minor and dominant seventh chords.



The choir at the piano

Our music

At the end of this journey, I believe that the most significant change does not concern a single musical skill, but the group's relationship with music. The voice, singing and, gradually, the instruments have become languages through which they express themselves and recognise their own abilities. As Aureliana says: 'I've learnt to modulate my voice', demonstrating that she can recognise and name her own musical achievements.

Today, music is something that belongs to them, it is their music. Sometimes I think the group resembles a rock band more than a class: a space where teachers and the *Tempestosi* share music, memories, cultural references and fragments of a shared generational history, and where roles can constantly be redefined. We are all *Tempestosi* and, at different times, we can all teach and learn something from one another.

This familiarity with music and with one's own voice continues to open up new possibilities. Recently, at Marta's suggestion, we went through the entire script of the show in the form of a *recitative*, and everyone freely improvised a melody to their own lines, with a naturalness that would have been unthinkable at the start of the journey. Even *the name gesture* – a warm-up exercise in which each person says their name whilst making a gesture that the group repeats – has evolved into a *sung name gesture*: today, everyone sings their name to an improvised melody, which the choir then takes up. Building on this practice, we have

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recently been able to work with ease on the pentatonic scale, using the gestures from the *Kodály* method.

Conclusions
By Marta Gilmore and Ersilia Prosperi

Since we presented this educational programme at the Athens Convention, the *Tempestosi* group has taken on the challenge of staging a more fully realised version of the work. Thanks to the support of the local authorities, we were able to make our debut in a local theatre before an enthusiastic audience, who laughed, applauded and wept at every moment. On the one day of a particularly stormy downpour during a sweltering summer, our *Compilascìon* celebrated its success and also marked its conclusion.

This final phase, too, had its share of small and big victories and setbacks. When we resumed work after the holidays, Nicole refused to return, following yet another row that had flared up during the summer break. Despite our efforts, we were unable to persuade her, and her dialogue scene with the doctor was taken over by Aureliana, who turned it into a hilarious and lively performance. It was only then that we realised Aureliana should have been given more of a role earlier on, and that what had started out as a stopgap for a withdrawal we'd deeply regretted allowed us to recognise something we'd failed to see until then. At the same time, through the *Tempestosi* project, Nicole – who we hope will return soon – was able to express her musical talents, which led her to join *Le Zebre*, Ersilia's music workshop, which she has not left.

One of the starting points for us was the desire for this group to find a way to tell their stories beyond the lens of disability. After the performance, many people from the audience told us they had recognised themselves in those stories: they had grown up in the same neighbourhoods, belonged to the same generation, had experienced the same feelings of shame, the same teenage crushes, and were living with the same inevitable anxieties. Throughout the process, we repeatedly came up against what we perceived as a form of 'diminishment': the adult with a disability treated as an eternal child, defined primarily by their needs and what others do for them. We were faced with people who had many years of life behind them, lived to the full with passion and resilience, and we wanted to work with them to find a way to bring these life stories to life within a collective creation of which they were the full authors.

Linking the development of new skills to our own life experiences and to the things we hold dear can spark and consolidate learning, anchoring it in deep roots. For everyone, being the authors of their own narrative, learning by connecting collective experience to their inner world, and ultimately being able to convey this complexity to the outside world whilst feeling seen and heard, can be a source of wellbeing and personal growth.

Taking the Orff-Schulwerk as our starting point, the learning space was the group that gradually became a choir. The choir as a character/community in ancient theatre and as a musical entity, where each voice joins the others without any one prevailing or being drowned out. It is no coincidence that the dramatic threads emerged from the anthem-like song *Compilascìon*, from which the various solo voices branched off to recount a part of

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their own lives. And it is within the choir – understood also as a polyphony of voices that do not necessarily converge on the same melodic or narrative line – that each solo finds the opportunity to occupy its own space.

All this brings to the fore a tension that has run continuously through our work: that between caring for people and the pursuit of an artistic and aesthetic quality that would drive the narrative forward. In theatre, as in music and dance, we have continued to set real challenges, without determining in advance which possibilities were or were not accessible to each individual. For us, this has also meant seeking to move away from the still widespread notion that artistic activities aimed at adults with disabilities are primarily recreational, entertainment-based or socialising opportunities.

One thing we would like to emphasise is just how important, throughout this process, the interplay between theatre, dance and music has been, as well as the ongoing collaboration amongst the teachers. Music, by reclaiming its narrative function within the broader dramatic framework, returns to that ancient connection whereby it forms part of a whole that gives it meaning and amplifies its impact; at the same time, theatre draws on the music and dance not as embellishments or ancillary languages, but as forms capable of condensing, transforming and communicating experience.

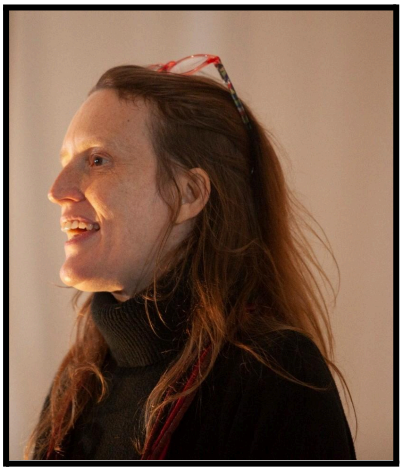
Exploring one's own musicality, discovering the ability to sing in tune, to sing and play together, but also to express feelings through the body, movement, silence and play, means acquiring new languages and new means of communication. In some cases, we felt that it was not only what the *Tempestosi* were capable of doing that changed, but also their perception of their own potential, as if each individual and the group itself could push their boundaries and gain a new sense of self.

To maintain this complexity whilst respecting specific needs, individual paces, health issues and the practical limitations of a twice-weekly workshop, the slow pace at which we began was a fundamental element, alongside our work as a team. A process that brings together the complexity of people's lives, the quality of artistic research, and the opportunity to continue learning which requires a different timeframe from that dictated by the need to produce a result to be showcased by fixed deadlines. Not having an annual showcase as our end goal allowed us to let certain possibilities emerge and then to have the time to recognise and develop them. It also required a community of teachers, educators, practitioners and coordinators capable of jointly supporting both the artistic process and the people participating in it.

The proverb says that it takes a village to raise a child. Our experience tells us that it also takes an entire community to nurture a poetic and artistic creation – a community that accompanies it, protects it and allows it to spread its wings.

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Marta Gilmore, trained in Acting and Directing at the Centro Internazionale La Cometa in Rome (2004), is a theatre director, playwright, dramaturg, and translator with over 20 years of experience in professional theatre and performing arts education. In 2004, she founded the independent theatre collective *Isola Teatro*, directing and devising productions presented at national and international theatres and festivals. She has also translated plays by authors including Brian Friel, Caryl Churchill, Martin McDonagh, and Athol Fugard, for both stage productions and publication.

Since 2023, she has been Educational Coordinator of CDMT – Centro Didattico Musicale e Teatrale, overseeing music, theatre, and performing arts projects that combine artistic and pedagogical research in collaboration with schools, cultural institutions, and local communities. Since 2022, she has led theatre projects at Polo Lumière (ASL Roma 1), including *Compilascìon*. She is also co-artistic director of AllezEnfants!, a theatre festival for secondary school students in Rome, and has collaborated with Teatro delle Albe on Non-scuola educational theatre projects for nearly twenty years.



Ersilia Prosperi is a trumpeter, composer, and music educator. She holds a degree in Sociology from Sapienza University of Rome, a degree in Jazz from the Conservatorio Licinio Refice in Frosinone, and an Orff-Schulwerk Certificate from the University of Rome Tor Vergata and CDM Onlus. Her musical training also includes classical and jazz trumpet studies in Italy and Cuba.

She has performed and recorded internationally, collaborating with artists including Amy Denio, Meklit Hadero, Antonella Ruggiero, and Calibro 35. She founded the experimental jazz group OU, composing and arranging three albums released and presented in the United States and Europe. Her artistic work also includes music for theatre, film, and interdisciplinary performances.

Since 2023, she has taught trumpet and ensemble music at CDMT – Centro Didattico Musicale e Teatrale in Rome, where she directs several brass and youth ensembles and leads interdisciplinary music workshops. Her educational practice combines improvisation, collective composition, and ensemble work with people of different ages and backgrounds. She also collaborates with Polo Lumière (ASL Roma 1), where she leads music workshops and oversees the composition and musical direction of Compilascìon.

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