

## **“Music is the best therapy I can imagine” – psylife-interview with Kevin Imbrechts aka Illuminine**

*(EEK) Recently the Flemish guitar player and composer Kevin Imbrechts aka Illuminine was diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) and Asperger's syndrome. In our interview he explains how his diseases influenced his life and his new album “#3” and how music helps him to express himself and to cope with his diagnoses.*

**Your music is very emotional and it touched me a lot. However composing can be a very logical and functional process but it can also be mainly driven by emotions. How do you compose your songs? Why are you concentrating more on music than on writing lyrics?**

I always write my music in solitude at home, in my tiny (and messy) music room. That's how I prefer to work, in my trusted environment. It's really hard to be creative in an unknown environment. Usually ideas or songs come spontaneously, first there has to be a bad feeling, a negative state of mind. If I'm feeling bad, I can write one (or even more) song(s) a day. On the other hand, if I'm feeling alright or happy I can't be creative, it doesn't work. Most of my music is written unconsciously, without even realizing I'm writing something. I have to feel it and experience it. I have to capture the moment. It's really hard to explain though. When I'm writing songs I always imagine landscapes or abstract figures. I hardly think in concrete words, that's the reason why I mainly write instrumental music. The music speaks for itself. I have difficulties expressing myself via spoken word.

**A while ago you were diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome and GAD. When and why did you decide to look for psychological support? What bothered you?**

At a given moment, my parents and girlfriend forced me to pick up the phone and call a psychologist. Looking back, that was the hardest part of everything. Looking for help looks easy, however, at that time, it was really difficult, nearly impossible. I was ashamed, I felt disappointed. I couldn't help myself, so why looking for someone else to help me? They wouldn't understand me, I thought. I was very sceptical about everything. But at that time I felt so anxious I couldn't function anymore. My life was a total mess. I was constantly anxious about everything. I couldn't sleep and I was constantly thinking about a thousand things. It felt I was living in another parallel world or universe, I dissociated from the real world and started to see or feel things that weren't present in the 'real' life. When I called the psychologist I was exhausted, mentally and physically.

**What has changed since you started your therapy? Why did you inform the public about your diagnoses? Would you like to help other people suffering from similar problems with your music?**

When looking back, I know myself better now. Or at least that's what I think. I learned to embrace my limitations and make the best out of it. It was a long process, with ups and downs. I talked a lot with doctors, psychologists, friends and family. I used to be very quiet, I internalized all my problems and anxieties. Now I've learned to talk about it openly. Talking helps. It's the best possible therapy you can imagine. That's also the reason why I wanted to inform the public about my diagnoses. I feel better when I can talk about it, and, on the other hand, I think people dealing with the same problems can learn from it. I've the impression

people don't want to talk about their anxieties or for example the Asperger syndrome. It's not good, you have to talk about it, learn from other people. And, most importantly, you'll get the feeling that you're not alone, there are a lot of people that want to help you.

**Asperger's syndrome is associated with difficulties in recognizing other people's emotions and with problems concerning social interactions. GAD goes along with permanent sorrow and anxiety regarding all areas of life. Do you see your diagnoses as a chance (for your music)? Where do you notice restrictions (as a musician)?**

On the one hand music is my life, I can't live without it. On the other hand, it's my biggest enemy. I like to compose music and to express my feelings through sounds. However, the music industry itself is very demanding and you have to deal with uncertainties the whole time. That's probably the hardest part of everything. For example, there are many restrictions, performing can be very intense. There are a lot of things happening at the same time and I'm feeling overstimulated. The drive to the venue in busy cities, looking for parking, new environments, talking with strangers, exposing yourself, etc... . Most people can deal with it very well. I can't deal with it, it drives me crazy. For me it feels like a horror movie. Too many stimuli, it's overkill. On the other hand, music is my life, it's my way of communicating with the world and to express myself. There will always be a tension between these two sides.

**How does music help you to cope with your diseases in general? Has the value of music changed for you since you got your diagnoses?**

Without music it would be very hard to cope with my diseases and to embrace my limitations. When I'm writing music, I feel relieved, and, most important, I stop thinking and worrying about everything. It puts my busy mind on hold. It's the best therapy I can imagine. When I finished a song, I feel better. My batteries are recharged. Music is like an addiction to me, but a healthy one. I need it, I can't live without it. Before I got my diagnoses I didn't realize the value of making music. But now, I realize its value, and that's maybe the most important gift of this whole process.

**Which effects did your diseases have on your new album "#3", which was released in November 2018?**

The album is about the darkest chapter in my life, 2017-2018. I felt the need and urge to be creative and to write new music. It was my drug and addiction. It helped me to go through this dark period. The music you'll hear was my guide through life. Without the diseases the record would sound totally different. I hope I can transfer my emotions and feelings to the listener. I would be proud if I could put their lives on hold for 45 minutes and they had the chance to think about the meaning of life. The best possible therapy!