

Defining Creativity S2 E22: Diego Costa transcript

Debbi: Hi, everyone. Thank you for joining me for this episode of Defining Creativity, a podcast that explores where and how creativity is found. I'm your host, Debbi Ponella, a creativity researcher, cultivator, and devotee. On today's episode, we're joined by...

Diego: My name is Diego Costa. The full name is Diego Souza Gomes de Cruz Costa, which I guess is really part of who I am. There's a lot of history in why I have so many last names.

I am a harpist. I am a harp technician. I am a software developer. I am a pet dad. I'm also a husband. I am a lot of things, and this is sort of like a little bit of all that I do in my day-to-day life.

Debbi: Thank you Diego so much for being here and having this conversation with me. I'm really excited for it. I'd like to start just by asking you where does creativity show up in your life?

Diego: Okay. I think in a lot of different things. You know, my full-time job is really being a software developer, and surprisingly, or I guess not, there is a lot of creativity involved in that because it's this sort of like translation between what people are saying and how to turn that into something that a computer understands and is gonna do what this person is wanting it to do. And I always found that kind of fascinating how a computer can actually do things that you tell it to, because it always feels kind of magical.

But there is, I feel like the more I study about it, the more I understand it. I'm like, oh wow, this is actually incredible! And so, I think a lot of the creativity my, in most of my time during the day comes from that.

I feel like another part of creativity is really just like having lived in such different social contexts in my life, because the first 21 years of my life I was living in Brazil. Now I'm 28. So, the last seven years, I've been here in the U.S. and it's crazy how things, they are so small can be so different and like social expectations of how you communicate with other people, what people expect from you, and I feel like this difference in perspective has also made me, you know, think differently.

I think that's part of what creativity is, is just thinking differently based on the circumstances around you. And, even like the college studies that I had, which I also studied university back in Brazil, so that was also very different. And like what is again what's expected? How you're graded? How you're viewed? How you're treated? And I feel like these you know breadth of experiences sort of funnel what you think of creatively, yeah.

Debbi: So, I love that there's different cultures that you're talking about. And within those cultures, what differences do you see as far as how creativity is viewed or as it's embraced and valued?

Diego: Yeah, I think there's a... there is a difference in rigidity and flexibility between these two cultures. And maybe the expectation when I say this is that Brazil is more flexible and United States is more rigid. But in some things, it's actually the opposite. And maybe it'll be more interesting to talk about the opposite because sort of like what people least expect: Brazil is very... This is going to sound so crazy, but it's very rigid in its flexibility.

And what do I mean by that is that the way you talk to people has to be very laid back and has to be very personal. So, like for example, one thing that people always think about... Brazilians specifically when they come to the US is that Americans say no very abruptly. And for a Brazilian, when you hear an American just say "Oh no, I can't do that..."

So, for example, if you invite them to a party like, "Oh sorry. I'm busy. I can't do that." For some Brazilians that comes off as like, "Oh so you don't care about me. Oh, so I'm not important."

So like there's just different social expectations and even though we are very flexible in our behaviors and how close we are with people, how we always embrace people, and how our parties are always like extravagant and how we talk to random strangers in the street and we're like hugging them after two minutes talking. At the same time we're this flexible, it's also very rigid in how small things like saying no to someone can be perceived as so faux pas if you don't do it correctly. Of course it's possible, but it's such a learned behavior that when you encounter the other side, which is here, that people are way more direct, you're like, "Oh okay."

And then I learned in my life to learn the difference between just a cultural difference and when people are actually being rude to you, because sometimes they can be, but sometimes there is really just a cultural difference. I remember some of my first days in the U.S. When I came here to study, I was still very used to just hugging people that I had never met in person. The other thing is also that we're always super close to people when we talk; like we are always very close distance.

And then I remember one time just like approaching someone as I was talking to them because I was like, "Oh no. We're too far apart!" So, I was just getting close to them, and they started walking back away from me. And I was like, "Oh, why does this happen?" And I remember feeling so... like inside, I was feeling so offended by it. And then I had to think, wait, is this... is them just, you know, having their personal space, which is something that's very American—having your personal space—or do they just not care about me and just want to be away? You know, I actually became good friends with this person after, you know, weeks and years, so I think it's more of this personal space cultural norm, right, cultural symbol that people have.

Debbi: Yeah, yeah, that's fascinating because you, in a way, if we're tying it into creativity, it's just being able to read the room and understand and being open to people having different norms and reading how you are differently right and the fact that you're able to do that and function, and maybe it took a bit of adjusting, but to be able to be in different situations in different cultures, um, and not get caught up in your own view, to be able to be open to different perspectives, and I think that ties right into creativity, right; to understand things from different perspectives and have that.

Debbi: (7:45) One thing I did want to make sure to follow up on is you were talking about some of the different functions. So, thinking toward computer engineering, I love that you use the word magical. For me an understanding of engineering in that way and everything seems very math and science oriented, and I think it's really valuable to look at those things as more creative, not just the critical thinking, but to have that sort of merging of critical and creative. So, I love having that idea of in these intangible ways, thinking magical. Can you talk more about your process and how that creativity does tie into your work as a software engineer?

Diego: Yeah. You know the thing that came to my mind as we were talking, was when I was teaching this course at IU. It was a course on mathematical logic, and we called it discrete structures. So discrete mathematics for computer science students. And the reason I say that is that it's probably the most... I don't know what people might think of the most critical and like static kind of course. It's very mathematical, it's very formal. It's a little theoretical even.

But, I have always thought that perhaps this distinction between you know in Portuguese we call it the exact sciences and the humane sciences. I always found it a little weird to distinguish them because I feel like they both use... They both require logical thinking at the same time that they both require you to be creative in how you approach things. Like it doesn't work if you meet... I mean, I'm talking about more personal experience here, but every great historian that I've met or great Ph.D. student in literature or any other so-called humane sciences that I've met, had a very logical mind and the things they write are very logical.

Their arguments are very well structured. In a way that reminds me the proofs I had to teach and write in teaching that course. So, I also always looked at mathematics in this part of more abstract mathematics as very poetic, even. It's very creative. It's very free in a way because one thing I would always think is, and that reminds me a little bit of music... but I will get to software engineering, I promise... is that there is a lot of freedom in sort of imprisoning yourself under certain parameters you have to follow. I think it was one of my harp teachers actually talked about it: how sometimes the imprisonment in a measure line gives you freedom to express yourself. That without it, it would be difficult.

And sort of my musical taste goes to that as well because sometimes I feel like music that if a composer chooses okay, I'm only gonna use two instruments, whatever they are, to write a piece of music and that imprisonment sort of lets them flourish in a way more interestingly. If they're just like, I'm just gonna write for 130 instruments in a huge orchestra. And sometimes I feel like those small, contained exercises are way more interesting.

But going back to math anyway, I'm saying this because you know sometimes I'll teach proofs to my students and I'm like you know if you absorb the categories that we are teaching you, be it sets, real numbers, be it graphs, and then you remember how they're you have this toolbox of how they're organized and how they are defined rules what and guide them. And then you just use this toolbox to pick up whatever you need and jot it in a proof. And then you're like, oh, the proof just sort of writes itself.

So, like your creativity is sort of guided by whatever you have in your toolbox and sometimes it's things you didn't even know are in that toolbox. And so, I feel like part of the creativity in these exact sciences comes from that, comes from discovering what is in your toolbox. And I sort of use that in my in my history courses. No, of course there's another difference culturally speaking about universities at IU. You have a lot more breadth of courses you have to take.

Like as a computer science student had to take history courses for example, which is not a thing in Brazil. So that was one difference I had to deal with. And so, I remember taking a class on Russian expansionism, and I wrote a paper on the role of religion in nationalism in Lithuania, something like that. And then I remember thinking how I'm using the same logic tools I'm using in teaching my course, in writing something that's about history. I'm looking for arguments. I'm looking for definitions, I'm looking for something that makes sense and that will apply to that context.

So, I feel like when you get to computer science, which is far more mathematical than a lot of computer science students even might think about it, there's a lot of this like: This is a tool you have. This is a class. This is an algorithm that you can incorporate here. And if you just have that toolbox, you know, full and well established, you can look at your code and think, "Oh, I can! I can use this one algorithm here, or I can implement this design pattern in this case, and it's gonna work well." So, I think there is a lot of creativity in there because it's never closed in which you have to write something one specifically. There's only there's not just one answer. Just like when you're writing a proof, there's not just one proof you can write to prove something. Uh, there's not just one program that does exactly what you want. Um, there's not just one argument to show how I don't know how being the only Catholic country in the USSR makes Lithuania so distinct from all the other countries. You know, there is a lot of paths you can take, and you choose whatever aligns better with your little toolbox.

Debbi: (14:30) So you're talking about being a sort of a technician, as far as with the computer software, you're thinking in a certain way, at least from my perspective, I would think that's like more non-tangible and you know, and then you're a technician of harps, and that's very physical and everything. Is there overlap in that about how you approach it? Or can you talk about maybe your creative process in one, both, or where it overlaps or diverges?

Diego: Oh yeah, I mean, there's a lot of creativity even in harp technician work because the harp is, it's this very weird instrument. That it almost feels like it shouldn't work, but then it does. And it is also kind of magical how it does. For example, a lot of the work that I have been doing in my job as a software engineer aligns very well with my job as a harp technician that I have to do a lot of debugging. So there's a lot of investigation of what is going wrong, and then you have to go through multiple files and you have to read multiple logs and you have to test out what's gonna happen if you do this. What's gonna happen if you do that.

And a lot of the work of a harp technician is the same. It's the exact same thing. You hear random buzz that's coming from some part of your harp, and you just have no idea where it comes from. And you start testing. You start hammering parts of your harp. You start testing pedals. You start rubbing springs and oiling random parts and removing rods and putting them back on. And then touching random parts of the instrument in very awkward positions to try to recreate the buzz in specific situations, and you're like okay this is it. And then you're I don't know sometimes it's as simple as tightening a screw like fifteen degrees. Sometimes it's as complicated as having to replace a whole rod or... That's actually fascinating to me. It's very physical. Sometimes the problem is that the tape we use surrounding the this piece that holds the rods in the column of the harp is spaced equally in a way that the equal spacing creates a space for resonance between the harp and the actual tube.

And you think, how is that something they can do? And then the way to fix it is just like tying it in uneven spacing because this way the with the different spacings you don't have room for a wave to form in the tube. And you're like, who thought of that? How would this be a place to vibrate? But it is, so there's you know the mechanism has like a thousand moving parts and all of them vibrate. They're all metal pieces. They all loosen up with time, and then it starts randomly vibrating.

And sometimes the investigation process takes you know minutes, hours, sometimes days, and you just discover it and it honestly feels like... It's the best feeling in the world when you finally discover where it comes from and it's sort of like the thingy that I chase when I'm writing software too and something breaks and I'm like, "Oh where is this coming from?" and then you finally found find it and you solve it. You're like, "Yes. Ooh I can give myself a 15-minute break." Just enjoy it. I feel good about myself and then I can move on. Wow.

Debbi: You probably deserve like more like a 20-minute break, but you know we'll if 15. You know be generous to yourself.

Debbi: (18:09) All that that you're talking about, first of all, it really leans into creativity as far as some of the characteristics are like tolerance of ambiguity and just going into this unknown and those creative problem solving skills. It's all that critical and creative thinking that we were talking about. How does that apply? Because not only are you a harp technician, you also play the harp at a very high level. I can say personally, I have enjoyed hearing you play.

Actually, let me take a step back too, and you talked about it in teaching helping students sort of dissect and put together the ideas or in your own studies like that. How does that apply to learning music as a harpist? Because in harp particularly at the high level that you play, it is so deep and complex. So, does any of this that you're talking about apply to how you approach and then perform as a harpist?

Diego: Yeah, you know what I feel like the harp playing... The harp has always been, and probably will always be, the most difficult thing that I do. It's probably the most gratifying also, but it's also so difficult because I feel like it never clicked in me in such a structured way as all the other things I do. Like playing the harp, like I can see the patterns in the music and think, "Oh, this is an arpeggio. This is a scale. This is a trill. This is..." whatever it is, and sort of like try to mechanize it as much as I possibly can.

But, the harp has one difference from all these other things, is that harp technique is very difficult for me personally. And I know that's true for other harpists as well. Even like the best harpers you know, they always say that the technique is so difficult. And it is. It like especially for me, I have physical limitations on what my fingers do that sometimes they're so frustrating because I know what they need to do and they will not respond well to me as well as I want them to.

And that is what makes this so difficult to me because I have it in my brain what I want to happen and trying to make your fingers do that is so, so difficult. And I think it's part of the reason why is how we don't really know how our brains work, right? I try to send a signal to my hands to do exactly that, and my finger that will not lower itself and actually touch the strings. Like, no, I'm not gonna do that. I have no idea why, but I'm not gonna do that. So that can be very difficult.

But in terms of how I learn, I am very grateful for having some characteristics in harp in music learning in general that are very easy to me, and one of them is memorizing. That's something that I feel like I had this issue when talking with my professor Ms. Szmyt that she always says, "Diego, you have to read from the music more because you memorize so quickly that you just stop looking at the music," and that's true because sometimes I stop. I don't notice things are written because I just memorize it really quickly, and I don't know why my brain works like that, but it does. Everything sort of stores there.

I remember my last semester, not last semester, my penultimate semester at IU. I memorized a concerto because I was playing the concerto competition, and I had my whole senior recital and they happened in like three weeks apart. And I really just had it all memorized, and there was nothing I could do to even like make myself forget it. It's just stored here, and there is nothing I can do. So that makes it easier, but then of course my fingers don't respond to what I wanted to do. But it does make it easy to remember things.

The other thing is I've always been a good theory student, and I do believe that knowing music theory helps so much in learning music. And I get that it is for some music that we play sort of outdated in what we are actually doing, but it gives me this basis of tools and of structures that I can use to fall back on. I can use it to predict what's happening musically in like the next measure. I use it to memorize what's going to happen. I, I think in harmonies almost all the time, which has helped a lot in learning and memorizing music. The other thing is that my brain doesn't stop playing music, so if I'm learning something that is just replaying in my brain, with me wanting it or not, it's just playing nonstop.

And then I can tell sometimes as it's playing back in my in my mind that I might not remember the specific measure, and then I can't move on with my day until I go to the music see what I'm forgetting, and then I'm okay now I know, and then I can continue going, and then it's gonna replay, and I think that might help actually. Now that I'm talking about it, that might help in the memorization is that I keep replaying it, but not only replaying in it In the sounds that it makes, I also always remember music in solfege.

But that's also the cultural differences between Brazil and the U.S. In Brazil, everyone learns solfege. There's no such thing as any other method of singing a melody but solfege, and so which is really easy for the harp because the strings are diatonic, so it doesn't matter if I'm playing a C sharp or C flat or a C natural; it's always do. So it's really easy for memorizing harp music to do solfege if you do fixed do solfege.

Debbi: You don't use movable, you use fixed do?

Diego: We use fixed do. We never use movable do because for us those are the names of the notes. It's like calling a G C because it's the tonic, and I'm like, no, that's not do. That's sol. That's always sol.

Debbi: Wow!

Diego: Yeah. So there's one other thing that was, oh that was a big cultural shock, and I remember the first class we had on fixed do because IU is very strong on fixed do right, solfege? I remember for me it was like yeah this is how we always done it and everyone around me was like how do you just know how to do this so fast? But like I literally can I don't know I can like sing the whole Mozart flute and harp concerto in fixed do. It's just here in my mind and that's how I memorize it because it just makes sense to think of it in fixed do. But a lot of musicians do that. I mean, in the US is a little less common, but if you go through all through Latin America, we all do fixed do. That's how we all do it. There's no other option.

Debbi: Wow.

Diego: Yeah.

Debbi: No, I learned movable do, so it's a different language. And speaking of actually, you're talking about a different language. I was thinking that as you're saying it, you're kind of translating the written music into a different language of solfege, into a different language of a physical language that manifests through your fingers. There's a very common understanding that music is its own language and a different language, and it's a language that can cross barriers, which I believe very much so.

How does that affect? Obviously, you're from Brazil, so you speak Portuguese. Do you speak other languages? And are learning languages easy for you? And does any of this come into it?

Diego: (26:03) Well, okay. Yes, I speak Portuguese as my main language. I also speak obviously English. I speak Spanish and French as well in the level that I can communicate and read and all of that. I have learned very basic German, and actually, I went to Germany this summer, and I realized I can, I can like not starve, so I can go to restaurant and buy food, I realize, but it really stops there. It's, it's not for been easy me. To learn it, I have started learning Chinese as well, and I do remember a little bit of it. I remember the... our teacher was always saying that I had very good tones. I was like, yeah, because it's just singing. It's pretty much almost singing, so it's fine. And then yes, it, I know if I have it easier today to learn languages because all these languages I learned, the last one being French, when I was at most fourteen or sixteen, sixteen years old.

So I don't know if today I could pick up another language. I feel like there is this urge and this ease and this like strong desire, this hyper focus that I had as a teenager, that I decided oh I'm gonna learn French, and then I would just stop anything else I was doing during the day and I'll just sit down with a dictionary and just think um what kind of words would I use today? What kind of phrase would I like to use today, and then just discover how to say it. And I'll do that for weeks and weeks and weeks until I actually learned it. So, I don't know if I could do that today, but as a teenager, for sure.

Debbi: Yeah. I guess I might suggest the computer is a different language that you are involved in learning and exploring. I certainly struggle sometimes, and I need someone. Oh, and speaking of... Actually, let me bring this up. One of the things, the tools that I use in presenting, that gets a lot of positive feedback is the Diego Method, named after you because. And I don't know if I'll cut this out, but I have to say this because I do.

So you had put together a Jeopardy, a Harp Jeopardy type of thing with PowerPoint that was just so interactive and in academia, often you have to use PowerPoint; you have to do whatever. And me thinking of you as such an incredibly creative person when I was first getting to know you a little bit was you came up with this amazing interactive fun way to have PowerPoint share information, and it's been something that I've used and I have labeled it and I have referred to it in academic settings as the Diego Method. So...

Diego: Oh my God! I'm so proud and ashamed at the same time.

Debbi: Your legacy will live, and I've actually had people ask me, "Oh, show me how to do that," and I'm like, "Oh, this is the Diego Method." So yes, it is a thing.

Diego: Oh wow! So you know why I came up with it? I feel like that actually ties into what we're talking about in like cultural differences, is that uh. My husband, you know, he loves Jeopardy, the TV show. And so, I first met his family in the Christmas season of 2019, and they were watching Jeopardy. And I remember just looking at it like, oh! And before it was Wheel of Fortune. So, Wheel of Fortune was a show that went to Brazil, and it was very successful. So, I knew Wheel of Fortune, and always found like as a kid it was interesting.

I up, grew I as then and sort of like fell out of it. I was like, okay, I don't find it that interesting anymore. But then right after Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy would start, and I remember watching for the first time. I'm like, I have no idea what's going on. What? What is happening? And I just got so lost in like the clues and the answer in the form of a question format, and I was so confused of what was happening.

But I remember one thing that really liked is how straightforward it was. It was really focused on the game, and it was very direct. And the clues were always interesting, and then I was like, "Okay, never heard of it." That one never came to Brazil, so I had never heard of Jeopardy my entire life. And that's one of the things that I learned just being in the U.S., and that was probably my favorite one.

And then I remember when I came back to do my bachelor's, I was talking to Victoria and to Nathan, my friends. I don't remember how Jeopardy came to be, but I remember thinking that I knew all this like harp repertoire and random harp facts, and it would be nice to one masterclass that our teacher wasn't there if we could just like have a little game that we can play, just like have a nice time with the department.

You know, when I came to my bachelor's in the harp department is really like a family, and so we always want to spend time together and do stuff together, and so I was like, you know what? I'm gonna do Harp Jeopardy. And I don't know why I chose PowerPoint because I later learned that there are websites you can create a Jeopardy, but I was like, no, I want to create my own thing.

I want to have like my Jeopardy stuff. So not only I designed all of that, which I don't remember how I found the time because I don't know if ever even talked about my crazy schedule as an undergraduate student. But I don't know where the time came to create a whole Jeopardy. I remember it took a lot of time and not only that, I would like assign Victoria or Nathan to find audio clips of the repertoire we're using so they can crop it and then add to the animations and stuff. And it was a success full on such; it was a blast. We had three editions. It was very popular. It was really like um, it left a mark in the department. People love it.

Yes.

Debbi: Yeah, and I love that. That's mean part of I think just living creatively, right? You're talking about watching a TV game show and how just being in that atmosphere wasn't even something you were seeking out or you know trying to learn or... No, it's just existing and being aware and experiencing different things and then connecting it to something meaningful and then something that took all of these random facts and these other things and made it meaningful for other people.

I mean, come on, that's amazing and I love it so much. And then I took it and I used it in a totally different way and I think that's such a beautiful thing when we can all be open to different things and just seeing how respecting them for what they are, and not shutting down and being oh it's a game show or it's a this or that you know putting things in the silos that happen all the time, you know, where it's like, oh that's... labeling them I guess you could say or putting them in boxes or... and that you can just have all these diverse experiences and you have a plethora of them already in your young number of years... and then just to have it be part of you and part of you as that creative being and what you can bring to every situation to make it more Diego you know and um and we're all better off for that.

Debbi: (33:41) All right, as much as I really am tempted to dig more into how you personify your fingers in learning harp and how they talk back to you, I do want to talk about environment as far as a creative environment versus one that stifles creativity and what came to mind a little bit as you were describing being a harp technician and you were talking about space for resonance and a place to vibrate and so can you apply that to just how you work in various environments? Where is your creativity allowed the space to vibrate and flourish or are there environments that stifle your creativity or don't allow it to manifest in the same types of ways?

Diego: Oh, that's tough. I feel like part, maybe part of my personality is that I tend to not be... Okay. I tend to be very flexible in like cultural norms around where I am, but I always try to bend in a way that allows me to be uh pretty like warm towards people and just be more myself because I feel like I've always been like that in uh in the places I've been. So, I think of the harp department a lot because that has become my family and every time I go back to Bloomington and visit, I'm like yeah. This is this was the first place I lived in the U.S. so it does feel like it is my home.

I remember sort of like finding my voice in this new context of a new country and nobody that I knew, and still, like being able to make new friends and still being able to discover another side of me but still being, in a nice place. I don't want to be in a place that I feel like I have to... *podar*... How do I say that in English? You know you have a tree and you have to like cut it off when you're gardening it? How do you call...

Debbi: Pruning it?

Diego: Trimming, yes. So like I don't have to trim myself to fit in a specific expectation. I'm like, I want this to be like a nice and a good place and everyone to feel good and I know that sometimes it can feel like too much you know. I feel like nobody likes a place is just obsessed with being perfect, nice and shiny and happy. Like I have my hard times, as well I've had my hard days, definitely had them trying to juggle, you know, I had three jobs on campus at one point in like twenty-five credits per semester, so I barely could do anything.

And that was the semester I came up with Harp Jeopardy. I have no idea how that happened, but it did. You know maybe that is part of it. Maybe that, the restriction we were talking about earlier, this like boundary that you set for yourself, allows you to be way more creative. And sometimes, maybe if I didn't have all this free time, I wouldn't have thought about how to make this free time more enjoyable. And making Harp Jeopardy was really enjoyable. Even though it was a lot of work, I was like, oh, this will be a nice time for everyone.

And I felt like part of it also is that, Harp Jeopardy was not the slideshow that I set up. It was also that, when it happened, you know, we put the TV there and we had the music, and I was being... I sort of like became a character of like this very happy presenter of the TV show, and I was like, "Let's go! Let's play!" And I feel like in the harp department, I always had this persona that really is like probably the best of me that I want to, that want people to think about and remember me for, is this like more happy person, very like positive and hopeful even with difficulties that life might throw at us. I still want to be very positive, even though sometimes I can't. But I want, I want to be. So, I feel like that also helps in this creative endeavor to try to allow creativity to come. Maybe hoping to be the best that we can be is a tool that we can use.

Debbi: (38:14) All of this creativity that you're talking about in these very specific areas and that they overlap, is there a way that you see how you engage with creativity benefiting you outside of work, outside of the professional harp or computer science, or and in life in general? Do you see it manifesting in other ways?

Diego: Hmm... I have to think about that. I don't know. I feel like outside of life, study, work, practice, it's like... What I most do: I read. I watch TV shows. I like traveling. When I travel, I'm not a big fan of the tropical tourism type of travel. I guess maybe because I am from a tropical place, so I'm like that's just going back home. So why would I want to do that? I love to do tourism, that I go to a place and then I obviously act like a tourist. I don't believe in the whole like oh try to live like a local blah blah blah. Nah, you are a tourist; just act like one.

So I get there and I want to go to all the museums. I want to go to the tour... I want to go to the closed down streets that you can just walk through, and then I want to visit the old city, and then I want to see whatever festival is happening. So, I don't want to feel like I am closing myself to a hotel room and sleeping the whole day. Oh yeah another thing that I also like to do actually.

So my brother and I we are very close and we're very similar in a lot of aspects and we have long conversations about the randomnest of topics and one of the topics that we always talk about is urbanism because he is himself an architect and I've always just been interested in urbanism in general. So every city I go, to I have to call him and be like, "Gabriel, you know they have these incredible credible light rail system that actually like functions completely different from any other place you've ever seen." And then these little things just like click on me, and I'm like, oh, I have to talk to him about it. Or like how we were in Montreal, me and him actually two years ago, uh, no, actually was last year. Never mind, last year, and we were visiting their new rail line, and we are actually obsessed with rail systems. And they're like, ah, it's amazing!

It's automated, and all the systems integrate. And look how this met... the subway station has like art in it. How they're all different? I love subway art also. Like when they have something that actually connects to the scenario outside, and have uh in Lisbon they had a lot of that, too. They have like Portuguese tiles for example on the side, or they have this like sculpture, or they use like natural rocks from the area, and they have something interesting there. I'm like, oh, look at that, Gabriel! This is so cool, and how Oh look, this subway system is like inspired by the Paris metro system. And then he's like, oh yeah, that's interesting, right? That's how they did it. Or uh, this neighborhood just feels so pleasant because it has mixed hues or something like that. And they're like, ah yeah, that's perfect.

So this craziness in mind of talking about random topics is actually something that I share with my brother. And maybe that's something that connects us very strongly. And I love talking to him about these random things, which is good because we don't usually talk about work, which makes me ah it usually clears off the mind. Uh, but it is it is interesting how it is like our thing, and how that and I think it does align itself a little bit with creativity, probably more for him that he can use in his work that we pay attention to these things that surround us all the time, because like we were talking earlier, a lot of creativity is about noticing things other people wouldn't notice and just like picking on this and picking on that. And we share this interest in picking on urbanism things, so how cities are organizing themselves and stuff. Like this is my main random interest that just pops up from time to time. I don't know.

Debbi: Yeah. Just seeing things in patterns and making connections whether it's in numbers or in in shapes or in architecture whether it's man-made or it's in nature, being open to those and in the same way that you took all these elements and came up with Harp Jeopardy, also just taking all of these elements and having them be part of how you see the problems and they can just manifest just so randomly like you use the word random. Is it random? I guess it is, but it's all connected somehow. And the connections that we make in our minds, I think that's where it's just beautiful, and I love them.

Diego: Yeah, it's definitely what makes us you know human and interesting and unique. How, you know, we don't... We don't need to be prompted to think. We just do, right?

Debbi: Yes. Absolutely.

Debbi: (43:50) All right, so we're about to get to the last question, but is there anything creative-wise or otherwise that I asked haven't that you wanted to share or explore?

Diego: I feel like you're mostly bringing out creative stuff I didn't even remember what I had done. Like I actually genuinely forgot I had done Harp Jeopardy until you mentioned it. I was like, wait, that's right because you said the Diego Method and I was like, what is she talking about? I didn't devise any method, didn't write a paper about a method, but yeah, I mean, I don't, I don't know if I have any. In other things, I know. I feel like I have so many random interests in life that a lot of them just die down. Like for example, right before I came to the U.S., I was huge on doing crochet and knitting, and then I even brought my knitting needles and crochet to the U.S. and I never did it here. And so, it's like sometimes things just you know move on from things, and you get new interests, and then you lose the old ones.

Debbi: And you never know when they'll come back.

Diego: Yeah. You never know.

Debbi: You know, you might pick that up again sometime, and it be a catharsis in some situation where you're just you... You know, having all of those uh interests, and whether they're fleeting or whether they're cyclical or daily, um, it just makes for a more full life, I think.

Diego: Oh yeah.

Debbi: That's how I feel about it.

All right, well this is the Defining Creativity Podcast. And so, the question that I ask everybody as a final question is: What is your definition of creativity?

Diego: Well I'm glad that we talked about everything we talked about because that sort of helped to come to an answer to that question. I don't know if it's a full answer, but... Yeah, I guess we got to the conclusion at least in you know our conversation that creativity is this ability to notice things that can pass unnoticed.

But also one thing that I also think about, you know, I have just random opinions that come to me in life. Like I was talking about how I don't like this divide between the humane and exact sciences or whatever. Is that I... I don't believe, maybe because it never happened to me, but in my experience, creativity is never this sort of romanticized view of you know idyllically walking in the forest and feeling this inspiration coming from nowhere, and you're like oh I must do this or whatever. It really comes... It does come from you know unexpected moments, but it is most of the time way more boring, way more uninteresting how it comes to me than those stories.

I guess the only big story that I have that's sort of similar to that is how I decided to be... I'm sort of steering away, but this is probably the most interesting story in my entire life: is how I decided to be actually a harpist and come to the United States, which is because I studied electrical engineering in Brazil actually.

I finished high school really early. I was 15 years old when I finished it, and then I got accepted into the public university in my state for electrical engineering, and then I started studying that, as I was studying to be a harpist at the same time in this youth orchestra project. And at one point, all of my classes in college would switch from the morning to the afternoon, and so I would not be able to continue being part of this orchestra project and still learn the harp, so I'd have to drop it, and I had decided that was going to happen.

And that same time around, this tour was announced that we're going to go to Europe to perform in France, Switzerland, and Italy, and it ended in Paris actually in the Philharmonie. So, we played there, and this group of four friends decided to overstay in Paris for a week after the whole tour was done, and then we did. And that's sort of the... the romanticized part, is that, it was like Paris in late September, so it was already like emptying out. And Paris when it's emptying out is the best. It's just, you can go anywhere. There's no lines. It was a little cold, but it's you know it's still a beautiful city and everything.

And I remember we wanted to go to stores to buy music, and then we went to them and we bought a lot of music. That's still how I got my copy of the *Danse sacrée et profane* that I have. It was from that day, and I bought a lot of music. And then I got back home and was like, "Why did I do that? Why am I buying music if I'm deciding that I'm not going to be a harpist anymore? If this is like the last thing I'm gonna do in music?" And then I, the next morning, I wake up and think, "Oh." I don't believe in like signs very much, but this might be my own subconscious telling me, "No. You want to do this. This is what you want to do, and you don't feel like that towards electrical engineering. You wouldn't do anything remotely similar to this other area of study."

And then I told everyone at the table like, "Yeah, I think I'm gonna study the harp, and if I'm gonna study it, I'm gonna study it abroad. I don't know where, but it's gonna happen." And everyone was like, "Yeah, Diego, you should do that. I don't know what you were doing electrical engineering." I could only think, "Oh yeah, great. Thank you for letting me know that that was your guys' opinion, and only now you're telling me, now that I already made my mind." I guess you know it's fine. You know they were in a way respecting what I had thought that I wanted to do, and that was the beginning of everything. You know it took it took me years to actually be able to get to the US. It's a lot of hurdles, a lot of complicated things I had to do. Also, the fact that I came without knowing anybody, but it happened.

And you know if I hadn't decided that one day that I wanted to do that, you know we wouldn't have met. I wouldn't be talking to you right now. And it's crazy how these small decisions happen. And I guess this in a way does tie to how I define creativity because I just noticed this message I was telling myself, that this is what I wanted to do, and I was like, okay, I should listen to it. I should actually do this, and I did. And here I am, even though I, you know, I'm not a harpist necessarily in my like main career.

I work as a software developer, but that's also something else that came out of nowhere. And I decided maybe I should listen to this instinct that I want to do because even though I said earlier that I didn't feel like that toward electrical engineering, I still wanted to do something in this world of exact sciences because, again, in my mind it doesn't make sense to divide those. So, I still wanted to do something there, and I don't know. It was it was something that I wanted to do. I ended up doing it. I ended up doing a lot of stuff related to mathematics, which is still what I like to do the most. And here I am.

So it's... Creativity is really this filtering and hearing what we are telling ourselves based on what we see around us, what we hear, what we sense, right, in general, and you know taking action when we feel should.

Debbi: That's beautiful. It's a really long definition, but that's beautiful.

Diego: No, sometimes definitions are very long. That actually is very mathematical.

Debbi: True, true. Oh my goodness! Well, Diego, thank you so much for doing this and having this conversation with me. I learned a lot, and I just really appreciate you being willing to talk creativity with me.

Diego: Oh, thank you so much. Yeah, thanks so much for thinking of me for doing that. This was great. I loved talking about these and remembering things I didn't remember had done. So, this was good too. I don't know, sort of bring me back to a more creative side of myself.

Debbi: Beautiful.

Debbi: That's a wrap for Episode 22, my discussion with harpist, harp technician, software developer, pet pad, and husband, Diego Costa. I'm so grateful for Diego and for you, the audience, for tuning in. Additional thanks to August Fackler for composing and recording the music. Join me next time as I talk creativity with the chair of the music business program at the intersection of Indiana University's Kelley School of Business and Jacobs School of Music, Michael Sammis. Meanwhile, be open to possibilities, make connections, and embrace your creativity, however it manifests itself in you.