

Introduction

In this research paper I investigate the possibilities, motives, risks and limits of immersive contemporary music performances. After each chapter I applied the theory to my own immersive (graduation) project 'IN'. My aim is to make both the audience and myself forget about any traditional concert situation in a way that creates the best possible environment for the particular music that is played. I strongly believe that creating such (physical, virtual, emotional...) space is a powerful tool to collapse the distance between performer and audience. By combining knowledge about this subject with my own experiences (as a musician, composer and curator) and personality, I believe I am able to create a strong performing identity. I also hope to inspire other players to reflect on the contextualisation of their concerts and to see the relevance of strong performing concepts in today's cultural field. This paper mainly focuses on contemporary music, since that is the field I am the most active in.

Could immersive performance concepts be used to create a better connection between a musician and his audience, and how?

What is a concert?

What elements does a (traditional) concert situation consist of?

Before attempting to create innovative performance contexts for contemporary music myself, I needed to have a closer look at what (traditional) concert situations actually are. What makes a certain situation a concert, what are the different aspects and how do they relate to one another. Are street musicians or background jazz combos playing concerts? And what about the work of sound artists or player piano recitals?

After consulting several online dictionaries (www.dictionary.com, www.oxforddictionaries.com and www.dictionary.cambridge.org on september 7th 2016) and adding my own opinion to the information, I will consider for this research every performance that suits the following description a concert.

*A **delimited** action to keep an **audience** interested, provide them enjoyment or move them with live music, done by one or more **musicians**.*

I added the word delimited to be able to talk about place and time. Obviously a concert has to take place somewhere in this world ([or in space](#)). Not only the impact of the geographical location, but also the way concert halls or other venues can be manipulated to serve the music, will be discussed in the first chapter of this research. A concert needs to have a start and an ending, but that doesn't mean it necessarily has to feel that way. Both can be vague, open or affected by other factors. This time-aspect will also be discussed in chapter one.

“If a tree falls in a forest and nobody is around to hear it, does it make a sound?” is a well-known philosophical thought experiment that raises questions regarding observation and knowledge of reality. Thinking about that question made me doubt my above description of a concert, in particular of the necessity of an audience. Do we - musicians - really need others to witness the culmination of our talents, interpretations and ideas to be able to speak of a concert? After imagining myself playing a solo-recital in front of an empty concert hall, I decided to stick with my definition. If music is a language (which I am convinced it is), musicians are senders in need of receivers to communicate with. In this comparison the concert could be seen as an organised situation for this full communication process. Without the receivers there is no point in sending out a message. The traditional behavior of the audience, and possible ways to manipulate it will be reviewed in chapter two.

The third and final chapter will be the most self-reflecting one. It looks into the question what happens to me (and performers in general) when playing an immersive concert? How can one achieve the aimed connection with the audience and how to deal with it without losing attention for the music and its original concept. Can a musician ever manage to create a completely honest identity as a performer whilst staying loyal to the composer? A concert doesn't always have to be beautiful. Besides beauty, music knows a lot of pain, anger, fear, humor, awkwardness, emptiness, senselessness or even meaninglessness. I consider it my role as a musician to express whatever the composer's message is as clear as possible. Most of this can not be found in the creator's notes only, but needs research, creativity, imagination and (life) experience from the performer. Because I am both a performer and a composer, it's very important to me to make sure all necessary respect is there. Especially when I'm planning on adding extra-musical (immersive) aspects to the performance, I need to make sure the composer is fine with that.

Finding new and personal ways to communicate the composer's message to audiences and trying to make them really understand and/or feel it with you is an important part of this research. At the end of every chapter, I describe the process of creating 'IN', my own immersive performance that will be presented in June 2017, related to the insights I gained researching.

IN - concert concept

My graduation project, called 'IN', will be the practical result of this research on immersion. It will be premiered at The Royal Conservatoire in The Hague in June 2017. The overall concept is immersion in order to connect with my audience. The goal is to explore that idea and make my audience and colleague musicians aware of the power it has. Own experiences (like 'Headliner_'; a series of concerts I played with my trio in which the audience was invited to read books, play board games or playstations and/or lay down) convinced me of the fact that immersion also affects me as a performer. It often takes some stress away because together with the audience you get immersed in the environment you have created (which takes the focus away from technical challenges or wrong notes). I want to make people (including myself) forget that they are in a concert (in the traditional sense) and try to make them experience the music more from the inside.

PART 1: IN (45')

This is the solo and "hardcore percussion" part of the performance. The first piece I choose is Kate Moore's [Puur, Miniatuur 1](#), because I believe it perfectly fits my concept: the player is literally inside the instrument. After that I want to play [Interieur, I](#) by Lachenmann and find a way to make this piece a bit more accessible by amplifying it so that I get some control over the audience's focus. With this piece I will also oppose the concept of 'interior' to that of 'exterior' in terms of spatialization. To close this first part, I commissioned a piece for marimba and tape by Ruben De Gheselle.

PART 2: MUSIC FOR BARS (30')

'Music for Bars' is a flashmob project by The Hague based composer Brendan Faegre. The original production is a 60-minute amplification of sonic, physical and social elements of the bar, featuring three percussionists (Slagwerk Den Haag) and three dancers (Poetic Disasters Club) who explore and break the boundaries of "normal".

PART 3: POST-ROQUE (30')

This finale will consist of [Vivaldi's RV443](#) with baroque orchestra and three new own compositions with my [IHEART](#) band. This is easy-listening music, which means that the additional immersive aspects could demand more attention.