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**HÖGSKOLAN FÖR SCEN OCH MUSIK**

INTO THE MAQAM

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IMPLEMENTATION OF ELEMENTS OF NEAR EASTERN MUSIC INTO MY OWN ARTISTIC  
EXPRESSION AND PERFORMANCE

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## ABSTRACT

key words: **near eastern music, improvisation, musical expression, clarinet, imitation, interpretation, maqām**

Much has been written on the topic of Near Eastern classical and traditional music. This huge, integrated musical tradition, existing in large areas of the Middle East and Middle Asia differs a lot from western musical theory and performance tradition.

This thesis examines the topic from an outsider's perspective, revolving largely around the possibilities of integrating concepts and techniques found in near eastern music into playing. For example: scales built on tetrachords, modulations within the maqām, micro tones, ornaments and odd meter .

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

I was studying clarinet under the tutelage of a Polish classical professor since the age of nine up until my moving to Sweden in 2015. Since there is no musical tradition in my family I used the classical music as the only tool of expressing my musicality. Up until the age of 17 I had not tried any form of improvisation or experimentation with music other than interpretation. Then I encountered traditional Polish music and I was blown away with its wildness and freedom enchanted in the rough sound and translike forms of improvisation. Pulled in by this new way of playing I started exploring traditional music on the side of my classical studies. That journey opened the door for me into freely improvised music and I ended up recording my first album as a leader of a folk jazz group in 2014. At the same time as exploring my creativity in new ways I started putting more awareness and curiosity into the matter of the sound of my instrument. I began to realize that I had not been using the full potential of my instrument in terms of colour, timbre and rhythm. I subconsciously started to seek for music more natural to my instrument. After finishing my first year at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw I made the decision to quit classical education and move to Sweden to continue my search for a deeper and more natural artistic expression. I came to the realisation that being able to improvise is one of the most important abilities a musician can make use of. In the pursuit of developing this skill I have tried different musical styles, mostly circulated around jazz and western musical theory. The two years after quitting my classical education I came in contact with the musical traditions of the Near East, through the playing of Ahmad Al Khatib who later became my teacher. This style of music has long been something that I have listened to and admired but never before had a chance to learn. It has always seemed so very different from my own musical tradition and hard to grasp. I decided to explore this music not with the intention of mastering it but to investigate it and draw from it.

## 1.2 QUESTION FORMULATION

I am in a process of expanding and reflecting on my experience of near eastern improvisation. I want to make it clear that I am not an expert on the subject of classical Arabic music, as previously mentioned in my background I am a classically educated instrumentalist from Poland. I have however had the great privilege of studying near eastern music under the tutelage of Ahmad Al Khatib. That process has been and still is a journey towards understanding the art of improvisation, mastered through centuries by Eastern musicians and composers. It provoked many questions in my own artistic philosophy as a musician and as a performer. Through exploring new techniques on my instrument, encountering new musical language and ways of executing musical ideas I am in a process of implementing certain near eastern techniques into my individual musical expression. That leads me to important questions, such as:

- How does my process of learning certain Eastern techniques look like: what are my methods and routines?
- How can I use new techniques on my instrument?
- Can I use new techniques without imitating a specific tradition?
- How can I learn modes and tonalities that are fundamentally different from the musical culture I have been raised in?
- Can I combine my experience as a western musician with new techniques learnt from the eastern traditions and gain new qualities?

### 1.3 PURPOSE

The purpose of me learning this music is not to imitate a certain tradition or copy a certain style of performing the repertoire. I want to find out how to use new techniques and ways of interpreting music as an artist, while keeping already schooled and practiced techniques. By using its core elements (such as odd meter, modes, scales, ornaments and improvisation techniques) I believe I am enriching my instrumental abilities and overall musicianship.

I think this thesis might be interesting and valuable for those who are also in a position of encountering a foreign musical language and are struggling with questions on the topic of imitation and freedom, methods of applying new techniques into their own musical workmanship and simply expanding artistic expression.

### 1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS: TWO PARTS

I want to emphasise that the process of exploring near eastern improvisation was for me not only a matter of learning the theoretical and technical aspects of it but also delving into the philosophical aspects. Therefore I divided this thesis into two parts: one more theoretical where I describe the methods of learning and practicing this new musical language. In this part I will be referring to the classical repertoire from the Middle East.

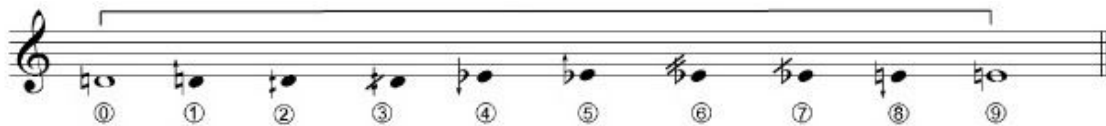
In the second part of my thesis I will describe the process and the effects of working in a duo with my teacher Ahmad Al Khatib. I will present the effects of implementing previously mentioned elements in a new context: contemporary chamber music, inspired by the near eastern techniques. This part has a more of a reflective character and refers to my own observations and artistic choices.

## 1.5 THEORY

Basic explanation of terminology used in this paper for equivalence in understanding:

**Microtonal system:** Since arabian music began to appear notated not earlier than in the 19th century there are many methods of writing down this complexed tonal system. One of the most commonly used today is a system of “Holdrian’s commas” or “Arabian commas”<sup>1</sup>, divides a whole step into 9 commas. The choices of these specific commas are determined by the relation between the tonic and the micro tone in the scale and in some cases by tradition.

This is how the 9 commas/micro tones look in the musical notation:



**Maqām:** the word maqām in Arabic means a “valuable place”. “maqām is a system of scales, habitual melodic phrases, modulation possibilities, ornamentation techniques and aesthetic conventions that together form a rich, melodic framework and artistic tradition”<sup>2</sup>. As mentioned in “Makam, Modal Practice in Turkish Music”, the closest counterpart in Western music would be the medieval mode. There are approximately 60-70 maqāms recognized today, each with its own name (*Bayat, Farah Feza* etc.) and its own distinctive structure.

Habib Hassam Touma in his book “The music of the Arabs” speaks about the maqām phenomenon, describing it as a “technique of improvisation unique to Arabian art music (...) found throughout the entire Arabian world, in secular as well as in sacred music”.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Touma, Habib Hassam, “The Music of the Arabs”, 3rd edn. Portland, Or. Amadeus Press, c1996. p.23

<sup>2</sup> maqāmWorld.com

<sup>3</sup> Touma, Habib Hassam, “The Music of the Arabs”, 3rd edn. Portland, Or. Amadeus Press, c1996. p.38

According to Ahmad Al Khatib: “Each maqām consists of a number of tetrachords and scales. To be able to improvise any maqām is to learn the implementation of these tetrachords in a certain order.”

**Tetrachord:** (*jins* in arabic) a series of four notes separated by three intervals. “They form the basic melodic unit in arabic music as a maqām is really a path way among many tetrachords”<sup>4</sup>. In near eastern music there are eight tetrachords and one trichord (series of three notes).

**Oud:** short neck lute type, pear shaped, fretless, string instrument with 11 or 13 strings, grouped in 5 or 6 choruses.



**Intonation:** accuracy of the pitch in playing or singing

**Peşrev:** instrumental composition that has a rondo structure ABCBDBEB, traditionally is used to accompany Sufi ceremonies. It follows the rules of a maqām very strictly.

**Samai:** instrumental composition that has a rondo structure ABCBDBEB, written in 10/8, based on the rhythm called samai (grouping: 3 2 2 3)

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<sup>4</sup> maqāmWorld.com



**Yegah:** (“the first” in persian) the lowest note that can be effortlessly produced by an individual singer.

## 2. METHOD AND APPROACH

Exploring new musical tradition is like learning new language or doing puzzles, it takes time for the new elements to create a sensible totality. Since my goal is not to imitate a certain tradition or in other words musical a “dialect” but rather understand the essence of the musical practice I have struggled a lot with finding a productive way of approaching improvisation. I had to find the most important element to focus on, the element that will guide me through the complexity of near eastern music. While going deeper into the theory of near eastern music I found out that the major component of any composition or improvisation is the mode built of tetrachords. The world of tetrachords became my main platform of exploration, main gate to improvisation. Therefore I will describe my process of expanding my technique as an improviser through exploring two modes: bayat and fereh faza. I will use my own process of individual practicing and creating a duo (oud and clarinet) as my main research source.

In the process of learning a new musical language and theory I used the method of building a performance repertoire where the main focus was solo playing. During the lessons my teacher and I decided to focus on the clarinet as the soloistic instrument, accompanied by the oud. During the lessons I have learnt theory, history and the aesthetics of the music through playing and practicing. To give an example of my learning process I will describe how I learn a new mode. In this process I will also analyse what I am learning regarding the sound of my instrument. For this purpose I made a selection of chosen modes and tried to follow the practicing method I made, which involves playing the repertoire of a certain mode as much as possible. I will describe this topic in more detail later on. The chosen modes are fereh faza and bayat. The reason why I chose these two modes is the fact that the first mode fereh faza is a mode very similar to a natural minor scale in terms of intonation. That allows me to focus on the traditional execution of the mode instead of struggling with an unfamiliar tonal

system. This mode will be the foundation, making it easier to handle other modes with more complex microtonality in future. The second mode is called bayat and contains one micro tone. It is one of the most common modes to be found in the areas of the Near East. It is used both in classical and folk music.

### 3. INTO maqām: TECHNICAL IMPLEMENTATION

#### 3.1 WHAT IS FERAH FAZA?

Ferah faza is a maqām which from a theoretical perspective is similar to a natural minor scale. But in the eastern theory the ferah faza has very defined procedures when it comes to performance. These procedures are: ferah faza's tonic should be the lowest sound that can be comfortably produced by a human voice (in arabic this sound is called yegah). For the purpose of explaining I will take G as my starting note.

It is important to mention that the tonic “yegah” is placed only in the lowest register. Since the modes are built on tetrachords, the western system of octave equivalence is not pertinent. In tempered music, if the tonic is G, it is all the Gs, however in Near Eastern music the tonic, Yega, is the lowest G and the lowest G only.



First step: the first section should start from the upper octave (above the tonic) with the major tetrachord built on the minor thirteen from the tonic. (Bb C D Eb).



Second Step: is going to the tonic and introducing the main tetrachord which is the G Minor. (in the upper octave). To bust the tonal shift we use the F sharp as a leading tone to the note G. The use of F sharp should only be when going to the G minor or C nekriz. It is not expected to use the F sharp in a melodic context that goes to note D because that would initiate D hijaz tetrachord (hijaz: major tetrachord with diminished 2nd) which is not allowed in ferah feza.



Third step: F sharp can also be used as a gate to a new scale and sound: C nekriz.



Step four: within the ferah faza scale there is also a phrygian tetrachord, built on the 5th step, that can be used during the improvisation, often towards the end of the maqam.



Step five: coloring with tetrachords that are outside of the basic scale of ferah faza (melodic minor) for example: Bayat on D, Major on F.



After executing all of those ideas the final step is to fall down to the Tonic (low G) with the minor tetrachord on that note.

As an improviser in this tradition one is welcome to be creative, innovative and free but within the frames of the Mode's most important rules. Skipping important modulations or modulating to f.ex: D hijaz will change the mood of the maqām and make it into something else.

This analysis came from playing chosen compositions written on this mode *Peşrev Ferah Faza*” by Ismail Hakki Bey (listen to the “Recording nr.1) and *Samai Ferah Faza* by Tanburi Djamil Bey.

### **Recording nr.1**

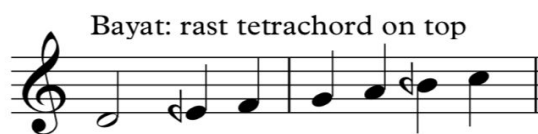
### 3.2 WHAT IS A BAYAT?

Bayat is the name of a maqām and a family that consists of many different maqāms sharing the same tetrachord on the tonic. The tetrachord bayat is the phrygian with a micro tone on the second step. In the bayat family we recognise ten different maqāms. What differentiates them is either the choice of the upper tetrachord or the process of executing the order of tetrachords in performing the maqām. Traditionally a bayat should start from the perfect fifth from the lowest note of a human voice (yegah). If our lowest note is G the tonic of the bayat will be D.

#### bayat tetrachord



In the bayat maqām the dominant note is the perfect fourth of the tonic (G). It means the fourth step is the gate to modulation. Often it is also the starting note of the maqām. The upper tetrachord in the bayat maqām is either a minor on the fourth step or a rast on the fourth step (rast: tetrachord with a micro tone on the third step).



The main rule of the bayat is avoiding the fifth step as a modulation gate. This distinguishes the sound of the mode. If we build an upper tetrachord on the fifth (on A in this case) it will automatically change the mode from bayat to husaini. To build the upper tetrachord in bayat we use the perfect fourth instead.

It is common to start an improvisation on bayat from the fourth step. By using the fourth we initiate the minor tetrachord on the fourth (G minor) which gives the the feeling of subdominant. Bayat has a descending tendency, meaning it goes to a certain note and then it descends back to the tonic. For example if in our Bayat on D I will play the note G, the second frase will most likely go to note F (F major tetrachord), third frase would lead to E micro tone (E sega: the only jins built on three notes) and finally the last one will lead to D, the tonic.

In bayat there are two styles of modulating: one is to modulate the upper tetrachord (most common is to use G hijaz) and the second is to modulate the main route tetrachord (more common are hijaz on D and Saba on D: bayat with diminished 4th) To learn this maqām within the dialectical differences in the Near East I played a collection of compositions both classical and traditional/folk music from Armenia, Kurdistan, Iran, Turkey, Greece and the Arab World. I tried to feel both the different intonation approach and ornaments. When it comes to bayat there is a variety of intonating the micro tone. If we look at the map we see that the lowest micro tone is in Egypt and the more east we go the intonation gets higher. The highest micro tone is in Armenia and Azerbaijan where it is almost natural.

One important part of the bayat is introducing the upper register very dearly.

### 3.3 WHY THE BAYAT?

Bayat is considered the biggest maqām in the Near East music. It has a minor character, therefore even though it contains of a micro tone it still has a familiar sound. It is common among all the oriental musical cultures and it is easy to find examples and resources, especially in the clarinet tradition. In contrast to ferah faza, bayat follows less rules. That makes it easier for me to focus on intonation, and also explore different modulations. It also allows me to be more free and creative in a personal way.

To practice this maquam I chose to play one of the oldest samais in the arab world:

“*Samai Bayat*” on D bayat scale. The composition shows the most popular modulations used in the bayat. “Teslim” from D bayat (the refrain of samai) to D hijaz (in the first “Hana”, first movement of the samai) to G rast (in the second Hana) and D saba (in the third Hana).

## **Recording nr.2**

### 3.4 IMPROVISING THE MODE

#### **Playing the maqām as free improvisation.**

To an untrained ear maqām performance might seem as a formless improvisation, as Habib Hassan Touma writes in his book “(...) clearly defined themes and their elaboration and variation during the course of the piece are absent. (...) The maqām, however, does indeed have a form. It consists of structural elements, including melodic passages, phases and tone levels, and emotional content, that can be clearly observed in vocal as well as in instrumental forms.”<sup>5</sup>

When you improvise within the maqām tradition there are four parts that are commonly presented.

Part One: Introduction. Circulating around the main tetrachord of the mode and presenting the relation between different notes in that tetrachord and tetrachords close to it.

Part Two: Exposition. Circulating around the dominant note and the tetrachord built on that note, which is very often the perfect fifth or perfect fourth from the tonic. In this part a performer is also expected to modulate to other tetrachords that might contain notes outside of the main scale.

Part Three: High point. In this part performer shows the use of tetrachords in the highest register.

Part Four: Coda. Descending back to the tonic.

These parts vary length wise, accordingly to the performer's will. Each part has its own challenges, both technical and artistic. I often practice each of these parts separately, focusing on the needed qualities. Each part requires its own approach. All four of them together make a complete story.

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<sup>5</sup> Touma, Habib Hassam, “The Music of the Arabs”, 3rd edn. Portland, Or. Amadeus Press, c1996. p.39

The first part is the most meditative one, I use my low register, long notes and slow movements between the notes. I practice the timbre of my instrument and explore the deep and round sound of the clarinet. In the second part there is room for both technical and musical display. Here I prepare rhythmic sequences, fast scale exercises and interesting modulations that show the potential of my instrument and the variety of colours in the mode. The tempo of the movements should increase. The third part requires good control of intonation in the high register. I practice the pitch and the sound. This is the part where I can show the capacity of my instrument, wide dynamic range, long notes, slides and glissandos so commonly used among the clarinet players in the Orient.

The fourth part, the outro, is an opportunity to once again show the whole register of the instrument, in calm, descending movements. I work on phrases that can smoothly and logically connect different scale notes and tetrachords.

Being able to navigate through my ideas and control the length of my improvisation has become one of the biggest challenges. All practice and hours spent on finding the best solutions come together in one moment of performance. I believe that being clear and confident about the musical path you chose, despite all the other possibilities, is what makes the listeners follow and therefore react strongly to your story.

## **Improving my Improvisation**

There are two parallel paths which I decided to take in order to develop my improvisation

### 1.Repetition and analysis

Comes from repertoire and listening. After playing a number of compositions I started noticing similar phrases and solutions that are very useful in improvisation. Sometimes It could be whole phrases, musical sentences or figurations that can be easily applied in any scale or rhythm. This became my daily warming up exercise; practicing scales and sequences built on different steps of the scale. I found it very effective to practice those sequences over rhythmic and harmonic loops.

### 2. Understanding



While traveling to the Middle East I heard this sentence: “It is a matter of one note before or after, higher or lower that differentiate between a shallow melody and a deep one”. It is believed to be said by Assi Rahbani (Lebanese composer, musician, poet). This thought became my guide line and shaped my approach to daily practice. I try to develop a sense of modal shifts and understanding for each note in a scale context.

I use a drone as a bass to investigate different tetrachords. This exercise should be practiced in a meditative way: performed slowly and with a lot of patience. I play a drone and I choose a mode. With long notes I carefully listen to each tone of a chosen tetrachord and the relationship between the root (drone) and all the other components of the mode. This helps me to evaluate the function of every note and sound within a mode. In this process I learn how to use notes in a very effective manner and maximise the impact of small tonal shifts that can later on be used in any maqām or improvisation.

### 3.5 ORNAMENTS

After working with ornaments in Near Eastern music and trying to adopt them into my clarinet technique in a genuine way I categorised them into two groups. An ornament in this case is a single note or a whole phrase added to the main structure of a melody. This division is my subjective observation that was concluded after listening to many recordings of the same composition from different areas. For example the *Samai Bayat* attached as an audio file in this thesis exists in the Middle East and in Turkey.

The first group can be described as tradition based ornaments, meaning: these ornaments are mainly formed by the musical heritage of the area. They are often used in a strict way and in specific melodic movements. These ornaments are commonly practiced among instrumentalists and vocalists in the area. In fact these ornaments play an important role in our recognition of different musical dialects.

For example: using double trills in descending phrases in Turkish music



And characteristic pulse in 12/8 Chaharmezrab (example: Recording nr.3, p5).

The second category of ornaments are ornaments added by the performer according to his or her personal taste. These are very often determined by the musicianship and skill but also the instrumental idiom.

During the last two years I have mainly been exposed to oud music. Therefore many of my ornaments are closer to oud tradition than to clarinet tradition. Since the technique and the results are so different it made me interpret these ornaments in my own way. I combine mordents, trills and gruppetto (commonly used by oud players) with slides and glissandos often used by clarinetists.

To be able to apply any of these two categories of ornaments I must understand the composition very well. Applying the right ornament to the melody was one of the most developing skills I have learnt. It is technically demanding and it refined my musical expression.

### 3.6 UNDERSTANDING OF INTONATION

I realised there are two aspects of dealing with intonation. One is to intonate with another musician . To work on this issue in the duo we chose a repertoire of slow compositions containing long notes and pedals based on modes that have no micro tones in them. This gave me a chance to learn natural sound and resonance of both clarinet and oud. This process requires time and patience. While building intonation together there is a great amount of flexibility and intuitive behavior required. With time we realised that the note I can tune to the best is D and C. Not an A as in classical tradition. I have also learnt that intonation is personal and changes as our musical expression does, or tempos, or dynamics do. This has been a huge discovery for me. I have been taught and always believed that while playing I have to follow the tempered 442Hz A. And everything that happens in between is out of tune. Now, while playing with a non tempered instrument, I started discovering natural intervals and intonation that varies depending on circumstances such as: characteristic of the mode, personal taste,

individual hearing and characteristics of each instrument. For example my G1 tends to be slightly lower, or my C2 is usually quite sharp. In fact each note of my instrument has its unique sound and while working on the sound of the two instruments together we subconsciously tend to react to that. And that creates the impression of well blended, united instruments. This process gave me a lot of freedom in performing. I have put all of my attention into listening to my partner and following the flow of the performance. The outcome was surprisingly satisfying. The sound started blending much better, we naturally found common intonation.

Another aspect of working on intonation in oriental music is to find the sound of micro tones. That was and still is one of the biggest challenges. To find them is one thing. To make them sound integrated and natural is another thing. Once again, time and patience are crucial. My teacher has told me that to find a micro tone one must digest the mode, the context and most importantly the very function of the note. This to me sounded like hokus pokus in the beginning. I have rarely thought of relations between the notes while trying to intonate. I would spend a lot of time by the piano or a tuner to find the best embouchure position and try to remember where a note is placed in my mouth and ears. I also intonated to chords, trying to find a good sound of a note in a harmonic context. But in near eastern music the approach is different. Since vertical relations between notes are not as crucial, the intonation of a single note is determined by horizontal, melodic movements. For example: in chordal thinking the choice of intonating Eb in a C minor chord is decided by the relation between the tonic and the fifth of that note while in D hijaz the intonation of Eb is determined by the neighbouring notes. The intonation of E micro tone changes depending on the distance between this note and the root, further away from the tonic the higher the micro tone. Raising and lowering intonation can be used as an ornament for creating a certain expression and raising tension. Similar to ornaments intonation can vary according to the musical dialect used in a specific area. The same scale or even the same melody can be played using different intonation. For example the micro tone in bayat scale would be lower in pitch in Egypt than in Kurdistan or Turkey. Even if they play the same composition. To be able to present those differences on my instrument and use them to my musical advantage I have to train my ear to identify them.

#### **4. LEARNING ABOUT THE EASTERN MUSIC WITHOUT TRYING TO IMITATE A DIALECT OF A SPECIFIC MUSICIAN OR A TRADITION**

My goal is to expand my tools and my musical perspective in order to be able to create a full expression, closest to my personal taste and understanding of the matter. During the last three years I chose the Near Eastern tradition as the main source of inspiration. In this learning process I put a strong emphasis on the preparation and precision. I believe that firm knowledge is the necessary background for further development in my work and later artistic choices. Before I evaluate what I do or do not like I spend a lot of time on listening, transcribing and learning a composition with its complexity and ornaments. This process became my main occupation, it consumes a lot of time, effort and thought: both in my daily practice but also in my reflections. To see the clear outcome of my work and to be able to evaluate my learning process I decided to set a goal of making a performing production. To challenge myself and test the ideas in other circumstances than my own practice room. Therefore the idea of starting a duo was valuable not only artistically but also pedagogically. I decided to treat every composition as a potential concert material. This forced me to work on aspects of the composition: theoretical and performative.

#### **4. INTO maqām: CREATIVE PROCESS**

##### **4.1 WORKING IN THE DUO: CHALLENGES.**

- One of the great challenges in working in a duo is the need of taking care of every fine detail of the melody and sound. Both musicians are exposed and every sound that comes of your instrument is noticeable and can make a difference. I have responsibilities of both a soloistic and an accompanying nature. In bigger constellations the roles of each instrument are more defined and often certain qualities can be unused. The oud for example is usually used as an accompanying instrument, but in this context we want to find a way of widening the sound capacities of both instruments.

- I decided to learn all the music by heart. This was challenging because the music we chose to perform has long and complex forms not always following the rondo form or symmetrical structures. To capture

all the details of the repertoire I chose to learn all of it by ear. This gave me more freedom to focus on the connection between my ears and my fingers. This method was necessary, for the music is rich in ornaments and variations. It also made me realise how ornaments contribute to the dialect of the music.

- I have learnt most of the repertoire directly from an oud player.

This instrument is considered the major instrument in arabic musical culture. Most of the repertoire was composed by oud players. The technique of playing oud determines the music to be percussive (plectrum technique) and microtonal (fretless). This is challenging to apply into my own playing. Firstly I transcribe the oud phrasing, without simplification if possible. Sometimes it can be very challenging, for the phrases natural to oud are not commonly used in the clarinet repertoire. When I get the skeleton of the melody and oud variations I choose what sounds best on the clarinet, I change ornaments if needed or decide to approach the melody in another way. This experience has taught me to appreciate the possibility of producing long notes. Very often what is covered by many ornaments can be said modestly with one long note. By seeing the contrasts of the clarinet and oud I am both appreciating the strong sides of my instrument but also exploring more rhythmical approaches to music. This has affected my solos a lot: I started picking less obvious ideas and experimenting more. I feel there is more to play with, more to surprise the listener with.

-The sense of rhythm is essential in many of the compositions we are playing. Since there is no percussion we must work a lot on the rhythmical aspects of the music. Two musicians have to cover three main aspects of music: melody, harmony and rhythm to create a complete sound image. That means that both of us have to learn how to take on the role of a bassist, percussionist or soloist when it's needed. This made me practice on skills I have neglected in my playing before. I needed to find interesting ways of accompanying or playing more rhythmically than I normally do.

To demonstrate the results of working on rhythmical possibilities and less conventional approaches to our instruments I chose a recording of a classical persian composition " Chaharmezrab Nava". (composed in the XXth century). In this recording the clarinet plays a fast, rhythmical intro inspired by a technique of repeating the bass note, commonly used by plucked instruments. The idea behind this composition is to combine short sections that represent different rhythmic variations on the 12/8 meter.

### **Recording nr.3**

-Another challenge we encountered was to find a good balance between the sound of our instruments. Both volume wise and register wise. For me as a wind player it was crucial to learn how to use my low register and soft dynamics without losing the clarity and energy.

-While choosing the repertoire and composing music for the purpose of performing with this duo we wanted to investigate the harmonic potential in near eastern music. Arabic music is traditionally performed in unison. Musical content is approached horizontally and not vertically as it is in western, classical music. Due to microtonality and non tempered system as well as the instruments used in tradition, harmony has always been of a secondary matter. Nevertheless from the XXth century many musicians have experimented with harmonising Near Eastern music, respecting the characteristic sound of the melody.

To demonstrate an example on this subject I attach the recording of “Oriental Fantasy” (composed in 2015). This piece is written on 14/8 metre, on mode hijaz (major with minor second). The main idea of this composition is moving the hijaz tetrachord in unconventional way. Starting from Eb hijaz, then to D hijaz to G hijaz and to C hijaz. In the improvisation part there is a scale progression supported by harmonic progression. The progression of the improvisation part is: C hijaz -> Eb hijaz -> D hijaz -> C nekri -> C hijaz -> C hijaz. The harmonic progression that follows this cycle is as follows: Fm -> Eb major -> D -9 -> Cm +4 -> Db maj7 -> C. To me these harmonic modulations are unusual in their sound and make a challenge to improvise on. This arrangement was made mainly to make it possible for us to practice

#### **Recording nr.4**

## 4.2 ARTISTIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DUO

Performing this programme is the real evaluation of my work on implementing near eastern music techniques into my musicianship. At the moment of a performance You need to use all those elements in real time. The result of your interpretation and level of expression is determined by your

ability of controlling your instrument and harnessing your creativity. In this duo I feel exposed because the oud gives me a lot of space in the music. Every detail matters.

The repertoire performed in the duo is different from the classical repertoire I choose for my practicing purposes. By choosing such a small ensemble I wanted to face the challenge of playing chamber music. We consciously chose a complex and ambitious repertoire to emphasise the possibilities given with the circumstances. The limitations in terms of sound, volume and energy become liberating and open new possibilities to work with: silence, space, time and sound quality. Although we put a lot of time into expanding the possibilities of our instruments in order to make the duo sound as big as possible (in terms of layers and elements) we also spend a lot of time on creating an intimate sound of the two instruments together, sounding like one.

This puts responsibility on each one of us to work on our individual sound quality and timbre.

Those delicate details all together compose the quality and sound we aim for.

A lot of the music chosen for this project is composed by my teacher Ahmad Al Khatib. His way of using his musical heritage and giving it new context is very inspirational. His knowledge and respect for near eastern music combined with an open mind and experience in western music (as a classically educated cellist) gives the music depth and beauty that can reach out to any listener, regardless of his/her musical background. Working on the music together with the composer makes it easier to understand the meaning of the composition, the intentions behind it. Theoretically and artistically.

## 5. SUMMARY:

Making a summary of my last three years of practicing Near Eastern music is an important step in evaluating my methods and judging the first outcome. In this thesis I tried to answer some of important questions I faced during the process.

1. Methods of learning and routines: I described my practice methods exactly in chapter 2, 3 and 4. I divided the process into three main categories: technical skills, repertoire and creative improvisation. I believe all the factors are very important but after this time I value playing with other musicians the most. In my opinion all the routines and transcribed music can not be processed and properly acquired without the performance

factor. It is on stage or while playing with other musicians where I can evaluate my progress and notice if my routines should be changed.

2. How can I use new techniques on my instrument? First of all, I can not use all the techniques I come upon on my instrument. After realising that I am willing to spend time on finding new ways (new fingering, new blowing technique, different reeds) but also adjusting them to my possibilities when needed. As I described in chapter 3 I find it very helpful to find examples of the same composition from different regions, times and performed by different musicians. This helps me getting ideas and understanding of the melody and choice of techniques. When a certain dilemma is too difficult to be solved individually I contact another clarinet player who is more experienced in the matter.
3. Can I use new techniques without imitating a specific tradition? This is work in progress. As I wrote in this thesis I have never been interested in learning one specific tradition, from a certain region. Therefore my approach into listening, choosing repertoire and also a teacher was determined by broad vision of the musical content more than a way of performing it accordingly to one, chosen tradition. This gives more freedom in choosing ideas but also makes the process longer and requires more reflection and attention to your own input in the music. One could be deluded with a platitude of such approach, but for me it is simply the most interesting form of exploring music that I will always be an outside observer of.
4. How can I learn modes and tonalities that are fundamentally different from the musical culture I have been raised in? This again requires time and patience. The exact techniques I have been practicing are described in chapter 3. The most important conclusion after three years is that things take time. With music and sound so different from what I grew up surrounded by I have to accept the fact that things take time. Even after playing a certain mode or a microtone technically correct I would not feel comfortable and integrated with it. It takes many rehearsals, performances, hours of listening, even journeys to the Middle East, to accept the sound and the way music has been existed in that part of the world for centuries to be able to feel comfortable about it in your own playing. This is definitely work in progress and will remain so for a long time.
5. Can I combine my experience as a western musician with new techniques learnt from the eastern traditions and gain new qualities? This question is probably the most difficult one to answer. It's too soon for me to give an objective answer for it's only been three years since I started exploring this musical field. For now I can say that my music experiences always mix and



influence each other. My goal is to take from them consciously and use to advantage of the music. It would be impossible to close oneself from earlier experiences, not mentioning muscle memory and simply our individual interpretation of music we perform. Led by this thought I chose to perform and work on a musical project that will have a room for all of that. I needed a platform to experiment with the sound and freshly gained knowledge as much as with my other musical skills and ideas. My fear is: can this mix enrich the music I chose to work with? Do I corrupt the compositions? For this there's no objective answer, for music is at the end a subjective impression. For as long as it gives me the feeling of artistic development and inspires me to search I will continue this path. As I mentioned in chapter 4, I decided to study near eastern music and work on a Duo project which would become a platform to test the ideas. This gives me a fair chance to evaluate the outcome of my development and test my fears and ideas in front of an audience. It's always thrilling to perform this music live, to see how people react to your work. In one of the review of the concert commissioned by the Swedish Radio (P2), from the 20th of february 2020, Rasmus Klockljud wrote:

*“Efter uruppförandet förvandlas duon till en trio när klarinettisten Lena Nowak ansluter, och här får vi höra ett snabbt stycke av Hossein Alizadeh, baserat på traditionell persisk musik, där ouden och klarinetten möts i snabba, dynamiska löpningar. Det är en ovanlig instrumentkombination, men den passar mycket fint. Tillsammans med ramtrumman blir det tre träklanger med varsin karaktär, som möts i en fascinerande konsert. (...) Nowak visar att klarinetten mycket väl kan inkorporeras i arabisk musik, inte bara klangmässigt utan också i högsta grad melodiskt. Dynamiken i hennes spel och de stundtals oerhört snabba fraserna gör sig utmärkt tillsammans med ouden och slagverken, och andra gånger lägger hon långa, mörka toner som en botten för lutan att brodera ut över. Den direktsända konserten finns att lyssna på i efterhand på P2:s webb i en månad framöver, och det kan jag verkligen rekommendera er att göra.”*<sup>6</sup>

(english: “Following the performance, the duo transforms into a trio when clarinetist Lena Nowak joins, and here we hear a quick piece by Hossein Alizadeh, based on traditional Persian music, where the oud and clarinet meet in fast, dynamic runs. It is an unusual instrument combination, but it fits very nicely. Together with the frame drum, there will be three wooden sounds of each character, which meet in a fascinating concert.(...) Nowak shows that the clarinet can very well be incorporated into Arabic music, not only sonically but also to a great extent melodically.

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<sup>6</sup>[https://www.lira.se/virtuost-och-kansligt-i-nya-stycken-av-al-khatib/?fbclid=IwAR31XvHmsq5d\\_BQL9xhbmX5eaBKXdiFTIf5OI2ItwW0vniRtXsAhyUYKW5o](https://www.lira.se/virtuost-och-kansligt-i-nya-stycken-av-al-khatib/?fbclid=IwAR31XvHmsq5d_BQL9xhbmX5eaBKXdiFTIf5OI2ItwW0vniRtXsAhyUYKW5o)

The dynamics of her play and the sometimes incredibly quick phrases make her great along with the oud and percussion, and other times she lays long, dark tones as a base for the lute to embroider over.”.)

This for me is an important encouragement to keep working on my progress and believe it is possible to integrate my musical experience and gain new skills by following chosen methods in the process of learning near eastern music.

## NEAR EASTERN MUSIC AS A TOOL OF EXPRESSION

Even though playing this music requires a lot of work I believe it really allows me to express my musicality and develop my creativity. I have always found great pleasure in Art music with it's sensitivity and complexity. I believe music feeds both the senses and the mind and therefore I find it valuable when art inspires me not only aesthetically but also provokes thoughts.

Experiencing the revelation of this new world and the pleasure of digging into new music theory and philosophy makes me appreciate the value of learning and widening my horizons. It makes me curious, it triggers questions about identity and self expression and motivates me to continue my quest.

Expanding my technical skills and musical possibilities helps me develop my personal musical expression and self awareness, paying attention to my instrument and my relation to it. This process pushed me into discovering my instrument and its potential as well as my own capacity as a musician. These techniques influence my playing also outside of the maqām world. Even though this project has become my main focus I have been actively performing with other musical projects of different styles. In the beginning I often questioned the purpose of my exploration of music so far away from my everyday musical language and lifestyle. I was afraid it would affect my playing in an uncontrollable way: that I would lose my tone, my phrases, my sound, my confidence. That it would bring confusion. But the journey into near eastern music made me explore the realm of sound and ways of expressing emotions with sound. It made my sound bigger and more colorful. It also made me look at music in a deeper way: imbedded in history, culture, literature, poetry and a way of living. It teaches me patience and admiration for fine details in craft and art.

I must admit it is not always easy, I sometimes doubt my method, but never my purpose. For the ultimate philosophy of my journey is to liberate me as a musician and as a performer. I confront my feelings and I want to be able to reproduce them in a musical form.

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## RECORDINGS

1. Peşrev Ferah Faza (composer: Ismail Hakki)
2. Samai Bayat (composer anonymous)
3. Chaharmezrab Nava (composer: Ali Hussein Zadeh)
4. Oriental Fantasy (composer: Ahmad Al Khatib)

