

# Syncretic Musical Experiments #19: developing a live performance during a pandemic

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**Abstract.** Companhia de Música Teatral's [CMT] work is based in collaborative creative processes and often involves close interaction between performers and audiences. Due to the pandemic, several of CMT's planned activities were cancelled. New paths had to be discovered and the Zoom™ platform became an important tool to carry on working on CMT's projects. It supported the creation of the music-Theatre piece *O Céu Por Cima de Cá* [trans. Heavens Above Here], a live performance offering two different points of view [at the *Theatre* and via *Zoom*]. This paper is proposed by the artistic team that created the performance, who aim to unveil the concepts underlying the piece, the sources of inspiration and the collaborative methodology of working. It is a collective auto-ethnographic artistic research reflection exploring how the piece came to be and how the final performance impacted not only the performers but also the audiences.

**Keywords.** Artistic Performance, Artistic Diary, Zoom Performance, Pandemic, Companhia de Música Teatral

## Introduction

The following paper is an account of a music-theatre piece that *Companhia de Música Teatral* (hereafter called CMT) created and presented during the pandemic and that had its premiere on September 2020. The performance is called *O Céu Por Cima de Cá*, which roughly translates to “heavens above here”. Throughout the text we will use its original name.

Before delving into the conception of the piece, a little background on CMT's work is required, to better understand the driving force that led to its inception, and the forces that molded the performance into its final shape. Whenever CMT is referenced, the aim is to include past, present and future collaborators in CMT productions, unless specified.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> All CMT projects that will be referenced throughout this paper can be better understood by visiting and exploring [musicateatral.com](http://musicateatral.com) or [vimeo.com/cmusicateatral](https://vimeo.com/cmusicateatral).

## CMT's approach to artistic creation

Almost since its inception, CMT has manifested an interest in exploring the power of music to enable both inward self-reflection and outward creation of networks of human connection.

CMT's work is multidisciplinary, having music as a starting point for incursions into different artistic languages. Additionally, a strong emphasis is placed into exploring the boundaries of artistic research, education and community outreach. Therefore, it is usual that a project may unfold several possibilities: a performance, and/or a published book/paper, an installation, a workshop, a training, a lecture, or all of them at the same time. As such, CMT groups its projects into Artistic-Educative Constellations (Rodrigues, Miguel, Vences, Santos, & Rodrigues, 2020). These reflect the myriad ways in which Music intersects with other artistic languages, creating groups of distinct objects that evolve and are, in some way or another, artistically/conceptually connected.

In CMT's work, music is a holistic and transdisciplinary concept, not only referring to sound production, but also to the creation of connections between different groups of people through artistic experiences.

A commonality between many of CMT's productions is the call for audience participation and interaction. These moments serve to blur the wall between artists and audience, bringing the moment from performance (one-way, artist-audience) to experience (omnidirectional, no assigned roles). In this way, feelings of co-presence<sup>5</sup> and sharing are fostered. These ideas are present either in specific moments of larger performances (for example, *PaPI-Opus 8*), or as a general ethos that permeates an entire project (such as in community music projects like Projecto X). The final performances of such projects account for – and sometimes depend on - the unknown generated by organic interactions between people.

In essence, human interaction is a core component of CMT's projects, being a catalyst for growth in everyone involved. The artistic work is then not only an artistic concept made real, but also all the interpersonal relationships that arise during its making. Those relationships are often compelled forward by the physical presence and interaction between the people involved. The sense of the physicality of others enhances and shapes the kinds of connections that arise and is often a component incorporated in the performances.

As in most years, in 2020 CMT was involved in a variety of projects, mostly related to the *Mil Pássaros* (A Thousand Birds) constellation. However, as can be inferred by the title of the paper, those plans fell one by one when the pandemic hit and restrictions were put in place. Suddenly, all prospects of artistic creation ceased, and CMT collaborators were left each in their home, unable to artistically interact and create. After the cancellation of many of the projects from the *Mil Pássaros* constellation, our need for collaborative creation rose, and soon we were looking for ways to keep creating even with all the limitations of the confinement.

This was the point when a series of efforts were undertaken by CMT to retake what it had lost during the confinement, and that eventually lead to *O Céu Por Cima de Cá*. What follows is an account by the artistic team (this paper's authors) that participated in the creation and performance of *O Céu Por Cima de Cá*. This account aims to unveil the concepts underlying the piece, the sources of inspiration and the collaborative work methodology. A brief reflection on the impact of COVID-19 in the inception of the performance will precede a

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<sup>5</sup> The feeling of being present while also being conscious of the presence of others, interacting with them.

larger section detailing, among other things: how the performance came to be; how the stage was set and the scenery and lights were conceived; the expansion on the themes of angels, birds and clouds that had been a source of inspiration; and how the final performance impacted not only the performers but also the audiences.

*O Céu Por Cima de Cá* is enmeshed and embedded in the places where it happens, drinking from their history to build itself. This paper is not only a reflection on the final performance, but also a kind of crew logbook of a voyage that took us to the clouds and beyond, expanding on the webs of relations that were created between each of the artists and the audience(s).

## **Poemário and other tales of overcoming**

When the pandemic hit we lost our capacity for embodied, collaborative, immersive artistic creation. Little by little, throughout the projects we will describe in this section, we reacquired all those capabilities. These projects aren't only the result of our thirst for communication, but also of our dependency on responsive human connections.

By reflecting on the projects that preceded *O Céu Por Cima de Cá* (*Poemário*, *Poemário Vivo* and *ZygZag&Zoom*), we will not only describe what our objectives were, but also what we gradually (re)learned and the connections we (re)forged.

### **Poemário**

The first project that we developed during the pandemic as a replacement for *Mil Pássaros* was called *Poemário* and was a collection of audio-visual poems. It started in March 2020. We imagined *Poemário* as a conversation not happening in real time, but in pieces. Someone would create a video, an image, music, a poem, and another would take that and add something. Eventually, what resulted were small videos we called audio-visual poems<sup>6</sup>, that would range from animated written text, to drawings of birds and hands, etc.

With this project we understood we could still communicate and create together, albeit with some limitations. Nevertheless, we found this way of creation unsatisfactory, and soon started to delve deeper into video communication software alternatives, to allow for real-time simultaneous creation and interaction with audiences<sup>7</sup>.

With this in mind, we started to develop new ways of escaping the limitations of the confinement (without breaking sanitary rules, of course). Thus, *Poemário Vivo* was born.

### **Poemário Vivo**

With *Poemário Vivo*, premiered in April 2020, we recovered our ability to make a live interactive performance. Doing so was not easy and made us deal with a host of technical hurdles. We soon understood that Zoom™ (hereafter, Zoom) was a tool that was becoming progressively more massified, and so it was the chosen software for these projects. The reason for choosing a tool like Zoom and not perform only as a livestream is the aforementioned

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<sup>6</sup> We prefer to use “audio-visual poems” and not “short movies” because the association with poetry allows for more liberty in terms of style, content and form.

<sup>7</sup> All videos can be watched on [musicateatral.com/en/constelacao/poemario-2](http://musicateatral.com/en/constelacao/poemario-2)

importance of audience participation in CMT's performances. Zoom allows for the creation of dialogues and connections with who is on the other side of the call. This enhances moments of unveiling that what people are watching is not only a recording or a static performance, but something organic, ambiguous. A window into a different world.

Unfortunately, at the time of the development of this performance, Zoom was not particularly adequate for simultaneous audio performance. Two artists would rarely be in sync, and the sound would be subjected to drop-offs and peaks in volume. CMT continued using Zoom in detriment to other more audio-focused platforms such as Discord or LANDR Sessions, because not only is video an important part of our work, but we also noticed at the time that Zoom was becoming the standard choice for schools and workplaces. And so, we had to use a platform that we were certain the general audience could frictionlessly use. It is a central component of the referenced surprise effect, furthering the sense of co-presence during the performance.

The instinct against isolation pushed us to better deal with plainly anti-musical modes of creating music. Nonetheless, CMT felt that this performance needed to be much more than simple unilateral communication. The audience would need to feel a part of what was happening. These interactions were fairly rudimentary but combatted the idea that the artist is monologuing, turning the process into direct communication, a shared *now*.

We maintained and continued to explore bird imagery, almost as an act of rebellion against the strict measures of confinement. The virus could take our physical liberty of movement but couldn't prevent us from *flying* in our creative imagination.

### **ZygZag&Zoom**

CMT has been developing *immersive trainings* since 2007. On that year, after diagnosing difficulties related to traditional teacher training, CMT proposed a training model intrinsically related with the artistic experience *Grande Bichofonia* (Rodrigues & Rodrigues, 2014). The model was very well received by the trainees and we became aware of the importance of i) body work and emotional involvement/ development on learning; ii) isomorphic practices and role models in living artistic experiences; iii) the existence of a final artistic presentation at the culmination of the training. These concepts and practices were refined during the *GermInArte* project (Rodrigues, Rodrigues, & Rodrigues, 2018) with the development of three immersive trainings: *Jardim Interior* (2015), *Caleidoscópio* (2016) and *Dabo Domo* (2017).

In a nutshell, the expression “immersive training” describes a process based on the acquisition of skills –artistic, educational, interpersonal– through practical experience, in a real context that can present successive challenges and opportunities to assimilate perceptions and learning in an experiential way with strong emotional significance (Companhia de Música Teatral, n.d.).

In 2020, a planned immersive training week was cancelled due to COVID-19 restrictions. Notwithstanding, and thanks to what we had learned with *Poemário Vivo*, an online training week took place in July 2020, called *ZygZag&Zoom*. These three sonorous words stuck together referencing *Zyg* (a CMT creation), permanent search and adaptation (*Zag*) and, obviously, *Zoom*.

CMT's aim with this training week was not only to give the participants the technical knowledge on how to create artistically using technologies like Zoom, but also to enable the participants to create something artistic as a group. Most of the participants hadn't been able

to participate in active artistic activities since the beginning of the pandemic. Also, most were very tired of working with Zoom in the “conventional” way. The work with the participants not only involved creating and learning, but also provided a safe space to talk about some of the deeper frustrations that the pandemic brought along, while also wandering and exploring creation over Zoom.

The participants were often asked to create something with strangers (other participants). This enabled them to develop their (artistic) communication skills. Although the final results of such exercises were not always the most artistically interesting, the processes of communication and networks that were created were valuable not only for the final performance, but also for the lives of the trainees.

Between the training moments, the trainers/performers had time to experiment and start to develop snippets of what would end up being *O Céu Por Cima de Cá*. Many of our technical capabilities using Zoom were challenged, and we were able to refine what could be done with this software. We also learned how to better use Zoom with a “film-director” mindset. This residency made us think of ways to create something that would have different meanings depending on if the audience was physically present or watching over Zoom.

## 0 Céu Por Cima de Cá

The experiences described earlier established a path that led to *O Céu Por Cima de Cá*<sup>8</sup>. As explained earlier, the name roughly translates to *Heavens Above Here*. It is supposed to evoke both images of birds and clouds, but also angels, meshed together in the characters we call the *anjitsuri*. This word is the result of the connection between *angel* and *tsuru* (bird), of which they are simultaneously neither and both. Our aim is not to reflect religious imagery, but induce ambiguity in interpreting what they are, where they are and when they are. The place they occupy is an imaginary and limitless one, formless and everchanging, with the only certainty being that it exists somewhere above the place the piece occurs and reflects that landscape.

It should be noted that in Portuguese “céu” not only is the word for “heaven”, but also for “sky”. That ambiguity in naming is present throughout the performance. The piece aims to bring the viewers into a parallel world where present, past, real, virtual, quotidian and art cross, mesh and meld together in an ambiguous tapestry. Images collected during performative incursions by the characters to the place where the piece happens, share space with old movies and documentaries. Collected sounds mesh with digital soundscapes, laments of yore, and normal human thoughts of disquiet. The piece is inextricable from the biography of the place it takes place in. In each city it occurs, we “drink” references of sound and image, which are integrated throughout the performance. A few artistic incursions into the daily lives of the city’s inhabitants occur, when the *anjitsuri* descend on public places bringing birds, examining simple things as if seeing them for the first time.

The *anjitsuri* are characters created from the intersection of different bits and pieces from previous CMT creations, the play *Orizuro* and *Mil Pássaros*. They started as beings that inhabited the same place as birds, but with an almost human form. That anthropomorphism evoked and was inspired by the angels in Wim Wenders’ *Der Himmel Über Berlin* (Wenders,

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<sup>8</sup> First premiered at Vila Nova de Famalicão’s House of Arts on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

1988). In a similar way, they also share a presence with normal humans, while also inhabiting a more whimsical reality (Figure 1).

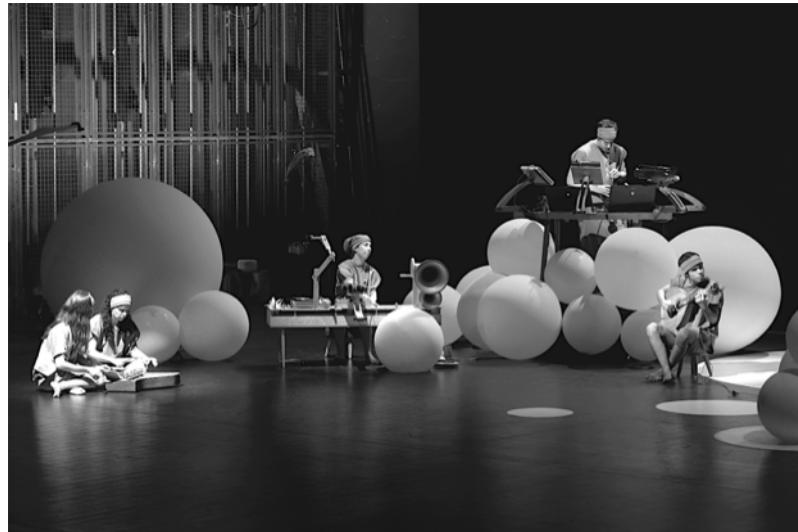


Figure 1. *Anjitsuri* making music

The idea of collecting sounds and images of a city is that each place has over it a different sky, different clouds, maybe even different *anjitsuri*. That infinite space echoes what is beneath it, creating reverberations which mesh sounds from the past and present. The performance should be like the clouds that travel the world, always subject to each place's atmospheric pressures. No two skies are the same.

On the technical side, one of the first questions we thought about when developing the performance was how we could use Zoom asymmetrically, meaning that watching the performance live and over Zoom would yield different interpretations. Our insistence in using Zoom was not only because we weren't sure that we would be able to have people watching live on the room, but also to comment on how teleworking and online co-presence were becoming more and more common. The idea of simply livestreaming the performance was put aside early on, as soon as we started to find ways to integrate who was watching over Zoom into the performance.

### *The "Listening and re-composing protocol"*

The idea that the piece reflects the identity of each place where it is going to be presented is fundamental in the conceptual framework of *O Céu Por Cima de Cá*. This is both a statement about the need to pay attention to the uniqueness of the places and people living there, as well as an assertion of our own identity as artists: we regard creation and performance as a continuum that we enjoy to *play* with. We decided, therefore, to establish a series of principles to guide the creation of uniquely different versions and inscribe that in the “score” (the general architecture of events that unfold on the stage). This set of principles is what we call the “listening and re-composing protocol”.

This is a multimodal process that, among other steps, involves interactions between the characters and the landscape. These take place as performative incursions with spy cams, which in subtle ways capture the place as if it was being seen in secret.

We try to gather older images of the human quotidian, the moments that by being unremarkable end up gaining an almost unreal essence. As if when the *anjitsuri* look down on

earth, they couldn't choose the most interesting parts, and ended up only seeing the normal, the common. These images can come from many sources, but documentaries about the places were the richest, especially their B-roll, which in the case of the documentaries we selected tended to show close-ups of the human face.

To those images we contrast the recordings made using the spy cams. These recordings undergo a treatment to make them look as old and battered as the older recordings, making them easier to merge and confuse, to contribute to the temporal ambiguity we foster during the performance.



Figure 2. Example of quotidian image from old documentary (a farmer in a market) used during the performance

The type of looking that sees mirages from other times is accompanied by a listening that hears echoes of the past. The sounds of *O Céu Por Cima de Cá* include snippets from old and present soundscapes. And so, one of the steps in the protocol is to recover extinct or endangered soundscapes. These are usually borrowed from published ethnographic field work. We imagine this as if the *anjitsuri* listen so carefully to a place that their hearing transcends time. Thus, we base ourselves on what remains of recorded memory, like a lament for a father's death, an interview with an old philosopher, work songs and war songs.

We also record present soundscapes, both very close to the ground and very far away from it. These are soundscapes in the Schaferian sense (Schafer, 1994), recorded in soundwalks, when the *anjitsuri* get as close to the ground as they can, actively listening and seeing what is around them, recording whatever arises without searching for specific sounds.

This listening state is reactive to what seems interesting or characteristic of the specific place, whatever it may be. That judgement is completely subjective to which *anjitsuri* is doing the recording. Specifically, we aim to find a busy place where to record something like a fair or a market, something where the cacophony of human voices blur into a vapor akin to white noise or a murmur of birds. This blurring hum is mirrored by recording the sound of the city from afar, its whisper. Like that, the *anjitsuri* ascend to a high place in the city, to record this hum, this confusion of sounds and voices similar to those a being would listen from heaven.

### ***Algorithm for the addition of clouds to the sky***

Parallel to this, we ask people to record clouds in the sky using an “algorithm for the addition of clouds to the sky”. Again, in Portuguese sky and heaven are interchangeable, and so keep in mind this ambiguity going forward. These clouds are being added to that formless and

infinite place that resides above a place. Clouds are a great inspiration for the performance, based in writings by Tolentino de Mendonça, a Portuguese theologian, poet and thinker, but also a thinker, a poet and a philosopher. He wrote a weekly column called *Que coisa são as nuvens?*<sup>9</sup> This column could either be a poem, or chronicles, essays, almost theatre-pieces. They were very influential to the way we look at clouds. Pier Paolo Pasolini's almost homonymous film was also an inspiration, and two of its characters make quick appearances during the performances, asking the eponymous question ("What are the clouds?").

Another very different source that helped us think about clouds was the Cloud Appreciation Society's manifesto for a cloudy sky (Cloud Appreciation Society, n.d.). This manifest compels the reader to shun a cloudless sky, to find faces and dragons and rabbits in the sky, to create a scenic space in clouds where aethereal characters play and live, where meanings take as long to change as our creativity allows.

With this protocol for the addition of clouds to the sky, we ask people from the place the performance takes place in to step back, slow down, sit outside and look at the sky. To be patient and record a time-lapse of clouds, and while doing so, to fly in their imagination. Those recordings are incorporated in the performance at different places. Our aim is not only to collect an archive of clouds and engage the local community in the process of constructing the performance with the artists, but also to invite people to do an almost guided meditation, while rediscovering the poetry of a cloudy sky.

### ***Building a performance***

*O Céu Por Cima de Cá* is composed of nine tableaux which can be grouped into three different categories: Philosophical Quotidian, Earth Seen From Heaven, Rogatory. These tableaux are preceded by a Prologue, and end with an Epilogue, which take place while the audience is entering the venue, and when they leave, respectively, giving the impression that they are not watching a show but a small glimpse into the ongoing lives of *anjitsuri*. There is something which could be called "sheet music", but isn't, that alludes to what can be a normal day in the life of *anjitsuri*. It is neither a "graphic score" nor a technical document, but occupies a place somewhere between a suggestion, a map, a painting, a photograph and a prophecy.

The categories of tableaux correspond to the daily lives of the *anjitsuri* in Heaven, how they interact with each other and what they see of Earth from up high.

The Rogatory is the moment in the performance when "prayers" (thoughts, worries, anxieties) percolate up to heaven. The *anjitsuri* may be able talk human language but answer in poems, songs or dances, probably because they feel that that's what is missing from the people who call them.

What follows is a small description of what each section of the performance entailed. Although everyone has defined "main" roles, the performers at different times take the roles of directors, musicians, dancers, scenographers, sound technicians.

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<sup>9</sup> "What are the clouds?", a reference to Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1968 film *Che cosa sono le nuvole?*

## Stage design

One of the main features when designing the set was to find an element that could work as a coherent base upon which other specific elements could be added. As the idea of clouds was of paramount importance, we decided that to look for a solution that would point into that direction, but would not be an obvious representation of real clouds, as the whole idea of the piece is to invite the audience to a voyage led by their imagination. The aim was not only to bestow them an ethereal appearance, but also to grant them a palpable weight. These “clouds” are not only made of vapour, being the building blocks of the *anjutsuri*’s structures, their tools and playthings. In practice, they are either atmospheric balloons (ranging in diameter from 2m to 8m) or Styrofoam spheres (between 2cm and 15cm diameter), with some being weighed down in place and others being able to be moved freely around the stage. They enable the stage to evolve during the performance, and to hide other scenic elements. At points they act as projection screens, while in others they are used like toys, played with by the *anjutsuri*.

The set design also contains aspects related to other inhabitants of the sky: birds. Wooden elements evoking bird’s feet (an idea previously developed in the constellation *Mil Pássaros*) are used to support the webcams that record the images for Zoom, as well as two instruments that look almost, but not quite, a cello and a violin. Instead of strings, these instruments’ sound emitting sources are meditation bowls. They are, nevertheless, played like their lookalikes, with a bow. They are called “sinolino” for the violin-like, and “cellobello” for the cello-like.

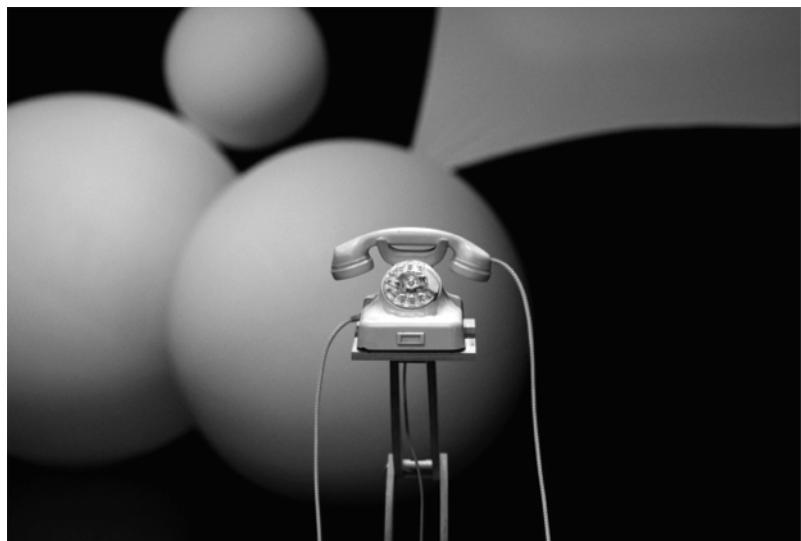


Figure 3. The telephone, with the “clouds” behind it.

The set itself was constructed in an organic way and grew during the rehearsals. This was facilitated by its modular design, which allows greater flexibility when adapting to new stages and theatres and enables the set to echo a place’s ethos more easily. Although this modularity endows the set with variance, this is somewhat constrained by the necessities of lighting design, and because of the existence of static elements in the piece, such as the telephone. The telephone is an anachronistic rotary dial phone that acts as a central piece of the scenography, thought as a direct line of communication between the *anjutsuri* and those on Earth, especially the audience on Zoom. The phone is used in the moments after the Zoom participants are asked to react to a “call center” recording of a list of grievances. Then, a performer takes the object and uses it either to recite a poem or to sing, as a “direct” answer to the supposed grievances of those watching over Zoom.

## ***Lighting***

The light design informed important performative aspects of the piece and it allowed us to venture into the territories of software development and video mapping. Specifically, all videos and images projected on the lycra screen and sent over Zoom is controlled by a *TouchDesigner* patch developed according to the particular needs of the performance. This patch, much as almost every aspect of the piece, is modular and continually evolving according to the needs of the performers and the morphing set.

The lights themselves are not only static shades over the scenery and clouds, but active and living elements of the performance, sometimes leading the physical movement of the performers in stage, at other times being led by a large brush or a dance from an *anjitsuri*. This flexibility is further encouraged by the technical rider. Although it states the types and places of the lights used in the performance, each stage configuration invites a rediscovery of the way the light plays on the clouds. Shadow-play is a common element during the performance, and so lights and clouds influence each other in an effort to perfect this effect. In turn, this reinvention elicits new developments in the movement of the *anjitsuri*, adding to the ever-present idea of innovation and reinvention.

The way the images are captured by the webcams to be displayed on a cloth screen onstage and/or over Zoom allows the performers to use light as a part of the scenery that can be played with and manipulated during the performance, as if it were a physical object, akin to the physicality of the “clouds”.

## ***Music***

The musical language of *O Céu Por Cima de Cá* is as varied as the backgrounds of the performers. All the performers on stage are multi-instrumentalists, each with his own set of tools and knick-knacks (music boxes, chimes, flutes) that enable the production of varied soundscapes. In the piece, Heaven is seen like a sound factory, and so from it emanates everything from birdsong, to thunder, to laments and poems, to J. S. Bach, to Bob Marley, to John Cage, to Stockhausen, to Wim Wenders, etc.

Every music section is the result of collective work held in laboratory sessions, eschewing scores in favor of free improvisation and memorization. This fluidity allows, as in the scenery and lights, an easier adaptation to what the scene requires emotionally and acoustically. It also accommodates more organic movements from the performers that dance and move through the space without them having to refer to strict timings and tempos. This link between body and sound is in a way similar to the mix of spoken word and song that they use to “speak”. The *anjitsuri* communicate more in music and poems than they do in simple words, and so the musical pieces aim to be as fluid as a conversation.

Recordings from extinct and collected soundscapes are used throughout the performance not only to punctuate the atemporality of Heaven, but also to mesh the performers’ voices and instruments. The samples range from excerpts from dialogues from films such as Wim Wenders *Der Himmel Über Berlin* or Pasolini’s *Che cosa son le nuvole?*, a TV talk show featuring Agostinho da Silva (Portuguese philosopher) to the grandmother of one of the performers reciting a Goethe’s poem, to markets and birds, a gamelan, boats and thunder, etc. These are used to enhance the fluidity of change between different musical styles and genres.

## **Movement**

The use of movement and space is very deliberate, being important components of the performance. Accordingly, throughout the week, every rehearsal starts with a body warm-up. These are led by a different performer each day. There is no set routine, but it always involves starting with breathing exercises that lead to full-body movement and almost always evolve into theatrical-music improvisations. The warm-up takes as much time as the performers feel is needed, to “wake up” not only their bodies but also their minds, stimulating their creativity for the work ahead.

These warm-ups aim to heighten the sense of self and the body, its relationship with the space, so that movement throughout the piece can be more mindful and aesthetically consistent.

There was an effort to make an asymmetrical performance, meaning that what can be viewed from the audience and over Zoom is at the same time aesthetically cohesive, mysterious and, more importantly, different. The movements of the performers in space serve to heighten the otherworldly and aethereal personalities of the anjitsuri, while also catalyzing the sensation that what the audience is seeing is almost, but not quite, familiar and normal.

During the performance, the anjitsuri take on different roles and tasks of their daily lives. Simple tasks can have complex and strange movements. Complex tasks can have subdued movements.

## **Interaction**

One of the tasks of the anjitsuri is to hear calls for help from those on Earth. To explore that, we thought that Heaven should work as a call-center, complete with an old landline. Anjitsuri should answer calls day and night. Both as a joke and as social commentary on the unfortunately isolated times this performance was developed in, this call-center is teleworking over Zoom, due to a higher quantity of cries for help.

At specific instances in the performance, a window is opened into Zoom and displayed on the cloth screen, so that people in the live audience can see those who are at home in their computers, and those in Zoom can see each other. A recording (or a performer, in later versions<sup>10</sup>) then reads a list of grievances, in a tone like those recordings common in Government/Hospital/Finance Department lines, as detached from human intimacy as possible. This voice asks those in the call to think about them and how they relate to their lives (broken down cars, financial difficulties, back pain, lost love, loneliness and other mundane tales of woe).

Because simple language can be reductive when you are trying to give a universal solution to the call, the anjitsuri answer in poems, songs or dances, their preferred methods of communication. This interaction is one of the reasons that this performance couldn’t happen over a livestream. This *window* that connects Heaven to Earth is a fundamental part of the performance, alluded to since the Prologue and commented on until the Epilogue.

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<sup>10</sup> In the later cases where there was an angel reading the list of grievances, there was direct interaction with those on Zoom, commenting on their expressions, clothes and what else could be seen on their camera. This was the case when we redid the performance in April 2021, which took place only over Zoom because of a new confinement.

These moments of communication may appear rudimentary, but given the limitations of the technology, they serve well the purpose of showing those on Zoom that what is happening is not only live, but responsive to them. Suddenly what was a screen turns into a window, with strange beings on the other side!

It bestows an air of mystery and ambiguity to some of the visual tricks that happen with the webcams. To those watching live in the theatre, it reveals that what is happening goes further than the room they are in, into other skies and far away clouds.

### **"What dreams may come"**

There is a myth in theatre circles that on the premiere of *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, most of the audience was in tears by the end of the play, with some people needing to be transported to a hospital (Isherwood, 2012). In a “sister-myth”, on the premiere of Lumiere’s *Arrival of the Train*, a stampede occurred when the people who until then hadn’t heard of this new thing called movies thought that the train would run them over (Loiperdinger & Elzer, 2004). Although both of these stories aren’t probable to be more than myths, they echo the human need of using art to create “windows” into other places, other worlds - to look on a stage, a screen or a page and see more than an artifice, to see something “real”. It was this “real”, this constructed reality that we strove to create for those who saw *O Céu Por Cima de Cá*. A window into the clouds and the daily lives of their inhabitants.

This performance took place again on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2021 at the Cineteatro Louletano, in Loulé. Unfortunately, it had to occur only over Zoom, because of the restrictions of the pandemic. But, as every hurdle until now, CMT made an effort to overcome the limitation, and so we took the opportunity to perfect and enhance what people saw over Zoom. The process was not as simple as putting a camera in the audience and record the whole stage. Instead, we designed more complex points of view, allowing for more moments of misdirection.

What we learned with the first versions of *O Céu Por Cima de Cá* will undoubtedly impact further versions, continuing the cycle of iteration and creation. All the projects that lead to *O Céu Por Cima de Cá* were a struggle against the invisible limiting forces of the pandemic, that impacted the quality of in-person presence and communication. There is nothing like sharing a place, to be co-present, and online communication is at best an emulation of normal human connection. Nonetheless, every experience allowed us to “cure” some of the “wounds” that the pandemic left on us, and on our audiences. To sate the thirst for human connection that the required isolation forbid. It is to give back to the audience what should always be theirs: the capacity to participate and create moments of artistic sharing.

Other than that, what the future holds is a mystery, as diffuse and ambiguous as what happens above the clouds.

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