[*Music in the age of streaming*](https://www.ltu.se/org/kkl/Music-in-the-Age-of-Streaming-2020?l=en)

**Networked Performance in Intercultural Music Creation**

**Introduction**

**Henrik:** This panel was set to explore a range of different relations between streamed digital presence, live performance in a physical space, and pre-recorded video. While turning the present conference into an all digital event was a very logical and successful approach, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the nature of our presentation. Paradoxically, while the presenters who were intended to meet you in the physical space in Piteå school of music are now presenting live, but online, some other elements that should have been live have had to turn into pre-recorded files. To this disclaimer, we also wish to add our thanks for being invited to this exciting event, and we hope that the following discussion of digital presence in musical performance will raise questions regarding the possible role of networked performance in intercultural collaboration. Although the possibility of near realtime interaction offered by contemporary technologies is fascinating this is not the only relevant parameter for this discussion.

**Stefan:** 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.

(Start sharing again)

This panel discusses the possibilities in intercultural musical collaboration through remote interaction using present day technologies, referred interchangeably to as networked or telematic performance. 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*. But what we are interested in is to better understand how intercultural collaboration may be challenged and vitalized through the use of networked performance. For this purpose we have structured this panel in six parts, 1. A performance produced through remote interaction between Sweden and Vietnam 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. 5. In the Discussionthat follows, we aim to weave these threads together. (6. Questions)

We invite everyone to now start the playback of the video file shared in the Twist account,

**1. Play video of Vong Co (8’)**

**Thuy:** You have just heard 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 performance, recorded a few days ago, 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 with musicians from their country of origin in the later end of this panel. 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.

**2. Background: research on intercultural collaboration**

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 practic*ing*, 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.

**Henrik:** 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.

Between 2009 and 2011, we were part of **(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 throughout 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.

**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:** 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”.

**Play video**

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**

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:

**Play video**

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”:

**Play video**

**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 the conception of how metaphors are grounded in our embodiment, such as proposed by Lakoff & Johnson.

Mills 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

* **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.

**5. Discussion**

**Listening in intercultural collaboration**

But, 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, my first question would be, **how can listening situations be created which enable musicianly listening?**

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?**

Henrik: In networked performance the mediating framework, the communication technologies, can be daunting. In principle, however, these are not more complex than other western technologies for performance such as an opera house or a recording studio. And just as these have contributed to framing the aesthetics and politics of the musical styles that they foster, so does communication technologies. For this reason it may be necessary to also consider the political and aesthetical limitations/possibilities that networked performance institutes. **In what ways does the technology limit or allow the potentialities in intercultural interaction?**

**Stimulated recall**

**David:** 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: When it comes to the use of stimulated recall, the next step in our work on developing our strategies for networked performance is to carry out an analysis of the performance you heard in the opening. We will also carry out networked performances with the group in the coming month, which will provide further data. We will code these performances with the aim of cross-referencing these with earlier recordings, such as the ones mentioned in the background section on listening.

**Educational Perspectives (New Slide)**

David: As the book *Teaching World Music in Higher Education* (Coppola, Hebert, & Campbell, 2020) demonstrates, higher education is increasingly opening to diverse forms of music from around the world, and there is greater interest in experiencing an array of music genres through direct creative performance rather than merely academic studies. Networked performance may be key to ensuring this is possible in European higher education, through direct collaboration between music performers on different continents. Another publication that is also now in press, *Oxford Handbook of Social Media and Music Learning*, demonstrates how music is learned through streaming technologies and other recent technological developments. **As explained** in that handbook, the convenience of streaming technologies for students of world music “has freed both the musicians and their students from living in the same location (or paying increasingly expensive airfares), and it offers unprecedented access in ways that bypass issues such as obtaining costly and bothersome visas and musicians having to live in an expensive metropolis in order to build a sustainable living” (Hebert & Williams, 2020). How might music conservatoires benefit from the affordances of such innovations within their programs?

**Conclusions (New slide)**

**David:** We find that projects of this kind produce a depth of embodied understanding (simultaneously cognitive, aesthetic, and kinesthetic) that is qualitatively different from standard academic knowledge. It is therefore worth considering the extent to which networked performance has potential not only for new insights and developments in research and artistic collaboration, but also higher music education more generally. Networked performance may indeed have the potential to facilitate profound improvements to higher education music programs, since it engenders new forms of both creative experimentation and intercultural collaboration. Such developments could enable music institutions to significantly broaden their offerings, extending to additional genres via international partnerships through activities enabled by streaming technologies.

**6. Questions**