Съфинансирано от Европейския съюз

ЦЕНТЪР ЗА РАЗВИТИЕ НА ЧОВЕШКИТЕ РЕСУРСИ

CREATOSPHERE

Song of the Soul

the journey



Song of the Soul is a Youth Exchange focused on emotional awareness, self-expression, and connection through music and creative practice.

The program was held:
18-27 April 2026
in Stolat, Bulgaria





About

You are invited to step behind the creation of this space where music became a tool for growth, connection, and vulnerability.

Whether you are a youth leader, educator, you have a creative practice that you want to develop further, or you are just someone who beliefs in the power of music to transform - ***this is for you.***

We don't gatekeep - dive into the meaning and methodology.

“Music can invite connection in unexpected ways”

- Toni

Author note

To be honest, writing these lines, I find myself on the border of excitement and nervousness.
My connection to this work is very personal as I've firsthand experienced how music can become a guide and a healer.

You are warned! You are stepping into a field where emotions, sensations, and intuitive knowings take the lead. It's a journey where vulnerability meets clarity and practical expertise.

We'll navigate together through this together, rooted in reflection, guided by the lived experience.

Now who am I?



I am Vera - an artist, creator, storyteller, space holder, aka the project coordinator of Song of the Soul.

I will be your guide.

Toni P. Lyubenova



Kris Filipiuk



Let's first introduce you to the **dynamic duo that shaped the participants' journey** and whose complemetary skills and shared vision brought this project to life.

Kris is the architect of the journey. With his expansive knowledge as a designer of learning experiences he took the lead in program design and facilitation, making sure each decision was intentional.

Toni is the vision powerhouse that initiated the project. Writing it's story, co-designing the essence and bringing her creativity and skills in facilitation.

Their reflections are woven throughout these pages paired with practical examples and participants' voices.

Turning this handbook into balanced mix between a practical guide and a journal of what we've created.

This project was about creating the path together, by walking it one step at a time. Every activity, reflection, and moment of vulnerability was a brick in the road we made our own and used to shape the journey.

Building environments for growth includes not only the way they are facilitated, but the whole context surrounding the experience.

Every detail contributes to the space where participants feel safe to open up and express themselves.

Here it's very important to acknowledge all big and small contributions - the visible and invisible elements that come together to create a container for transformation.

the team

Their presence was felt in every moment.
And their contribution was just as meaningful part of the whole.

Ewa Tomicka, Nadejda Petrova & Gavriil Nikolov (Kitchen crew)



Ivailo Petrov (Logistics)



Eve Enfer (PR & Photography)



How to read this handbook?

- Dive into **the story** of Song of the Soul - explore daily themes, activities, and reflections as they unfolded. This is the most immersive way to **experience** the project and understand it.

- Don't need the full story? **Pick and choose** what resonates with you and spark your curiosity. Dip in and out when in need of a particular **reference point.** - Check what's coming ahead

- Follow the core principles, to build your own music-based projects or **adapt** the activities and reflections **to your own work.**



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What is it about music?

"By the end of the fifth day, it felt like music had stopped being the centre of the project. It had become the excuse."

One of our participants wrote that for herself. I can't imagine a more precise capture of what the intention was behind Song of the Soul. A project that on the surface was about music - voice expression, songwriting, rhythm, jamming, recording songs. But music is never about just music. And the best music is not about the music at all.

- Kris

The project emerged from the shared belief: **Through creative methods, we can experience growth and transformation in life.**

Backing the methodology, is research on how musical expression supports cognitive functions. Combined with non-formal education principles, where people learn from their own experience and reflection, the method behind Song of the Soul has proven to be powerful.



This is at the foundation of Creatosphere's mission as well - **to give people creative tools to grow as individuals and as communities.**

Now, how do we shape a journey of transformation in the context of a youth exchange ?

Core principles and values

From the first contact with the participants, to the evening performances and spaces for improvisation, these principles were holding the frame.

Safety
The first priority is building an environment where the participants feel physically and emotionally safe. That way they are willing to experiment and fully lean in the program. Without it, vulnerability and is limited.

Trust
Trust is build through clarity and consistency in the frame. Settled through group agreements and predictable daily routines and rituals. The right balance between structure and freedom opens space for creativity.

Experimentation over perfection
Focused on the process not the outcome. What came was natural, felt and alive - because it was produced from a place of authentic expression rather than pressure to perform.

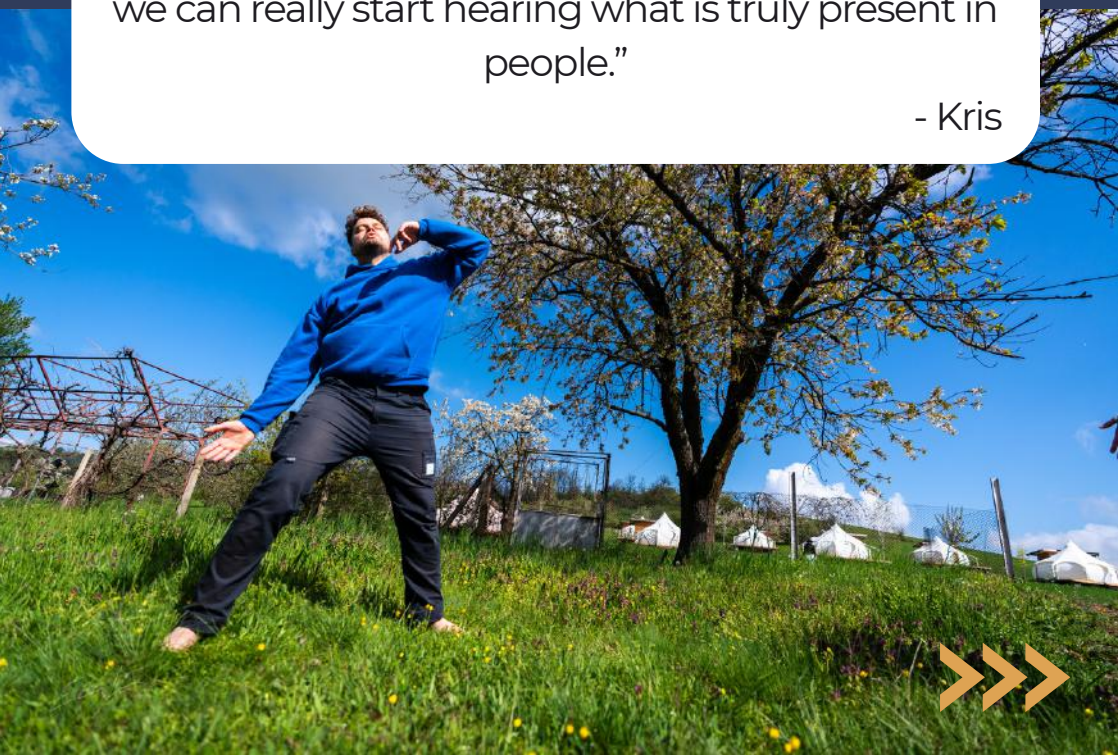
Reflection and Integration

Consistent structured moments for reflection were present each day - to integrate the learning, process emotions, and recognise growth from the experience.

Nonviolent Communication

Integrating NVC as a core mindset where empathy and connection guides us.

> "With the space given for listening to each other we can really start hearing what is truly present in people."
>
> - Kris



Development Arc

Designed as a 10-day activity program, the project balanced structure with spontaneity.

We start by setting the frame that holds it all - what is possible, what is allowed, what is encouraged.

In the first couple of days participants are gently introduced to the project's values and rhythms as it slowly becomes clear what this project is really about and what it's not.

Not a music camp or songwriting workshop, there are no lessons or masterclasses on theory. Instead it is a space for heart-led expression, where music becomes the instrument.

As the days unfolded, the focus shifted to exploration, with invitations that encouraged experimentation and collaboration.

Daily Flow

Each **morning** begins with a topic we are diving in together through practices and group activities. In the **afternoon** the focus is on a task connected to that topic. In smaller groups participants are given the space to approach it with pure freedom of expression.

The small groups are essential - by the time we reached the final phase of the project what started as individual reflection had evolved into collective creation.

Tune In → Listen → Experiment → Express → Collaborate

_ II Deep Dive

Tune in

To arrive - to the space and to oneself.

Each gathering starts with a proper tuning , if you rush or over-explain, you may lose the magic of people discovering the space for themselves and find their place. So how we support them is by simply creating the context to **become aware of what is present.**

This phase is less about doing something, and more about feeling the environment, the energy of the group and slowing down.



This gradual build up based on safety and clarity is making it possible for participants to naturally open up and bring ideas that are aligned with the spirit of the project.

activities

Meeting each other in a musical way :
Introducing music from the first moment is essential to how people step into the experience. Instead of traditional icebreakers, invite them to introduce through sound, rhythm, or movement

Grounding practices
Breath and intentional movement invite deep connection to self and from that place everything becomes more meaningful.

Introducing the space:
Giving them time to feel around the space - literally and metaphorically - allows participants to settle in the energy and feel the space as their own.

Co-creating group agreements:
This process creates inclusion and builds ownership and trust - We're in this together.

Question for you:
How do you support participants feel welcome and to arrive in the space ?

II Deep Dive

Body to voice

The arc of expression

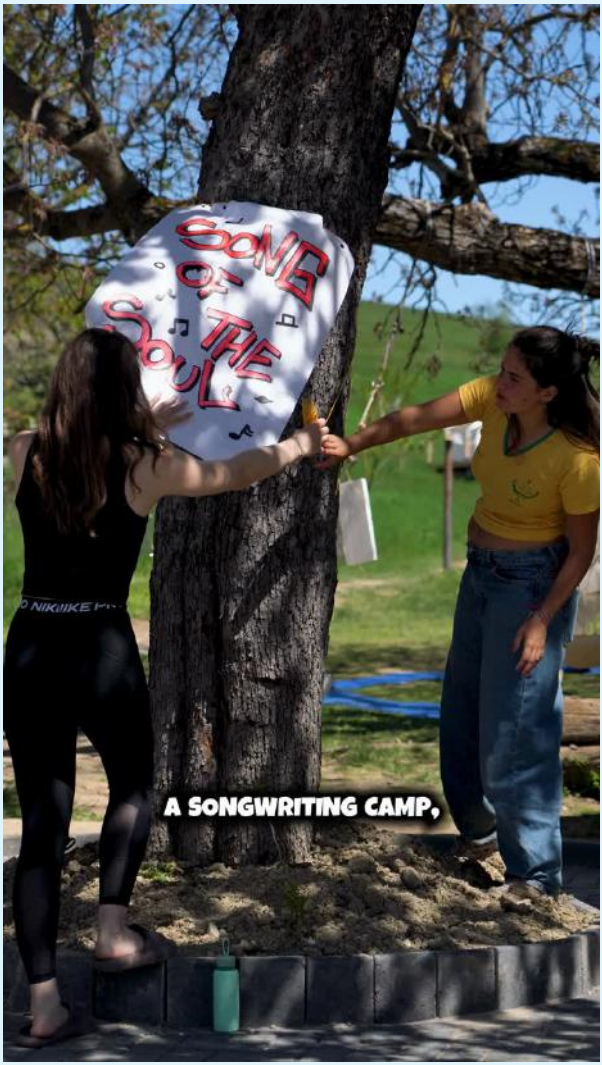
Warming up the voice is a journey that followed an intentional progression - going deeper in vocal expression was introduced on day 5 where we connected expression to emotions.

Why this build up matters?

1. The body is the first instrument – it carries tension and unspoken emotions - By starting with movement and breath we release physical barriers, unlock emotions and align the mind and body. This creates the needed fondation for vulnerability and expression.

2. Once the body is awake and present, the voice becomes a natural extension of that energy.

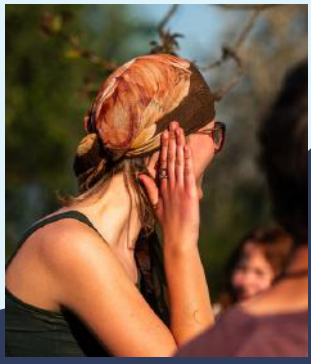
This is the natural flow the program followed that builds confidence gradually and feels intuitive and safe.


SONG OF THE SOUL
A SONGWRITING CAMP,

_ II Deep Dive

Listen

the foundation of empathy, trust, and collaboration.



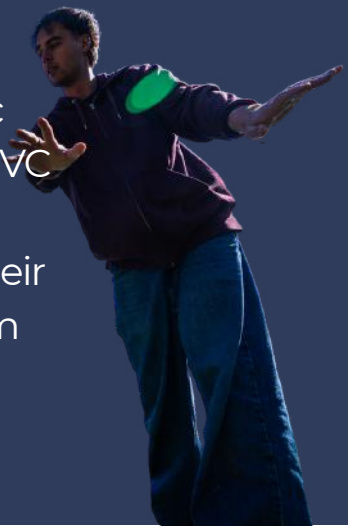
The aim is to come together as individuals, each as an important part of the whole.
'I know why I am here, and make it heard.'
'I feel as a part of the common group."

- Kris

This phase is about **finding our shared rhythm** as a group and **deepening our ability to listen** - ourselves, and to the others. We are setting intentions about what we are here to experience.



We invited empathetic listening by integrating NVC practices supporting participants to identify their needs and express them clearly.



activities - day 1, 2, 3:

Setting the intention

Participants are invited to co-create the experience, ensuring it resonates with their needs .

Drum circle

What else to feel the common rhythm than a guided rhythm session. In a circle we exploded rhythms.

—

Making instruments from scratch

Using everyday materials -boxes, recycled items, art supplies - participants crafted their own instruments that they would use in the course of the week.

Miroring

A powerful embodied method for practicing deep listening and presence.

—

Foley Synchronization

Challenge for synchonisation, patience and precision.

Question for you:

How can you use sound-based activities to invite collaboration, and non-verbal communication?

"Every evening was the heart of the project. I could hear people really stepping in and opening up – it was personal, carrying depth. The presence and encouragement from the audience I witnessed in those moments was the most beautiful experience. Being able to create that space where support emerges and people are really using it to show themselves – that was a gift."

- Kris







How we did it?

Kris on the philosophy behind the evening performances:

The sign up list *emerged intuitively - it was a simple but powerful idea that shaped the whole concept. In the morning, a list is opened where people could* ***pre-sign and secure their spot for the evening.*** *This created a space where participants could be witnessed sharing whatever they have to share in a musical form.*

The impact of this tool was positively surprising*. The sign ups grew until we ran out of spaces as the program progressed.*

This approach was especially meaningful and supportive to those who don't decide on the spot, who aren't feeling their most extroverted and confident when they need to grab the spotlight. By securing their place in advance, they could really commit fully to showing up with intention bringing a vulnerable piece in a space that held them.

_ II Deep Dive

Experiment

there are no mistakes

Day 4 was all about reimagining the ordinary - turning everyday objects into instruments, simple sounds into stories, with **curiosity being a guiding force.** It was designed to awaken wonder and play.



How could this object sound?

activities

Sound exploration - on a curiosity walk

Practicing the art of noticing and responding to the impulses - to see, to hear and to to engage with the environment started with silence.

Curiosity about others

We deepened the connections through the act of drawing in small groups - by asking one simple question: What is something I haven't had the chance to share about myself until now?

STOMP

The afternoon's work in groups was dedicated to finding sounds that inspire and put them together in a soundscape on a pre-determined topic.

Tip:

Encourage 'ugly' art. The goal isn't to create a 'perfect' performance - it's to try something new and have fun with it.

Express

let them hear you

Once connected to their voice, we focus on **finding the words** to express emotions and stories. It was given space for individual and group reflection, experimentation, and sharing - where participants transformed feelings into lyrics.



activities

Writing games

Using different prompts to how words fit together, putting limitations either on the form, or the way the lines begin. The group engaged in bringing poems to life. (What is a poem than a combination of lines. We focused on the meaning, and rhythm more than any poetic structure)

—

Emotions come to life

Collaborative task - to put those emotions and words into a collective piece performed in small groups.

Question for you:

How can you guide participants to translate raw emotion and articulate expression?

Group vocal improvisation

practical guide

Warm-up

→ Start with vocalization (humming, vowels, even just giberish to get comfortable making sounds.

- It can be with close eyes if it brings more ease.

Tip: Remind participants there are no 'wrong' sounds. The goal is to explore and release.

Repetitive phrasing

→ Move into mantra-style singing to build energy

Tip: Keep the phrase short and easy to repeat. Let the group find their own rhythm.

Harmony

→ Support the group to build harmonies.

- Start with simple intervals or call - response (depends on the musicality on the group)

Tip: You can use an instrument to give a tone and model harmony

Close with a jam

→ focused on connection and spontaneity

Tip: This isn't about showing off skill, but about presence. Give the group space to explore, and encourage inclusion and participation.

_ II Deep Dive

Collaborate

everyone takes part

Collaboration is not about just working together, but building something greater than the sum of its parts.

Honoring every voice and contribution, in this phase the group combined energies working together towards a common mission - **preparing for the Open Day:**

The team set the intention - to expand the magic we've created and whitnessed throught the week to the outside world involving poeple from the local community in creation, play and celebration.

The group planned and executed - pouring their creativity and soul.



activities

Writing and recording songs

Over two days participants work in small groups and individually to craft lyrics and music that they wish to record. It's no more just experiments - we are creating something that stays. Each song carrying a piece of participants' journey.

Open Day

Supporting individual ideas and curiosities to merge into a collective action. Guiding with questions, providing materials and inviting people was the task of the team.
Participants came together to plan performances, workshops, impro games, even a whole musical for opening the day. **What can emerge when we just give the space for it.**

Question for you:

How can you support participants to fully own their vision?
How can you ensure the impact of your project extends beyond its final day?
How can you engage the local community in a way that creates lasting connections and sparks positive change?

Final Reflection

How you can do it too?

Don’t pay that much attention to the song, but more to the soul.

- Kris



Looking back it wasn't about the activities or even the final performance. It was in the raw, unfiltered moments of expression where playing, being silly, but also being very connected and vulnerable is possible. That's where the magic happened. When people felt safe to let go, to be seen with all they carry, to receive support and to give back.

For environments like this to thrive, most of all, is needed for us - creators, to return to what makes us all human. How we hold the space, the energy we bring, the courage to be real.
With our presence alone we strip away the layers of expectation and performance and what is left is the essence and shared humanity

And that's the heart of it all.

Legacy and impact

Participants' voices

In the spirit of creation and collaboration, there are a few initiatives that outlive the project which I find important to mention.

1

With his journalist skills and digital competence, Marc - the Spanish group leader - created something special. **A journal of the activities** capturing voices of participants in the moment, preserving raw, unfiltered reactions and experiences.



This is now a page where Song of the Soul community can connect, revisit, and find inspiration - a space to return for a reminder of the magic we co-created and who was part of it.

2

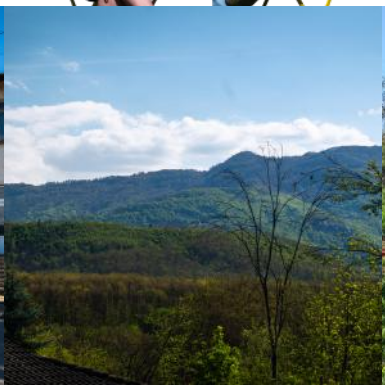
What began as a curiosity - evolved into a mission to get to know more about the stories of the small village the project was held in - Stolat.

An expected collaboration emerged as a group of participants decided to dig deeper - through research, interviews and surveys, determined to contribute to the place and not just leave as casual visitors. That's how the **Stolat infobook** was born.

more information to follow on our website









Playlist

→ The songs created during the project were recorded on the spot and mastered by Mihail Penkov in collaboration with Kris

In the valley - Vera - “Creation asks for you one thing - to be real and show what’s inside you.”
Lean on Me - Jad, Eliška & Agnis - “A song about helping each other to overcome a shared fear.”
Comfort Me - Agnis Vanags - “Reflection on personal feelings during the time of writing.”
Song of the soul - Anastasija - “Song created for the musical on the Open day“
Honey - Ecia
Give a little love - Collective song made by looping sounds

→ Songs parts of performances that happened in the course of the project (recorded on a phone)

Petrunko - adaptation of Bulgarian folklore song
Rainy day - group improvisation
I can feel your heart beat - mantra

hear on our website
creatosphere.org

Author's closing

To be a human among humans

a short poem capturing the quiet magic of meeting yourself in others

I am sitting finally alone,
after two weeks in a shared home,
with people I've barely known
but I saw myself in.

In whispers at dawn,
Big long hugs,
In the moment you wake up
with a cup of coffee and
exchange first words.

In the excitement of making a song,
the words are forming in a melody and it's just me that's holding it all to be a reality.
Is that easy!

In the spontaneous creation,
two sound shaping a rhythm
and a story - celebration.
We can all be free!

In the breath of smoke
by the fire provoked.
I see myself in you sitting cozy
in the cold shaky rocks -
to be close to us.
I feel myself in the moment
you jumped off the tree -
dangerous.

Ah, that adventurous spirit
you carry, I carry - in me.
And I see myself clearly
in the way you dance,
Immersed in the moment,
moved by fire, water, air or earth.

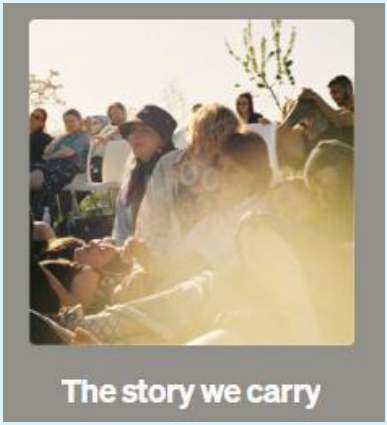
In the rain drops
you catch in your hat,
In the curious way
you call a cat.

I see me in your experience
and I treasure every bit of it.

I guess all I wanted to say is
that I see what we all share.
The simple nature of a human being
You, me, us, we're all there.

And still, connection is beyond what is seen
It's rather felt
The way I experienced it
even hard to explain myself.

I know one:
I'm here
because someone
can see themselves in me.
And that's enough
to just be.



I had to put my emotions in a melody after this purely magical experience I witnessed, and here you can hear:
"The story we carry"

Thank you to anyone involved!
Yours, Vera



Photos by:
Eve Enfer
@foxiontherun

Song of the Soul

Song of the Soul project would not have been possible without the support of our partners and the Erasmus + program of the European Commission.

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