For the conference it needs to be only a 200-word abstract. I hope this will be okay, based on what you wrote (also the presentation is a bit shorter in length) …

Intercultural Collaboration through Networked Performance

Abstract

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect individual musicians, ensembles and concert institutions, streaming technology has become a central vehicle through which musicians and audiences can meet. This paper discusses how networked performance, a format which has engaged artists for decades as an artform in its own right, may contribute to the sustaining of cultural heritage among migrant/minority communities as well as to the development of innovative intercultural artistic practices. Building on the experience of our group, The Six Tones, we wish to develop a more robust understanding of the possibilities, and the limitations, that networked technology affords. The central source of our own work is drawn from Musical Transformations, an ongoing project which studies the intersection between traditional and experimental music in globalized society. We address the role of social interaction in the practice for intercultural collaboration, developed by The Six Tones since 2006, and discuss how such interactions are made difficult when collaborating through mediation of digital technology. Qualitative analysis of video documentation from rehearsals and performances constitute the foundation for the study. The presentation is supplemented with video from networked performances, as well as interviews with the group and guest performers documented on video.

**…………………………………………………...**

**Add a short video of Ty playing Vong Co (excerpt before the video with The Six Tones)**

**Musical Transformations through Networked Performance in Intercultural Music**

**Intercultural Collaboration through the Lense of Networked Performance**

**or simply**

**Intercultural Collaboration through Networked Performance**

### Abstract

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect individual musicians, ensembles and concert institutions, streaming technology has become a central vehicle through which musicians and audiences can meet. But this forced move to digital presence also suggests new possibilities, beyond the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. This paper discusses how networked performance, a format which has engaged artists for decades as an artform in its own right, may also contribute to the sustaining of cultural heritage among migrant/minority communities as well as to the development of innovative intercultural artistic practices. Building on the experience of our group, The Six Tones, as well as on research carried out by Roger Mills (2019) and Ximena Alarcón Diaz, we wish to develop a more robust understanding of the possibilities, and the limitations, that networked technology affords. The central source of our own work is drawn from Musical Transformations, an ongoing project which studies the intersection between traditional and experimental music in globalized society. We address the role of social interaction in the practice for intercultural collaboration, developed by The Six Tones since 2006, and discuss how such interactions are made difficult when collaborating through mediation of digital technology. In this context we believe that it is possible to also study what the limitations that the technologies impose and what the nature of these limitations amount to. Such a study may be useful also in other areas of digital interaction. Qualitative analysis of video documentation from rehearsals and performances constitute the foundation for the study. In the presentations we further discuss the projected creation of a scene for intercultural exchange at Manzi Art Space in Hanoi, with reference to the first networked performance carried out live on a scene in Hanoi on July 12, 2020, curated by The Six Tones at Manzi. This project situates the discussion even more immediately in the current developments of music culture at the time of the pandemic. The presentation, by the four authors, is supplemented with video from networked performances, as well as interviews with the group and guest performers documented on video.

## Musical Transformations: Networked Performance in Intercultural Music Creation

## Keynote address by The Six Tones (VN/SWE) and David Hebert

Concert video presentation

The Hanoi-based group The Six Tones is currently engaged in Musical Transformations, an artistic research project exploring musical change in traditional music through the lens of intercultural collaboration. As a response to the lockdown, the group produced this experimental version of Vọng cổ, a traditional tune from the south of Vietnam together with Phạm Công Tỵ, a master of this music in Saigon. The video was created through remote interaction, and builds on their approach to networked performance in intercultural collaboration, as discussed also in their keynote address on Aug 25.

The Six Tones are Nguyễn Thanh Thủy (who plays Đàn tranh), Ngô Trà My (who plays Đàn bầu), Stefan Östersjö (Vietnamese electric guitar) and Henrik Frisk (electronics).

### Abstract

With the worldwide lockdown affecting individual musicians and concert halls, streaming technology has become a central vehicle through which musicians and audiences can meet. But this forced move to digital presence also suggests new possibilities, beyond the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. This paper discusses how networked performance, a format which has engaged artists for decades as an artform in its own right, may also contribute to the sustaining of cultural heritage among migrant/minority communities as well as to the development of innovative intercultural artistic practices. Building on the experience of our group, The Six Tones, as well as on research carried out by Roger Mills (2019) and Ximena Alarcón Diaz, we wish to develop a more robust understanding of the possibilities, and the limitations, that networked technology affords. The central source of our own work is drawn from Musical Transformations, an ongoing project which studies the intersection between traditional and experimental music in globalized society. We address the role of social interaction in the practice for intercultural collaboration, developed by The Six Tones since 2006, and discuss how such interactions are made difficult when collaborating through mediation of digital technology. In this context we believe that it is possible to also study what the limitations that the technologies impose and what the nature of these limitations amount to. Such a study may be useful also in other areas of digital interaction. Qualitative analysis of video documentation from rehearsals and performances constitute the foundation for the study. In the paper, we further discuss the projected creation of a scene for intercultural exchange at Manzi Art Space in Hanoi, with reference to the first networked performance carried out live on a scene in Hanoi on July 12, 2020, curated by The Six Tones at Manzi. This project situates the discussion even more immediately in the current developments of music culture at the time of the pandemic. The presentation, by the four authors, is supplemented with video from networked performances, as well as interviews with the group and guest performers documented on video.

The Six Tones and Phạm Công Tỵ play an experimental version of Vọng cổ, a traditional tune from the south of Vietnam. The Six Tones are Nguyễn Thanh Thủy (who plays Đàn tranh), Ngô Trà My (who plays Đàn bầu), Stefan Östersjö (Vietnamese electric guitar) and Henrik Frisk (electronics).

## Biographies

### The Six Tones

Since 2006, The Six Tones has been bringing art music from Vietnam and Europe together, touring as an instrumental music group or in music theatre projects, and working with choreographers. The group plays traditional Vietnamese music in hybrid settings for Western stringed instruments and traditional Vietnamese instruments. They improvise in traditional and experimental Western idioms and commission new music by composers in Asia as well as in Western countries. Since 2010, the group has developed a conceptually driven, cross-disciplinary practice, creating choreographed productions, music theatre, film, and video installations. The Six Tones are Nguyễn Thanh Thủy (who plays Đàn tranh), Ngô Trà My (who plays Đàn bầu), and Stefan Östersjö (who plays guitar and also many other stringed instruments). See further www.thesixtones.net. The four authors of this paper are David G. Hebert, ethnomusicologist and professor who has worked extensively on the development of online teaching for universities in China; Stefan Östersjö, chaired professor of Musical Performance at Piteå School of Music. He is PI of the Musical Transformations project and has long-term experience in intercultural collaboration, first and foremost through his work in The Six Tones; Nguyen Thanh Thuy (PhD in artistic research) who is a world leading performer of the dan tranh Vietnamese zither. Her Ph.D. discusses the performance of traditional Vietnamese music in contemporary culture, in particular how a performance culture has been created for popular TV-shows, through the lens of gender analysis; Henrik Frisk, electronic music composer and professor with the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. Henrik is also a founding member of The Six Tones, and has long-term experience in networked performance.

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Link to video

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l-iHavkGP5qBDL-K9WOjfv4QZriPXpnt/view?usp=sharing>

## Introduction

Remote interaction has been an important possibility in musical practice since the invention of musical notation. Already in the early days of western art music, societal infrastructure would serve rather well for delivering scores and parts for the purpose of artistic collaboration outside of the now of musical performance. Loss of information was of course always a possibility in the postal system, but the entire chain of production and delivery equally holds a risk of loss, as illustrated rather drastically when Carl Nielsen was biking to the office of his copyist, and lost the original manuscript to his first string quartet. The entire score had to be reconstructed through memory. When packages of data are lost in the transmission,they are seldom the entire content, but data loss still remains a constant challenge in the digital age.

We understand Networked Performance as the real-time interaction between musicians that are geographically dis-located, and may or may not involve both aural and visual communication, which today tends to be mediated over the internet.This paper discusses the possibilities in intercultural musical collaboration through remote interaction using present day technologies. Further, we also discuss the projected creation of a scene for intercultural exchange at **Manzi Art Space** in Hanoi, with reference to the first networked performance carried out live on a scene in Hanoi on July 12, 2020, curated by **The Six Tones** at Manzi. We seek to better understand how intercultural collaboration may be challenged and vitalized through the use of networked performance, but the creation of a stage for networked performance in Hanoi, we envision as a window to connect musicians across Asia, as well as to nodes in other parts of the world.

This paper is **structured** in six parts, starting out with the present introduction. It is followed by

2. A Background to our work on intercultural collaboration.

3. A brief account of findings from Musical Transformations, an ongoing research project on musical change in intercultural settings.

4. An outline of current research on Networked Performance in intercultural collaboration, including a presentation of our plans for curated series of networked performances in Hanoi

5. A discussion of how networked performance may contribute to intercultural collaboration in music

6. Questions. And we hope to also have time for some further questions at the end.

Before moving to the next section we will first listen to remote interaction across continents in a recording made in the Transformations project this summer by The Six Tones and Phạm Công Tỵ

**Thuy (play video):** You are listening to an experimental version of a song from the south of Vietnam, called Vong Co. Musical Transformations researches how this music has changed over time. In this video, recorded some week before the performance at Manzi, I was again able to play with Phạm Công Tỵ, one of the masters of this tradition. Due to technical limitations, related to Covid 19, it was not possible to set up a real time interaction with him, and we instead played with a video we had recorded earlier on, of him playing the piece. We will return later to the possibilities for musicians in exile to reconnect through the use of technology with musicians from their country of origin. But we will start out with an outline of the artistic research practices developed within **The Six Tones**, a Vietnamese/Swedish group of which we are members since we formed it in 2006. (**Fade out video**)

## 2. Background: research on intercultural collaboration

(Thuy on video) A fundamental building block was the notion of **mutual learning**, which we thought of as a prerequisite for an encounter on equal grounds, across cultural boundaries. The sharing of musical practices has also led to many hours of practicing, and learning to listen differently when disciplining our bodies to perform a different music. In section three we will hear Ty reflect on the processes of mutual learning in the framework of Musical Transformations.

Since the creation of the group, The Six Tones have been part of several artistic research projects, looking at artistic processes through the interaction between the musicians in the group, as well as between musician, musical instruments and scores. The central research methods have been qualitative analysis looking at video documentation of artistic processes, and of musician’s gesture in performance.

**Henrik**: Between 2009 and 2011, we led **(re)thinking Improvisation**, an international research project looking at improvisation from cross-cultural perspectives. Here we would both study improvisation in traditional Vietnamese music as well as the role of improvisation in the encounter with experimental artistic practices. As part of the method development within the project, we sought out ways in which qualitative analysis of video can be enhanced by the method of **stimulated recall**. This allowed us to address the specific oscillation between insider and outsider roles, that characterize the interactions within the group. In (re)thinking Improvisation, the role of listening became a central analytical focus, as a way of understanding the **interaction** between us. Through repeated stimulated recall sessions, we developed a shared understanding of different attitudes of performing, characterized as different modes of listening. The most recent analysis, carried out in 2019, revealed more clearly how the coding and annotations made in 2009 reflected a mutual struggle of finding a shared voice in the group. The opposed strategies of blending and creating difference, both fundamental to improvised performance, can be observed in the interaction.

**Stefan**: An earlier round of analysis, carried out in 2012 led to an increasing awareness that the notion of mutual learning, and the transparency in the relation between cultures which it presumed, was essentially flawed. A musician’s listening is a useful example here. Ways of listening are learnt through life-long socialisation. When a musician approaches an unknown musical tradition, **learning to execute a certain kind of novel vibrato** can be relatively quickly learnt. But to hear its actual significance may or may not be possible to learn, at all. Here, we found that the notion of transparency was countered convincingly by Glissant in his claim for the ”right to opacity”. By acknowledging such rights for each member of the group, an oscillation between processes based on cross-cultural understanding and a more complex form of co-existence, based on trust and empathy, emerged, similarly to how Glissant suggests that “**Opacities** can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components” (Glissant 1989: 190).

## 3. Musical Transformations (New Slide)

As previously noted, The Six Tones, together with David Hebert, are currently involved in a new research project, titled Musical Transformations. The first part is set in the Mekong delta and in the metropolitan city of Saigon. The second part will be looking at musicians who have migrated to Sweden interacting with the members of The Six Tones through the creation of a new film by Trịnh Minh-hà.

**DAVID:** As a musicologist in a team of artistic researchers (the one scholar in the project who is not directly involved in creating music), my role has been to document and interpret the significance of the project activities. This is quite an interesting responsibility since the project is innovative in many ways, serving rather different purposes. On the one hand, it is ethnomusicological in the sense that we are seeking to record the traditional music performances and life stories of leading musicians in a unique style of Vietnamese music that may be understood as comprising both folk music and popular music. Like blues, the Vong Co has certain formulaic structures and performance techniques that are distinctive and unifying characteristics of the genre, and through this study we have been making high quality studio recordings of some of its finest performers while also learning about their experiences from the time they first became interested in music. The genre is also westernized to some extent, featuring the **Vietnamese guitar**, which you saw Stefan play earlier in this session. It has a deep scalloped fretboard, enabling extreme forms of tremolo and pitch bending (unlike guitar-playing most anywhere else in the world), and is often played with electronic amplification. Unlike traditional ethnomusicology, most of our data collection does not involve extended fieldwork, but rather entails brief periods (often about one-week in length) of sessions in **recording studios**. Musicians are interviewed while they take breaks from making studio recordings that are in both solo and ensemble formats. From the interviews, we have been learning much about how Vietnamese music and society have changed across several decades of tumultuous development. This highly focused approach to the research has been made possible partly because the research team includes master performers of Vietnamese traditional instruments, and there has already been ample collection of relevant documents and recordings prior to this particular project, so intercultural collaboration is foundational to the research team.

However, that is only the ethnomusicological aspect of this study, for there is also an equally fascinating aspect that entails collaborative production of innovative forms of intercultural avant garde art music. Members of the research team specialize as composers and performers of new music (in the western art music tradition), and in parts of the recording sessions, they develop unique pieces in collaboration with the Vietnamese musicians. Much of this music is rooted in the Vietnamese traditional genre, but takes it in entirely new directions through variations, improvisation, and use of electronic sampling to manipulate and echo sounds back to the musicians, so there are creative responses that bring the traditional music into an avant garde context in which it arguably becomes as interesting as many recent products developed by contemporary composers using common techniques, such as serialism, postminimalism or spectral music. Due to the live manipulation of samples, this qualifies as a form of electroacoustic music, and yet it has roots in non-European traditional music and features improvisational elements. It therefore constitutes an intriguing polystylistic hybrid that is fascinating to listen to from either the perspective of Vietnamese traditional music or western art music. Through this aspect of the project it has been possible to see first-hand how musicians from different backgrounds negotiate toward finding common ground for production of new hybrid sounds that transcend genres.

One specific strategy we developed for applying “stimulated recall” techniques in the recording studio was to ask solo performers to explain their aesthetic choices in detail when presented with two versions of their own performance of the same piece. Together, we would listen to two 10-second segments, from two different “takes”, and ask them to explain which recording (of their own performance) they preferred, and exactly why it is the “better” version. For music genres that are so very different from European tradition (like Vong Co), we find that this technique may be especially helpful toward developing a stronger understanding of musicianship in the context of ethnomusicological research. While we consider this to be a novel strategy, it may be understood as combining an approach that rock musicologist Allen Moore (2010) calls “the track” with intercultural aesthetic exploration (Davies, 2011).

**Stefan**: We selected a limited number of performers to join the recording of a double CD, together with The Six Tones. The recording sessions took place in Saigon in October 2019. In the extended preparations towards these recordings, we explore the challenges to this tradition that emerge in the artistic process, carried out through **stimulated recall sessions** with all participating musicians. During the 2018 Hanoi New Music Festival, we presented a first public outcome of that ongoing work, in a concert with Phạm Công Tỵ, Phạm Văn Môn, Huỳnh Tuấn and Lương Huệ Trinh together with the group. The music we performed was developed in October the same year in working sessions in a studio in Saigon. Already through the five days we worked it was possible to identify, with reference to the stimulated recall sessions we carried out each morning, a development from initial doubt to the creation of a form which all performers were confident to work with in the performance. In the very first session, all musicians listened back to what we played on our first working day. Phạm Công Tỵ, whom you heard play in the opening performance, said he found the first track we heard sounded “wonky, muffled like music from a creased cassette tape”, and then everybody laughed. He continued to say he wasn’t sure if the music was to be listened to as Vọng Cổ or not.

**Play video**

**Thuy on video:** Similarly, Phạm Văn Môn thought that this music would confuse a Vietnamese listener, that they would lack the aesthetic reference points that constitute the identity of this tradition. Huỳnh Tuấn similarly expressed that also for himself, “it would be good to have something to keep the time, in order to know where we are”.

In the stimulated recall session in the morning of Nov 1, the atmosphere is different, all musicians are relaxed and smiling during the playback, and at the end of one of the takes, Phạm Công Tỵ says “This is good. This is different”. Huỳnh Tuấn fills in that it has “a different atmosphere, different colour”. Hence, rather than discussing difference as a threat to a listener’s understanding, here they embrace the new elements in the music, and discuss difference as a positive quality.

**Play video**

(voice over and video documentation) We believe that the concert performance at the Hanoi New Music Festival in December 2018, and the next **round of sessions** that followed in Saigon further deepened the relation between us. After the last sessions around the European new year, we did not meet until the recording sessions for the double album, in Saigon in October 2019. On the second to last day of the recordings, Ty expressed in an interview how a mutual understanding has emerged in the group:

On the last working day in the studio, we set up a longer conversation with all musicians to summarize our experience. Mon, the guitarist, mentioned the experiment they had made the day before, on Ty’s initiative. His idea was that the three of them should play Vong Co according to every rule, but to play in three different keys. Mon compared this experience to how his listening also had changed when playing with the musicians of The Six Tones, using a Vietnamese phrase that could be translated as listening with an “inversed ear”:

**Stefan:** Mon’s account of the change in his listening, and the notion of the “inversed ear” strikes a note similar to how we have previously discussed intercultural collaboration through the pair of musical and musicianly listening, taken from Pierre Schaeffer’s typology. Michel Chion observes how ”**musical listening** or invention refers back to traditional heritage, to established and accepted structures and values, which it attempts to rediscover or recreate; whilst musicianly hearing or invention seeks rather to locate interesting new phenomena or to innovate in the facture of sound objects. The musical attitude rests on old values; the musicianly attitude actively seeks new ones” (Chion 2009: 39).

It is important to note that Schaeffer regards the pair of musical and musicianly listening as complementary. For a musician navigating conflicting aesthetic and social systems related to musical performance, such an oscillation between attitudes related to tradition and to the searching modes of musicianly listening appears to be a key to the artistic possibilities inherent to intercultural exchange.

Rachael Swain claims that intercultural art embodies a “dramaturgy of incompleteness”, and suggests that thereby, also audiences must be drawn into a negotiation of **“an incomplete experience** that demands [...] a kind of reckoning with the context of the inter-cultural nature of Indigenous lifeworlds” (Swain, 2014: 161). Musical and musicianly listening become part of an ecology of intercultural collaboration which is intrinsically built on trust. In this liminal space between traditions, aesthetic judgement is sometimes suspended, as suggested through Swain’s notion of incompleteness. Musicians from different cultures and traditions interact in a site where sharing and mutual learning often must alternate with actions based on the acceptance of the opacity of the other. In such dramaturgies of incompleteness, musicianly listening remains a central method, in the search for invention in the very fabric of the musical material (Östersjö, 2018: 43-44). In this panel we wish to discuss how such negotiations, in a liminal space situated at the threshold between different musical traditions, can be addressed through networked performance. We will in the next section look at two central references for such artistic practice and research.

## 4. Telematic performance in intercultural contexts (New Slide)

**Henrik:**

While networked performance has a history that goes back several decades, intercultural collaboration through network technology has been sparse. Two important inquiries, combining artistic creation and systematic analytical study have been carried out by Roger Mills and **Ximena Alarcón Diaz**. In both of their projects, embodiment plays a central role. Roger Mills is the musical director of the Ethernet Orchestra, a group of musicians engaging in intercultural networked performance since 2007. **His research** has not included projects in which he himself participated, although members of the Ethernet Orchestra have taken part. His analysis builds on the conception of how metaphors are grounded in our embodiment, and suggests that the image schema that underlie these metaphors constitute “a useful analytical tool to examine relationships between instances of tele-improvisatory interaction and performers’ verbalised reflective thoughts and experiences of that interaction” (ibid). His study employs a qualitative approach, similar to that of The Six Tones. Mills identifies three types of challenges that face musicians engaging in intercultural networked performance, pertaining to (**new slide**)

* **Music and Sound**: unfamiliar tonalities, rhythms, and harmony, electronic sound, variable skill levels, aesthetic tastes;
* **Culture and Social Traditions**: differences in etiquette, language, and inter-personal communication, as well as political and religious outlooks; and
* **Perceptual**: geographical separation, limited or no visual cues, delayed cues through network latency, acousmatic sound and displaced physical presence of sound, performers, and audience, as well as distributed performance environments, multiple local times for dispersed performers. (Mills, 2019, p. 72)

**Stefan:**

While the first two categories are challenges similar or the same compared to any intercultural collaboration, the challenges to a musician’s perception of the event in networked performance is clearly distinct from interactions in the same physical space. If, as we suggest above, intercultural collaboration poses specific challenges to a musician’s listening, here, we encounter novel challenges that are related to timing and sound, captured through microphones and distributed through speakers, and the general issues of latency and the lack of gestural and visual interaction. Further, we must also bear in mind that each musician may experience the particular affordances of a networked performance very differently, depending on previous experience of working with computers, electronic music and, in a recording studio. Similarly, Mills observes how “**Understanding** cultural variations in bodily schemas is an important consideration for the analysis of cross-cultural musicians’ interaction and verbalised experiences” (2019, p. 14)

The negotiation of cultural resistance is a key factor in intercultural collaboration. Certainly, for musicians like Ty, Mon and Tuan, to perform without an audience in the same physical space is a great constraint, since they are part of a musical culture which is very deeply embedded in **social interaction** with audience members. A typical performance of Vong Co stretches over many hours, and erases much of the distinction between performer and audience, since typically many or most in the audience take part at some point, by performing a song or playing an instrument for a bit.

But the role of embodiment in networked interactions is a challenge and a possibility in other ways too. **INTIMAL** a project designed by Ximena Alarcón Diaz, seeks to connect women in diaspora across European cities. It can be described as “a physical-virtual system for relational listening, exploring the role of the body as interface that keeps memory of place in migratory contexts. The system is developed to integrate the body movements of performers (and their voices) with an oral archive. This archive is made up of Colombian migrant women’s testimonies of conflict and migration, representing a diversity of stories, from different generations and regions of Colombia. In a performance of INTIMAL, this archive is activated by walking in the spaces in which the performance takes place, using the dedicated software **MEMENTO**. The archive is organized in relation to four spheres of migratory memory: body stories, social body, native place and host-lands. In addition to this interactive system, a performance also entails transmission and sonification of the performer’s breathing using the software RESPIRO.

INTIMAL then may serve as an example of how networked performance constitutes a technology that can enable embodied reconnection to place. In our own work, we are very keen to explore further how musicians in diaspora can reconnect to performers in their country of origin.

**Henrik**:

We have recently taken the initiative to what we hope will become a regular scene for networked performance, with a base in Hanoi. For many years, we have been returning to **Manzi Art Space**, presenting installations, concerts and film. When thinking of ways to create a wider platform for international (and intercultural) collaboration, Manzi was the obvious choice. A few weeks ago we played the first performance there, with the Canadian composer and improviser John Oliver joining us from Vancouver, and with Ngo Tra My, the dan bau player of our group on stage in Hanoi. She was joined by a long-term friend and collaborator of The Six Tones, the DJ and improviser Tri Minh, a well known performer in Hanoi and abroad. The rest of the group were in different locations in Sweden. Hence, while some of us were in our home studios or living room, Ngo Tra My and Tri Minh, were facing a live audience at Manzi. Hereby, our experience of the performance, but also of time was fundamentally different. This was very apparent in the moments when the technology was failing. When struggling to get all lines connected from a remote site, solving tech issues remained essential, for the two performers in the concert venue, making the show go on was the only focus.

Furthermore, none of the Vietnamese performers had ever met John Oliver, connected from Canada, while Stefan and I knew him since 2010. It is obvious that the level of trust within the group was of a different order than had we all met in the same room. Under these circumstances the particularities, and possibilities, of networked performance makes it into a distinct format for concert performance. And still the communication between all the participants was strong, which can be seen in the following clip.

**Concert video from Manzi** (5’)

## 5. Discussion

### Listening in intercultural collaboration (new slide with audio file)

**Thuy**:

I have seen in the work of The Six Tones how building trust has been fundamental in every new collaboration. And I believe that the social interaction with Mon, Ty and Tuan, was important during the first year of our work. But we have also seen the importance of creating a space for co-existence, without a demand for transparency. Therefore I wonder, **is networked performance** a possible method for emphasizing each musician’s right to opacity? Might the physical distance, and the limited social interaction, be a possible window for giving this space for independence to the participating musicians?

And further, given the challenges to a musician’s listening in intercultural collaboration, such as expressed by Mon when he speaks of listening through a reversed ear, and considering the perceptual challenges posed by the networked performance situation, might we also expect **networked performance** to invite the participants to musicianly listening?

(stop share)

Stefan: Indeed, networked performance tends to be characterized by being both alone, and together. Alone, if we consider performers situated in different locations, monitoring their own playing and the performance of others over headphones. To Jean-Luc Nancy, listening is characterized by resonance, by a physical sharing of soundwaves in a given space: “Resonance is at once that of a body that is sonorous for itself and resonance of sonority in a listening body that, itself, resounds as it listens (Nancy, 2007, p. 40). This other listening, mediated by the prosthesis of audio technology and the global network, excludes the embodied interaction between performer and audience, but arguably, also opens a window for an encounter which is not governed by traditional social conventions of concert venues, or even of the society in which you might yourself live. Certainly, the circumstances may be similar to those of performing in a recording studio, evoking the particular loneliness, but also the possibility of introspective focus, afforded by such settings. What we are interested in is how a further use of technology might instead create a distributed connectedness, a virtual expansion of the presence of the other, along the lines suggested for instance by the INTIMAL project.

**Henrik**:

But in networked performance the mediating framework can be daunting: in advanced communication technology a whole range of things can go wrong and the internet was not originally built to handle high bandwidth data streaming in real time. Yet, in principle, these technologies are not more complex than other systems for performance, such as an opera house or a recording studio. Whereas the latter have developed during many years to promote one specific genre or artform, the former is a multi purpose network with a number of different uses. But, just as these traditional structures have contributed to framing the aesthetics and politics of the musical styles that they foster, we should allow a specific aesthetics to develop through this particular context. This is one reason why it may be necessary to consider the structural, political and aesthetical limitations/possibilities that also networked performance institutes, especially in the context that is discussed here: In what ways does the technology limit or allow the potentialities in intercultural interaction? In what ways is it possible to expand beyond the limitations of the framework?

**David:**

Returning to the main theme of this symposium, what does the case of the Six Tones (and their projects) reveal about the ‘reality’ of virtuality in music? More than a decade ago, in the Hungarian music journal Parlando, I published an essay centered on the question “To what extent may a ‘virtual’ embodiment retain the profundity of meanings associated with traditional musical experience.” This question endures, but since 2010, as we have seen, the Six Tones have directly explored technologically-mediated performance practices in the sphere of intercultural experimental music, with provocative projects that test the meanings of virtuality for “traditional musical experience”. Recently Stefan Östersjö describes the ensemble’s vision as based on an “ecological and postcolonial understanding of a musician’s listening” (Östersjö, 2020, p.157) and in terms of virtuality he argues that “immersive technologies may permit the creation of (…) transmodal experiences” (p.160). Meanwhile, musicology has seen such landmark publications as the Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality, and the Oxford Handbook of Social Media and Music Learning. While we consider at this symposium the extent to which virtual musicianship may be regarded as “real” in the experience of performers and audiences (under the conditions of a global pandemic), there are convincing signs that virtuality is increasingly defined through musical experimentation, and such developments in music inevitably have broader social implications.

We also find that projects like those of the Six Tones produce a depth of embodied understanding (simultaneously cognitive, aesthetic, and kinesthetic) that is qualitatively different from standard academic knowledge. Furthermore, networked performance not only provides an inspiring new artistic vehicle, but may facilitate profound practical improvements to higher education music programs, since it engenders new forms of both creative experimentation and intercultural collaboration. Innovative procedures that successfully harness this approach may empower music institutions to significantly broaden their offerings, extending to additional genres via international partnerships through activities enabled by streaming technologies. Indeed, these developments—whether ultimately judged as more virtual or ‘real’—promise to advance the art of music in new directions for many years to come. [1]

REFERENCES?

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