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COMPOSITION

AS A TOOL TO FIND HOME

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Abstract:

In this artistic research I explore my own process of composing music. Being a “world musician” with no specific roots but with experience from many different genres from western classical music and jazz to many different world traditions was confusing for me in the search for the answer to the question “what is my identity?” In this thesis I describe how the genres I’ve played and listened to blend in my compositions creating “genreless music”, which influences appear in the music unconsciously and also what conscious choices do I make while composing. This process helped me to articulate what identity means and how I relate to it.

Preface

Thanks to my beautiful band – Agnes, Ida, Robin and Erik for being so patient with me while playing my music with me. Thanks Per and Merje who also worked with me for a period. Thanks to Monika for many fertile and inspiring phone call discussions between Prague and Gothenburg.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

As a musician I've never been an expert on one genre. My musical development as a child included: singing in a choir where we sang gospels, Czech folk music, classical music and folk songs from different countries. We learned by ear and had freedom to bring our own creativity, to create harmonies and arrangements. I also started to go to music school to learn first the recorder and later on the silver flute. In the music school I learned only classical music. That's what all the kids of my generation did in music schools in the Czech Republic. We were taught that western classical music is the basis for any kind of music. And when we leave school, we can do what we like, but first we have to have really strong classical basics – technique, theory, phrasing and, music history. Later on I continued studying at the conservatory. I could say then, that western classical music is probably the strongest part of my background, of my tradition. As it's often said, “it's in my blood”, however it has never really been in my heart. I rarely listened to classical music, although I played it a lot. I remember that since my childhood I've been always looking for a way out of this culture that I found stiff and old fashioned. As a teenager I discovered Irish folk music, jazz and singer-songwriters – a genre that we call “folk” or “tramp” in Czech. It allowed me to be more spontaneous in the music and to start learning to improvise. Later on I learned a bit more jazz and I started to play in a band which played Irish and Balkan folk music. At that time I was already studying flute at the conservatory in Prague. I got an education as a classical flute player there and including a bit of jazz. During my studies I got to know about the “Ethno” camp in Slovenia. There I discovered a completely new world. A world of musicians, who learn by ear, play ‘dirty’, jam with a lot of enthusiasm the whole night and at the same time are very skilled professionals in different kinds of traditional/folk/world music. There I discovered Bulgarian and Swedish folk music, I also played a bit of Brazilian *forró* and got a bit of insight into many other traditions. Since I started studying at the world music program

at the Academy of Music and Drama in Gothenburg I have learned much more about Nordic folk music and lately also oriental music... To be short: since I got out of my “conservative Czech bubble”, I’ve had periods of being interested in many different music traditions. I simply became a quite typical representative of a “world musician”.

However, these periods never lasted for a long time. I started wondering: Am I never going to find something which I can be an expert on? Something that I'm going to stick to for many years, something that I can call “my music”, “my identity”? I realized, that when I'm learning a certain tradition - let's take Swedish folk music as an example, I always get to the point, when the next step would be getting really deep into the style and really become a part of that community - let's say to become a real *spelman*.¹ That would mean to have a lot of knowledge about some particular area and play a lot to dance and so on. At that point I always start to hold back and feel that I can't really go further with this, because it's “not really me”, I don't really feel to be part of that culture. And then I find a new style to get excited about.

I realized that I'm of course not the only one in the world with this kind of story. Especially for musicians inside the genre so-called *world music*, it's very typical. But even in any genre, is it even possible for someone in today's world to be a really honest authentic representative of one particular style? If I look around myself I can see that at least for the people I am surrounded by it's not possible. That kind of person, the authentic representative, would have to live in a little village somewhere in the mountains, without internet, television and modern ways of transport. ‘World music is an inescapable everyday experience, whether or not we understand what it means’. writes Philip V. Bohlman.² We get to hear so many kinds of music every day, even if we don't search for it. How would it be possible not to get influenced by it and not to put it in our own music, consciously or subconsciously? It is certainly a phenomenon of today's global society.

It was a very important step for me to decide that I should write my own music. A big part of that was to accept that I'm never going to become an expert on one thing and that that's fine. Instead, I should write music and put into it all the influences I've experienced. That is hopefully going to create what I was looking for – something that I can call “my music”, something that I know everything about.

1 *Spelman* is an expression used in Swedish folk music. A *spelman* is a person usually playing the violin (but nowadays even other instruments), playing traditional tunes, often having a deep knowledge of music from one particular area. Playing to dance is also very important.

2 P. V. Bohlman, *World Music: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. xii.

During writing this text I have discovered meditation and yoga practice and become interested in Buddhism. That knowledge and practice shaped my view, influenced my process of writing and helped me to get an answer to the question of identity. An answer that is satisfying and calming for me. I gave the topic of identity a special chapter in this study where I'm going to talk about that deeper.

1.2 Goal and questions of the research

The goal of this artistic research is to explore my composition process and how it is influenced by my background. I also intended to learn about my identity and what I actually understand by that term.

In my compositions I let myself be inspired by different elements of various styles of music, both consciously and unconsciously. Most often it happens to be influences from oriental music, Swedish folk music, western classical music and jazz. How does the fact that I have experience from the different genres influence my method of composition? And how does it influence the result? Is it possible to put such elements together in one composition in an "organic" way, so that it sounds like a compact style of music and not like a collage of different styles? Is it possible to almost create a new genre this way? How do I achieve that?

A good example of a direction I am trying not to go, is something that became quite popular in the folk/world music genres (especially in more commercial music): taking the most remarkable characteristics of two very different traditions and placing them on top of each other in an overly obvious way; for example gluing rhythms of one tradition on top of melodies from another. In my opinion this way of arranging often leads to losing the essentials of the traditions and what's left is the elements which are only recognizable and easy to understand. I personally find this way of working rather disrespectful and not very valuable. Is it bringing us somewhere new? Is it giving us new inspiration or thoughts? A good example of what I mean is a band called Celtic Jazz Collective³, which combines a traditional jazz rhythm section with traditional Irish violin players leaving the two elements unchanged.

Another thing I'm trying to avoid is elevating western music in the hierarchy. In the music I compose I'm very often inspired by so-called oriental music, especially when it comes to rhythms and in some cases also melodic structures. I learned about this music from musicians that have studied it for many years. That's something I can't say about myself.

3 *Aislinn (a vision)* [CD], Celtic Jazz Collective, Mapleshade Records, 2001.

Therefore I assume that my music will most often sound more western than anything else. However it's not at all my attempt to do so, it is my own background that I can't deny. Especially when it comes to "orientalism" this has been often a topic. Bohlman writes about the Cairo Congress of Arab Music in 1932 where there were participants from both Europe and the Arab world, including scholars, musicians and composer:

Clearly, the European and Arab delegations had two vastly different worlds in mind. For the Europeans it was the world of the past, a world in which Arab music had arguably been dominant, but also a world frozen at a great distance from the present. [...] The orientalist 'East' was transformed by the European gaze into an object at which one might indeed marvel, but also an object that was helpless against the intervention of the West.⁴

It easily becomes so, that we Europeans just take ownership of another tradition and "use it" for what we like. It might look like my work stands dangerously close to this, but I'd like to emphasize that having huge respect to all traditions is very important to me.

Another important question to which I dedicated a chapter at the end of this thesis is: How does the fact that I'm influenced by so many different genres form my identity as a musician and composer? It was after all a search for my identity which made me start composing.

It would certainly be interesting to do such research about a bigger group of multi-genre musicians. Due to the size of this thesis and due to the fact that it's an artistic research and not for example an ethnographical study, I'm going to direct these questions just to myself as an artist.

1.3 Theoretical background and previous research

As the program I'm studying is called "World Music" and the music I write and perform would after all also probably fall into that "box", it might be useful to look at *world music* as a term, how it is used and how music scholars describe it.

In defining *world music* I draw mostly from a handy book by an already mentioned American music researcher Philip V. Bohlman - *World Music: A very short introduction*.⁵ In my opinion he managed to embrace this complicated topic in a clear way. He describes the development of the term through the decades. At first it was mostly a term used for "music of

4 Bohlman, op. cit., p. 49.

5 P. V. Bohlman, *World Music: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

the others”, non-western music, while now, especially in the music research world, it means just any music of the world. And that's how I understand it in this study as well. World music then includes jazz, any world tradition, fusions of them and even western classical music. We can nearly say that all music has become world music. In the academic context scholars who research world music today commonly apply methods of cultural analysis, ethnography and music anthropology, both on research of the cultures where they originate and the cultures of “the others”; methods which were historically applied only (or mostly) when researching music and culture outside Europe and western world. That means that even western classical music is actually world music, only taken from another perspective.

The topic of world music in today's world is directly connected to the issue of globalization, due to the extremely easy communication and methods of transport. It brings up the question of whether we should attempt to preserve cultures or rather be open and let everything fuse and mix in a natural and uncontrolled way. Bohlman writes:

The two meanings of globalization are emblematic of the two contradictory ways in which 'world music' is understood today. [...] For many, world music represents much that is right in the world, indeed, the very possibility that music and music-making bring people together. [...] There's also a darker side to world music. World music can raise fears that we are losing much that is close to home. [...] Fusion and border-crossing may enrich some world-music styles, but they impoverish others.⁶

1.4. Material and Method

Context of the researched Compositions

For the purpose of this study I decided to choose three compositions of mine - *Eleven*⁷, *Světla a tramvaje*⁸ and *Peacock Tree*⁹ as examples to find answers to my research questions.

The first idea for most of my compositions usually comes when I'm walking down the street or waiting for a bus. Suddenly I catch a moment, an atmosphere, an interesting light, sound or situation which can be both external or inside in my mind. I feel like I am a photographer. In that moment I start hearing chords, melodies, sounds in my head and I just

6 Bohlman, op. cit., p. xii.

7 See *Attachment n.1 – Eleven* for score and *Audio 1* for recording

8 See *Attachment n.2 – Svetla a tramvaje* for score and *Audio 2* for recording

9 See *Attachment n.3 – Peacock Tree* for score and *Audio 3* for recording

want to catch and preserve that feeling. Then I usually record myself singing small fragments on my phone. At that phase everything seems crystal clear. The music just comes, it seems precisely perfect as it is to me. Later on when I'm sitting, writing it down and working further on it, the process gets more technical and not as spontaneous. Also the method can vary. I will write more about this process in connection to the particular compositions.

The three chosen compositions are a part of my graduation concert. To describe the context I will make a short summary about that project. For that concert I wrote all the repertory for a five-piece band. I decided that I will first choose the musicians (and ask them if they want to be a part of it, and then write the music for that line-up. As this was my graduation concert band and I wanted the result to be as perfect as possible it was important for me to choose my fellow musicians carefully. I had a dream of putting together those who I've had these "magical moments" with while playing and improvising together - people who I communicate well with on both a musical and friendship level. The instrumentation was of secondary importance. That way I ended up having the following setting: myself on flute and alternatively bass clarinet. Robin on soprano and tenor saxophone and clarinet. He has mostly a Swedish folk music background and he's a very sensitive musician with a velvet tone. Agnes, a singer and a great improviser with an incredible register of colors and sounds in her voice. Erik, a very skilled and open minded jazz double bass player. And Ida, my totally favorite percussionist, who's the same nerd about odd meters as me, plays Arabic percussion and also makes beautiful soundscapes.

I was very happy with that group. As you can see, it still ended up being not very odd setting for that genre (voice, flute, sax, bass, percussion) but slightly odd anyway, because it's missing a chord instrument. That actually made an interesting challenge for me which I find very positive for the results. It made me use the winds and voice as accompaniment instruments and write arrangements for them to be used in that way. And it also of course created a bit of an unusual sound.

So I had the band, the setting, musicians of different backgrounds to write and adjust the music for. Now the instrumentation, the backgrounds and specialties, personalities, knowledge and skills of those particular musicians were several factors that formed my method of composing. When writing, I had to think how to write the music so that it's understandable for them but still not to compromise my own wishes and ideas too much. Should I use sheet music? How much should I write there? What should be decided by me

and what shall we create together at the rehearsals? I had to find a good balance so that everybody feels comfortable.

Everyone except Erik (bass player) was much more familiar with learning by ear than with sheet music reading. For Erik it was opposite, but it worked alright to learn by ear for him too. As for myself I'm quite used to work in both systems. But still, there I hit an obstacle and I noticed how strong my classical background was. Sometimes I had a very clear idea about how I wanted the music to sound like. Such an idea that would be easiest to communicate by writing it into the sheet music. But I realized that this was a wrong way of thinking, because the rehearsal process would take much longer, so I needed to either change my method of composition, or abandon the idea of being so precise with what I'm looking for and become more open to the creativity of the whole group. Most often I ended up writing a rather simple score with a melody, a bass line, sometimes an arrangement for the winds and voice, and a sketch of the form. It's a type of score that jazz musicians often use.

Method

As a research and writing method I used mostly the methods used in artistic research, with some elements of autoethnography.

Artistic research as been described by Finish researcher Mika Hannula combines artistic practice with theoretical approach while aiming at the production of knowledge.¹⁰ Autoethnography as described by Carolyn Ellis is

...an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product.¹¹

To answer my research questions I used three methods and I will talk more about each of them: one is to get information from the journal I kept while composing, the other is to listen to and interpret the final versions of the compositions as they were on my graduation concert and the third is to interview other people about what they hear in my music.

10 M. Hannula, J. Suoranta & T. Vadén, *Artistic Research: Theories, Methods and Practices*. Göteborg: ArtMonitor, 2005.

11 C. Ellis, T. E. Adams & A. P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography: An Overview', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [online journal], Vol. 12, Nr. 1., Art. 10 – January 2011, <<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095>>, accessed 14 May 2018.

During the process of composing the repertoire I kept a journal documenting my creative process. This helped me remember the details about how I proceeded and also made it possible to look at the process from a distance after some time, and interpret what happened there. I can now see patterns in my process about how I made decisions, which choices were conscious and what just happened spontaneously.

Almost nine months have passed since my graduation concert when I am writing this text. This time was long enough for me to get some distance from the music. I listened to the recording from the concert with as much distance as I could achieve and then tried to describe what I hear in the music as a listener (aural analysis).

I used an online interview document that I posted in different groups on Facebook to get the biggest possible diversity of respondents. I asked them what feelings they have, what genres or cultures they can hear and in what environment is the music situated according to them. I got answers from 15 respondents. They were both musicians and non-musicians (about 50/50), people with different backgrounds and nationalities (Sweden, Czech Republic, France, Slovakia, India). I then interpreted their responses and compared them with what I myself hear in the music and with what intentions I had with the compositions as an artist. Did I manage to pass on the meaning I encoded into the music?

When doing aural analysis – describing how the music sounds to me and how others described it, I had this in mind:

In a process [called poietic,] the creator of the music encodes meanings and emotions into the “neutral” composition or performance, which is then interpreted by anyone listening to the music [a process called the esthetic]. Each individual listener’s interpretation is entirely the result of cultural conditioning and life experience.¹²

If there are several people with similar backgrounds and life experiences, there is some probability that they will perceive the music in a similar way, but not necessarily. Now, I as the composer consciously encoded my feelings and different stories and atmospheres in the music. At the same time, there is much more in the music that appears without me intending it and that comes from my background. Even that is encoded in the music. My respondents with their different backgrounds and experiences might hear what I encoded in there, but they might also hear something completely different. Reading all those answers was not only interesting and fun but also very inspiring for me as an artist for my future work.

12 T. E. Miller, & A. Shahriari, *World Music: A Global Journey*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p.14.

2. The Creative Process

Below follows the description of each of the three chosen compositions. I describe how they sound to me and what I hear in them. We will also look at how other people who I interviewed perceived the music, what genres they heard in it and what feelings or emotions they got while listening.

Then I invite you to my kitchen and explain how the compositions evolved from the first idea up to the version played at my graduation concert. These descriptions come from the journal I kept, shortened and made into a nice text with a bit of reflection from a distance. I tried to make the picture of the process as personal as possible, describing quite thoroughly how exactly I proceeded. It is useful to follow the attached scores and recordings while reading. The provided recordings were taken at my graduation concert the 19th of May 2017.

2.1 Eleven¹³

This is the earliest composition of all those which were on my graduation concert program. I wrote it in September 2016 – the very start of my third year of studies, at the very start of the process of preparing the final concert. Therefore it is a little bit of an exception because it was composed before the band was formed and it was even played with two different constellations. It means that I didn't think about the particular musicians and the sound of their instruments when writing this.

Aural analysis:

I myself perceive *Eleven* as very calming music with a bit of a sad tone, with a feeling of a slow walk and contemplation. When I listen to the concert recording I hear a strong influence of oriental music. I can also hear an influence of western music which is surely caused by the background of the interpreters. This influence I can hear mostly in the elements that are not a part of the composition but has been created at the rehearsals and on stage - the phrasing and the improvisation.

The answers I got were actually very similar to what I perceive myself. Many, both musicians and non-musicians perceived this composition as “oriental”, other common key words were also “raw” or “desert”.¹⁴ Also the atmosphere and feelings were pretty much in

13 For score see *Attachment n.1 - Eleven* and for the recording see *Audio 1*.

14 Except one curious answer that I keep wondering about: “I think it feels a bit German”.

tune with my own perception: the listeners told me that they got the feeling of melancholy, contemplation or searching for a place to rest.

Creative process

I started writing this composition one warm September night when I was feeling sad. I sat outside in front of the house where I live with a pen, blank sheet of music paper, a ‘zoom’ recorder and earphones. I wanted to put the sadness in the music, the sadness which is right now and the feeling of the new start that is behind that as the sadness clears away.

I decided to write a tune in the 11/8 rhythm. This rhythm is common in the Balkans and most often is divided in 4+3+4 (Figure 1).



Figure 1

I know a song from Macedonia where the 3 is in the beginning of the bar (3+4+4), which completely changes the groove and the feeling and this grouping makes it sound unusual in the Balkan music context. I also used that rhythm way slower in my composition than it usually occurs in Balkan music (Figure 2).



Figure 2

However in the Arabic tradition of north Africa and southern Spain this rhythm probably wouldn't be uncommon at all. I learned about this tradition at our theory classes with Ahmad Al Khatib. This tradition is typical for very complex odd meters which can often even change a couple of times in one tune. There are for sure traditional rhythms which are used often, but basically we can say that the principle is based on putting together groupings of 3 or 2, as many as you wish, in any order you wish. That way it's possible to create very complex and unusual sounding meters. I find it very interesting and challenging as an interpreter and inspiring as a composer. I can thus say that I made a conscious choice of the rhythm of the composition and that was also a starting point for me, together with the sad feeling I had.

I then started with a simple ostinato (bass line), just marking the meter, and I recorded myself singing it in my ‘zoom’ recorder. The creation of the melody of the A part

went rather spontaneously. I just listened to the ostinato I recorded and was singing over it and writing down at the same time. As a melody instrument player I have developed a good sense for melodies and they happen naturally and spontaneously for me. Unlike chords for example, which usually take some work for me. That evening I wrote also a couple of other harmonies on top of each other on the space of couple of bars, like a looping carpet (see the last system of the sheet music). Not much of that was actually used in the end.

There comes a typical phase in my creative process. I have a part which I like a lot but after sitting in the practice room to work with it further I find that it's maybe too little material and that I need a contrasting part. The creation of that one (here see B part) is never as smooth as the start. This phase is usually hard work at the piano and a lot of intellectual work too. I decided that the B part will break the ostinato and there will be more chords as an accompaniment so that it's contrasting the A part. I also decided that the melody here shouldn't follow the meter so strictly but fly above it a bit more. Also this was not very easy to achieve because I can't say that I had that rhythm safely "in my body" by that time. It took me quite a few tries to get to the version we can hear now. I was deciding there and back, counting a lot, adding and erasing bars, changing phrases, letting it "sleep" for some days and then changing my mind again before I got to the version of the B part as it is now and before I've accepted it mentally.

The first performed version of this piece sounded very different than I intended to. I was going to play a concert in October 2016 and present some of my ideas for the graduation concert there. At that time it was not hundred percent decided who was going to be part of the band, and some of the planned members couldn't play this concert. So the setting for that concert consisted of me (this time playing flute), Erik (double bass player who was a part of the final setting too), Per on drum kit and Merje on electric guitar.

I remember being very stressed that time, partly because I was quite new to, and uncomfortable with the role of a band leader and composer at the same time. I was feeling quite insecure when presenting my material to the band and I felt that I'm too much of an insider to have good arrangement ideas and make good decisions. What made me even more stressed and insecure was the rather bad group dynamics which occurred in that band. Simply – at the end I thought this concert was a catastrophe.

Much later, while writing this text, I listened to the recordings from that period. When I hear them I can still feel as if I had a stone in my throat, I can still feel rests of the unpleasant feelings and stress. But I have enough distance now and I was actually happily

surprised with what I heard. This version was much more spacey than the graduation concert version (which is rather intimate than spacey) due to the electric guitar which used a lot of delay and the drum kit which gave a bit clearer markings of the rhythm. I find the sound of this band quite jazzy, metallic and mellow. Not at all a catastrophe. Although neither the sound I was aiming for.

Having a bit of a break from this process after that October concert was very healthy for me. I found my confidence again and I found again what I actually wanted to say with this piece, what I needed to achieve this goal and which people I needed to have around. I knew that the sound of a drum kit and electric guitar was not what I was looking for. Starting to rehearse with Robin (cl., sax) and Erik was like coming home. I decided to play bass clarinet on this piece and Robin took his clarinet. That way we created a trio of three quite low and soft sounds (the frame drum joined later on as Ida, the percussionist, lives far away and couldn't rehearse with us so much).

I believe that there is something to it, that you feel in your body when you go the right way. With finding this sound I really felt like coming home, I enjoyed playing again a lot and I felt inspired to compose, arrange and rehearse more.

2.2 Světla a tramvaje¹⁵

This piece of music is another play with atmosphere. An evening in October, still rather warm. Brunnsparcken, one of the biggest and usually busiest stations in Gothenburg, late evening on a week day, so unusually calm and almost empty. Everything is in kind of yellowish light, from time to time a tram comes by and you can see its lights, see the people sitting inside in their own worlds, see it all passing by, listening to the details of the typical tram sound. The translation of the Czech name is actually just "Lights and Trams".

Aural analysis:

Even here my own perception of the piece is in accordance with what the respondents say. To my ears the composition sounds quite like contemporary western classical music, minimalism, maybe with a bit of jazz influence. I can easily imagine it to be music accompanying some kind of visual. The energy goes from very low and subtle, gradually builds in small steps higher and higher until its almost unbearable, and then everything stops and we just listen to how the seconds go forward.

15 For score see *Attachment n.2- Světla a tramvaje*, for the recording see *Audio 2*.

When I asked my respondents what genres or cultures they could hear, they most often answered film music. Quite many also couldn't place it in any genre they knew. But the variety of emotions they described is quite wide. Some felt expectations, some felt stress and tension, but some felt also hope or releasing of problems one by one. Myself I could actually easily relate to any of those. One also wrote "*calmness in motion*" which I consider a very fitting description.

Creative process

Bring your imagination back to that calm late evening at Brunnsparken. I was standing there waiting for my bus which wasn't going to come for a while. So I went to the river and watched the typical scenery that we know from the postcards of Gothenburg. Yellow light, warm air, trams, I felt almost like I was inside a slow movie scene and I thought that maybe I should write some music for that movie.

It needed to be something pulsing and quite repetitive. I was thinking if I can create a rhythm which would be actually quite easy to listen to, but giving a bit of an unexpected odd feeling. A rhythm that you can easily relate to bodily, but it takes you a while to understand how it actually works. I thought that if I manage to create that kind of rhythm which would be possible to use in a very repetitive way without it getting boring.

Again my passion for odd meters (which I got mostly from studying oriental and Bulgarian music) immediately came by and I thought how can I play with the listener's ear and also with mathematics. What if I put two $7/8$ bars after each other? It makes $14/8$ which is actually not odd anymore. What if the subdivision is different in the first and the second? I decided for two bars of seven, the first subdivided $2+2+3$ and the second $3+2+2$ (Figure 3).



Figure 3

There waiting for the bus I created a minimalist and repetitive ostinato (see the first line of the score), the pulsing part that we can call the *clave* of this piece. Here I put the accent on the second of the three to make it a bit less obvious for the first listen (Figure 4).

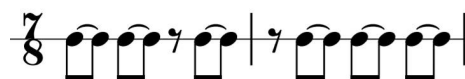


Figure 4

Later on I realized that it might make more sense to write it as 7/4 (Figure 5) - the two bars of 7/8 together as one but I'm still not completely convinced about that. For me, there are two ways of feeling the puls (or clave if you like). Either 2+2+3+3+2+2 or the 7 quarter notes .



Figure 5: version with changed accents

...alternatively the basic version 2+2+3+3+2+2

And I feel that both of these versions (the 2x 7/8 or the 7/4) are equally a part of this music. Having those two claves on top of each other makes it polyrhythmical and a bit confusing, which is exactly what I was looking for.

I recorded everything I created in my head by singing on my phone. I had already also the idea of long chords being over that, but I needed to work that out when I had a piano, which I did soon after (see the fourth and fifth system of the score). Now I had all the harmonies and voices and I had the idea of the arrangement as it is on the recording: starting from the voice, very subtle, and then little by little adding more layers and harmonies building gradually to the maximum level of energy that we can get as a band. Soon after that I also wrote the final part (B part). I felt that after the tension and a general pause it needed some resolution. So I wrote the short final part, simple, calm, going with the calm steadiness of a clock, letting you breath out.

I was immediately in love with this composition. I had almost no doubts about that it's exactly how I want it to be.

Oh well, I did have doubts. In my mind. "Maybe this is too little material, maybe this should be just an introduction to something else. Maybe it needs to be only a part of some bigger form. Maybe the last part should be longer and develop into something completely contrasting, surprising." My mind told me so as well as my teacher. It is actually quite typical for me to compose in this way – to think more vertically than horizontally. To add more and more harmonies, layers and develop everything gradually into a carpet or a cluster of sounds and melodies. This approach probably comes from the way of working with my solo project, where I play the flute, bass clarinet and sing and use the loop pedal to accompany myself. I started the solo project before I even started composing music in general. Here, this vertical way of thinking is very useful and I daresay maybe the only one possible. Therefore when I

then compose for the band I tend to think in that way too. But another reason is simply that I really enjoy minimalist repetitive music. That's why I sometimes need to push myself to write bigger forms with more contrasting parts and I need to think very technically to achieve that. Working in that way basically means leaving my comfort zone and controlling the process a bit more, which doesn't always have results that I'm satisfied with. It often takes many versions and attempts to get something that I find acceptable and often the process goes precisely nowhere. On the other hand, trying to write bigger forms is of course a very good composition exercise which is certainly broadening my skills; on the contrary – with the spontaneous composition I'm always satisfied with the result and sure that the music is exactly as it should be, as if it would come through me from some another resource in the universe.

In some cases I decide to follow my teacher's advice or what I feel the stereotypes of the musical community tell me to do – “write bigger forms, this is not enough material, you need more contrasting parts...” and so on. But in some cases, for example in case of *Světla a tramvaje* I dared not to follow that voice and instead to follow my inner sense . Yes, I believe that *Světla a tramvaje* should be exactly like this. A short cycle repeating and repeating, calmness in motion, gaining energy but otherwise almost unchanged. And yes, it should take the ca. 6 minutes that it finally took and not less. After all it is nothing so very extravagant. I guess I was just inspired by Steve Reich and other minimalists.

Another thing I was wondering quite a lot about was how to notate this composition and especially the arrangement. I had a very clear idea how I wanted it to be from the start to the end. Should I write a detailed orchestra score to make it very clear who comes in where and in which order? Or should we learn everything by ear as it's anyway not so much material to remember? I actually started with writing the full score. But while writing the third page and still at the start of the form I realized that it was a rather stupid idea. It meant quite a lot of work for me and in the end the musicians I wrote for worked great by ear, they were used to it and actually it would just have made it harder for them to have such a big score to read. I reminded myself that I'm not writing for classical musicians. I decided to write a small score, on one and a half A4 pages where I've written all the harmonies and parts. We did the arrangement at the rehearsals where everybody was to remember their cues where to come in or change harmony. The length of each step/level was often left open and up to the energy we felt that particular day.

When we started rehearsing *Světla a tramvaje*, we worked quite a lot on learning to feel the rhythm. It was harder to play than I expected. Another difficult thing in the rehearsing process was for all of us to learn to spare our forces, especially the singer and the double bass player. Everybody's part was going on and on, repeating the cycle many times without a break, and it was important to not let the energy of the music fall. Once you came in you wouldn't get a break until the climax of the tune. But once the band became familiar with the piece we always enjoyed playing it. I think *Světla a tramvaje* became our favorite piece, exhausting to play, as well as giving us strong energy and concentration.

2.3 Peacock Tree¹⁶

In November 2016 I was touring in my home country the Czech Republic. One night we played in a town called Pardubice and took a walk to the chateau in the center. The sun was going down and it was almost dark when we were walking around the garden. There was a dead willow which just had its biggest branches left. It had a very surrealistic shape, as if it was a tree from another planet. When I looked closer I saw that there are about seven big peacocks sitting on that willow and sleeping. What brought them to choose this very tree as their place to stay overnight? That I didn't know. But I knew that this scenery was worth a tune.

Aural analysis

Of the three chosen compositions (or maybe even of all the repertory of this project) this piece is closest to what we can call a "folk tune". It has three clear parts of an even number of bars, the rhythm is very much reminiscent of a Swedish *vals*. I can also hear some jazzy sounding harmonies. According to me this tune could easily be the music to some fairy-tail. It is wakening imagination and bringing me to some kind of magical forest and meadow.

My respondents described that they heard feelings of joy and playfulness in the music or "*like spending a day in the nature with no worries*". When it comes to genre I got various different answers: "*gypsy*", "*medieval alternative*", "*Nordic folk, a little jazz*", "*Celtic*", and even "*Czech folklore*".

Creative process

The first idea of this tune comes from the bizarre scenery with the dead willow and peacocks sleeping on it. Also I wanted to write something inspired by one of my favorite artists Joanna Newsom, a singer and harp player from USA. Her music is cozy and full of

¹⁶ For score see *Attachment n.3 – Peacock tree*, for the recording see *Audio 3*.

fantasy and stories. One of her typical ways of expression is to build up melodies with a lot of modulation.¹⁷ That gives the listener a feeling of unpredictability of where the melody is going and what will happen next.

So I tried. At first I was wondering if creating such a melody maybe has to be based on some complex music theoretical pre-thought concept or method. But then again I had some extra time while waiting at a train station, so I just tried singing a melody and intuitively use a lot of unexpected steps. I also thought that a whole tone scale should appear somewhere there as a “cheap but still working trick” to make the music sound fairy-tail like. And that’s how the first part was created (line 1-3 in the score). Again recording my own singing on the phone at the train station in Oslo. No advanced theoretical methods were needed at the end.

Later on when I was sitting at the piano figuring out the chords I realized that it has actually quite a lot from jazz harmony, like the II-V-I and often the chord arpeggios are a part of the melody, although that’s not at all what I thought when I composed the melody. This is one of the good examples of how my background and experience came up through the music without making a conscious choice to do it.

That day at the train station I composed even the melody of the third part (line 7-9 in the score). I thought it needs something much more simple than the first part, something rather “folky” and danceable. Later on when I was sitting in the practice room and putting the tune together I got the feeling that these two parts don’t go together so well. They were too big a contrast to each other. One really unpredictable, flying somewhere in the sky and the other really grounded and clear. And both of them were rather busy and didn’t have many breaks or places to rest your concentration on. How to connect them? I needed a part in the middle of them which would work as a good transition. It had to be something with *less notes*, letting the listener rest after the exciting first part and preparing you for the dance turn in the third part.

As I remember, that part took me quite some versions, quite some walks in the streets of Gothenburg. But eventually I thought that I just needed to decide for one of the options and let my ears get used to it (line 4-6 in the score). That worked. Today I can’t even recall what other ideas I had and I can’t imagine anything else being a part of the composition.

The way of rehearsing this piece with the band was similar to how folk music bands usually work. We had a melody, later on also some second voices and chords. I didn’t have a clear idea about the form from the start and we just jammed, improvised, tried different forms

17 Check i.e. album *Have one on me* [CD], J. Newsom, Drag City, 2002.

and instrumentations and at the end decided on one version. In opposition to *Světla a tramvaje*, the arrangement is of secondary importance. Here, as it is usual when speaking about traditional tunes (at least in European context), the tune is very defined by its melody, harmony and rhythm. The arrangement and instrumentation can vary.

2.4 Identity – finding home in myself

Identity is a very complicated topic and a lot has been written about it. In the case of world music as a genre it's also a very important topic. As I wrote a little bit in the introduction, in today's world identity becomes more individual than ever. Traveling and communication is faster and easier than it ever has been in history. People move, study and work in different countries all around the world and have easy access to music, literature, dance (and other cultural forms) from various places in the world. That makes the identities of today's people very complex and individual. At the same time the extreme accessibility may cause that we have more in common with someone thousands of kilometers away than we have with our neighbors. I'm not going to go deeper here as there were many scholars who have written about this before. However I think it's necessary to give that topic some place here and take it from a more personal perspective, as I myself am a typical example of having a very spread, unclear, "global" identity: coming from Czech republic, living in Sweden and playing many different genres of music from different parts of the world. It was actually the searching for my artistic identity which made me start composing music that sounds like that which I present here and which made me do this artistic research.

The easiest, shortest and most clear-sounding description I found in '*World Music: A Global Journey*' by Terry E. Miller and Andrew Shahriari: 'At its core, identity is self awareness'.¹⁸ I found out though that I can't really agree with this statement. Scholars usually use the term "identity" as a set of cultural behaviors, habits, skills, inherited background and so on. As an example we can take Bruno Nettl's '*Ethnicity and Musical Identity in the Czech Lands: A Group of Vignettes*'¹⁹ where he talks about *ethnic identity*, *musical identity*, *linguistic identity*, *political identity* (of a nation, for example) and similar. This is maybe relevant when talking about big groups, although still a huge generalization which makes it more and more inaccurate the more we zoom in on smaller groups or even individuals.

18 Miller & Shahriari, op. cit., s. 387.

19 B. Nettl, 'Ethnicity and Musical Identity in the Czech Lands: A Group of Vignettes', in C. Applegate & P. Potter ed., *Music and German National Identity*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 269-287.

While explaining my own musical identity, the Buddhist philosophy that I have absorbed during the last months had to come up. I tried to personalize *identity* as a term and go more from experience than from definition. Identity is that we identify ourselves with things that we are attached to. Material things, culture, ways of behavior, even our feelings. But the attachment is not always conscious. On the opposite: once I become aware that I am attached to something and I identify with that, it is actually the first step to take distance from it, to be free from it and to let go of it. If I ask myself what I identify with, I would probably say something like: “I’m a musician, composer, European, Czech, Westerner, woman, meditation practitioner...” But the moment I write it down like this, I’m immediately taking distance from it. The moment I become aware of it, a process of detachment has started in me. I have the awareness, the consciousness that these things are not permanent, they are made by my mind and are absolutely not definitive. Becoming attached to them would just bring me suffering when they change. That makes me cut it down to “I’m a human being and I have a mind.” Taken very far I would almost say that the opposite of what Miller and Shahriari say is true – ‘At its core, identity is lack of self awareness’, or ‘identity is manifestation of ego’.

We, as well as time, never stay still. We develop every second. Therefore even our identity is changing, even if just a little bit every second and these small bits become huge bits in a longer time period. Identity then is more a *process*, something developing, something unstable, changing, impermanent.

We tend to be proud of things we identify with (being proud of being a part of a nation or for example, being proud of being a musician or being a woman/man), but as often people get ashamed of their identity (for example being poor or being a minority, being “different”, being homosexual is certainly shameful still in many cultures). And also one can be proud of something that another one would get ashamed of (for example being homosexual, depending on background, education). As I see it, it only confirms that identity is created by our minds and it’s based on experiences and facts that we can’t always influence. Like where we are born, what people we meet, what happens in our surroundings and so on.

Through meditation practice and reading Buddhist scriptures I got the experience that being attached doesn’t bring me any happiness. Being attached means that I identify with things that I actually don’t own and that actually are not “me”. They are external things. The only thing which is left then is my mind. There are many examples of Buddhist monks who were able to rid themselves of all attachments, even to their own bodies and reached absolute freedom and happiness. I myself am of course far from being that advanced in my practice but

I have the awareness of what is forming my identity. That makes me let go of it a little bit, to look at it from a distance. That gives me the possibility of a choice. Do I stay attached? Do I confirm the identity I have or do I decide to do differently?

By being aware of my identity I took away the “being proud” or “being ashamed”. What is left is just the “being” part. I let my identity (or background if you like) *be there*. When I composed music, I most often got the first idea just walking down the street or waiting for a bus and my intention there was simply to express the atmosphere of the place, the mood of the moment. Then I often used my knowledge of scales or modes or for example Arabic rhythms. But my intention wasn’t to make the composition sound Arabic. I only used that knowledge I have as a tool, as an inspiration.

Then again one can hear many different influences in the music which I didn’t even think of when I composed. I actually used myself, my background, my experience for the music to come through. I wanted to express a feeling of a moment. I had no “concept of creating a totally revolutionary new art” in mind. I just let it be there. Let my identity be there. Let it show itself without controlling it too much.

3. Summary

This research was a very exciting introspective journey during which I learned a lot about myself as an artist and I got a lot of inspiration for my future creative work.

The decision to start composing music came partly from my confusion about my identity. As a world musician playing many different genres and music from different world cultures, I started to ask; where do I actually belong if I don’t feel at home with the roots of where I come from and I neither feel at home elsewhere simply because I don’t come from there and it feels far away. Composition is a tool for me to make a home in myself and to create my own genre of music which is a result of my specific background. Composing together with meditation practice and Buddhist philosophy made me find a satisfying answer to the question of identity, which I talked about exhaustively in the previous chapter.

The main goal of this study was to research my composition process. How does the fact that I have experience from different genres influence my method of composition? And how does it influence the result? Is it possible to put elements of different styles together in

one composition in an “organic” way? And is it possible to almost create a new genre for itself this way? How do I achieve that?

The answers from the respondents of my interview show that I probably did achieve making a smooth organic mixture of genres. What makes me think so is that a lot of the respondents actually couldn't place the music in any genre (*Světla a tramvaje*) or they considered it very new (one answer I got i.e. was “Žofkaland”²⁰). In the case of *Peacock Tree* people usually heard many things in there but each of them described something different.

That means that I created a genre-less music. How? The answer is again very Buddhist I would say. By not controlling. By letting go. It is possible to put the genres together in an organic way if the creative process is also organic. If we are not controlling it too much. When composing I wasn't striving for some kind of fashionable mixture of styles. If I let it go the way it wants to - that's what I mean by “organic” in this context - then I'm just letting the music come through me. My intention was often to express a particular atmosphere or a feeling with the music. For that I was using the musical skills and knowledge I have as a tool and inspiration. My intention wasn't to make it sound like “Arabic” or “jazz” or “classical” or this or that. Although I was using what I know from those genres, the principles how they function as an instrument for the music to come out.

And as I can't and don't even want to deny my roots and background, of course the musical results sound familiar to us and we can hear influences of different genres. Many modern composers try to create something completely new that no one has heard before. That is totally not my case. I don't believe that anyone can leave behind his or her roots completely, forget all that happened in the history of the human kind and start on an empty field. But the choice I made was to let my background come up through the music without me controlling it, without me intending to do it or striving for it to sound like a particular genre(s). And because my roots are not clearly placed in one style or area, several of them could organically appear inside one composition.

So those influences I put in the music unconsciously. What I encoded in the music consciously are feelings, stories, moments, places, situations. And what is surprising for me is that I obviously managed to communicate those. The answers I got in the interviews were most often very similar to what I myself intended to say with the composition.

20 Žofka is my nickname. This answer came obviously from a friend of mine.

I also consciously used my knowledge from for example Arabic rhythms or classical and jazz harmony. But those were only technical tools for me. Methods to achieve, the “how to”.

Interviewing people about how they perceive my music doesn't only help me to answer the questions of this research but it also inspires me. Many people (not only the respondents but also others who gave me feedback about my graduation concert) perceive the music as meditative, relaxing, someone said that it would be great if they could lay on the floor listening. These answers helped me to understand that what I really want and *can* do with my music is to wake up the fantasy of the listeners when they just close their eyes and relax. They shall dream, be in their own made up stories, places, situations. That's also what I would like to work with further in the future. To create ways how to produce such fantasy-waking music, ways to communicate emotions through the music.

This research also gave me concrete ideas about how to develop further as a composer. I discovered patterns I have in my composition process. Writing this thesis helped me to articulate them explicitly and clearly. Now I feel inspired to continue both my creative and research processes by consciously changing these patterns and ways of working. What would happen if I made conscious choices where I used to work spontaneously? How would the music sound if I left free the areas where I'm currently very direct and aware in deciding? That way it's possible to create many different composition exercises and challenges.

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Discography

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Appendices

Attachment n.1 – *Eleven* (sheet music)

Attachment n.2 – *Světla a tramvaje* (sheet music)

Attachment n.3 – *Peacock Tree* (sheet music)

Audio 1 - *Eleven*

Audio 2 – *Světla a tramvaje*

Audio 3 – *Peacock Tree*

All the recordings were taken 19th of May 2017 at Žofie Kašparová's graduation concert at Academy of Music and Drama, Gothenburg.