

# **Cultural intelligence in intercultural collaborative music-making:**

Self-reflecting on interpersonal abilities as a mediator for  
creative collaborations in Colombia



Viivi Maria Saarenkylä

Artistic Research Master Project

Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki

Global Music Department

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<b>Title</b>  Cultural intelligence in intercultural collaborative music-making: Self-reflecting on interpersonal abilities as a mediator for creative collaborations in Colombia
<b>Author</b>  Viivi Maria Saarenkylä
<b>Department</b>  Global Music Department
<b>Abstract</b>  <p>In this artistic research, I investigate the personal and interpersonal abilities of a musician in intercultural musical collaborations. The body of this research is my field trip to Colombia and two different artistic collaboration projects that I carried out during this trip. I apply the theoretical concept of cultural intelligence to observe and understand my personal experience in engaging in intercultural collaborative music-making. As an artist-researcher, I look into the distinctive characteristics of interpersonal interaction with culturally different others and I answer the following research questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does cultural intelligence emerge in intercultural creative collaboration?</li> <li>2. How can cultural intelligence and intercultural communicative competence impact the creative outcome in intercultural and transcultural collaborations?</li> </ol> <p>As the research method, I use artistic autoethnography. I focus on self-reflecting on my personal experience in Colombia and describe insights relating to the key concepts which are cultural intelligence, intercultural communicative competence, and intercultural collaboration. Through the observations, I aim to contribute new knowledge on these key concepts as applied in artistic research and creative artistic practices. As emerging in the findings, cultural intelligence and developing personal abilities in intercultural understanding and adaptation form a foundation for successful interpersonal encounters and collaborations in culturally diverse environments. Simultaneously, creative artistic collaborations can help in absorbing cultural understanding and succeeding in intercultural communication. Along with a thesis, this artistic research includes two artistic components: a music video as an outcome of a song-writing collaboration and an extended play release (EP) of three improvised musical pieces.</p>
<b>Key words</b>  Cultural intelligence, intercultural competence, intercultural, transcultural, collaboration, collaborative music-making, communication
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## 1. Introduction

The world is growing smaller while we humans take up more space upon it. Due to globalization, digitization, and other forces that make our world shrink, the same forces expand the world of music. While there are probably more musicians than ever before, twenty-first-century artists also have better than ever access to culturally diverse and complex musical playgrounds to explore the multifaceted world around us. Today's musicians may expand their musicianship by being influenced by the almost infinite sources of diverse musical genres, collaborations, cultures, and accessible networks (Davidson, 2014). The growth of opportunities, diminishing distances, and the evanescent boundaries between people as well as music styles are slowly making intercultural contact and collaboration more of a norm than an exception to which all of us are exposed in one way or another. Our own comfort zones get shaken and widened when interacting with others around us. Doing so in multicultural environments and transcultural contexts will inevitably shape our understanding and reform our creativity and expression in ways that might be eye-opening, and surprising and lead to artistically distinctive and original sounds and expression. When working in intercultural contexts is becoming a frequent event in many corners of the world (e.g. Bennett, 2013; Leung & Li, 2009), I recognize that also my personal experience of musicianship has developed in recent years towards more and more diverse fields. From running an international career to including intercultural collaborations and transcultural creative work in my everyday practice both at home and abroad, I am not only exposed to musically diverse worlds but carrying out my musicianship in everchanging, culturally diverse human interactions.

I believe that social intelligence and artists' communicative abilities play a crucial role in successful creative collaborations. Side by side with the level of musical professionalism and e.g. personal musical skills, the interpersonal communication of the musicians will always designate the process and thus influence the final outcome. Intercultural collaborations include multicultural factors and transcultural interaction and therefore require the musicians a particular and distinctive set of interpersonal abilities (see Ang et al., 2015). I find it interesting why some people thrive and function better than others in multicultural environments (Ang & Van Dyne, 2009), especially when participating in or conducting intercultural and transcultural creative collaborations. In 2022 I spent two months in Colombia collaborating with local musicians and in this autoethnographic artistic

research, I look back to my experience in the intercultural and transcultural creative collaborations that took place on this field trip. I self-reflect on the experience through the lens of cultural intelligence and intercultural communicative competencies.

### 1.1 Research aim and questions

In this research I investigate the personal and interpersonal abilities of a musician through the theoretical lens of cultural intelligence in collaborative music-making by answering the following research questions:

3. How does cultural intelligence emerge in intercultural creative collaboration?
4. How can cultural intelligence and intercultural communicative competence impact the creative outcome in intercultural and transcultural collaborations?

### 1.2 Context of the study

In this autoethnographic artistic research I draw on my personal experience of creating music in collaboration with Colombian musicians in Colombia to approach an understanding of cultural intelligence as a mediator for intercultural music-making. I examine the role of the above-mentioned ability as a mediator for creative work between myself and other musicians from culturally different backgrounds in a foreign environment. By looking into two different transcultural music-making projects characterized by cultural diversity and intercultural contact and reflecting on my personal development and experiences in these interactions, I hope to explore the role of cultural intelligence in creative work and consider its effects on the artistic outcome.

### 1.3 Structure of the written work

In Chapter 1 I address my personal motivation for conducting this artistic research and describe the aim of the study. I introduce the research questions and give an outline of the theoretical and methodological context of this study. Chapter 2 reviews the academic literature which has been used as a reference to understand and examine the research topic. Chapter 3 explains the theoretical frameworks of cultural intelligence and intercultural communicative competence, which are applied in the research. Artistic research and the use of artistic autoethnography as a methodological approach are introduced in Chapter 4. This chapter also includes an introduction to the field trip and detailed presentations of the artistic

projects (referred to as fieldwork). It displays the data generation and analyzing methods and discusses research ethics. In Chapter 5 I discuss and speculate my observations, experiences, and findings during the field trip. Chapter 6 undergoes the conclusion of this research project.

## **2. Literature review**

In this chapter I present the principal literature and articles which have been used as the methodological and theoretical frameworks of the research and present previous studies related to my research topic. My criteria for the included literature was to collect a balanced presentation of academic works from the fields of artistic research side by side with the research of social and psychological sciences. The key concepts for the literature search were collaborative and transcultural music-making, cultural intelligence, and intercultural communicative competence. I discuss these concepts in detail in Chapter 3.

### **2.1 Literature presenting artistic research methodology and collaborative music-making**

Artistic and arts-based research belong to the relatively new and developing field of art-related research practices. Both of these terms appear frequently in the discussion regarding the field and therefore I have included literature including both terminology to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the field and these often intertwining terms. My interpretation in distinguishing these two terms is, that artistic research is conducted by artist-researchers who participate in or conduct the artistic work of the research whereas arts-based research can be conducted by researchers from other disciplines, and art is seen as the mediating or researched method (Varto, 2018).

My position as an artist–researcher in this research makes a distinction towards artistic research as I examine the process of music-making and my personal experience as an artist in intercultural artistic collaborations. Therefore, as I am not analyzing the artistic outcome but the process of conducting the practice, I choose artistic research as the main terminological expression to describe this study and artistic autoethnography as the chosen methodological tool. Juha Varto (2018) writes in his book *Artistic research: What is it? Who does it? Why?*: “Artistic research is a special tradition in which the practitioner’s knowledge and skills are the keys to reliable, valuable, and comprehensive research.”. Varto’s book and

this remark plant the basis for understanding artistic research as a unique method in the field of art-related practices.

Patricia Leavy's methodology book *Method meets art: arts-based research practice* (2015) explains the concept of arts-based research and defines the research practices in the context of transdisciplinary social research. As it offers an extensive overview of arts-based research practices, it therefore helps me to understand the methodological tools of arts-based research. Especially chapter 1: *Social research and creative arts – an introduction* (pp. 1–38) introduces the concept in great detail and looks extensively into the multiple characteristics of arts-based research, making it a distinctive methodology in the field of social and qualitative research. The chapter represents an interesting framework for my research project, in which creative intercultural music-making is at the heart of the study. My research leans in the direction of multidisciplinary social research since I am concentrating on viewing the creative intercultural process through a psychological and communicative theoretical lens and reflecting on my own embodied experience as a musician - researcher.

Additionally, in *Handbook of arts-based research* (Leavy, 2017) Chapter 9: *The art of autoethnography* (Adams and Jones, 2017, p. 141–164) is a detailed description of the key research method that I am using in this writing. To understand the chosen research method – autoethnography – I also read the article *Autoethnography: An Overview*, by Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner (2011). These two articles are comparable, and I have used them as equivalent sources to deepen my understanding of the methodological frame. These articles together offer a comprehensive description of autoethnography and they also regard the general critique, which is commonly associated with the method. Finally, to acquire an overview of the research ethics and what is necessary to consider when conducting autoethnography I read Jane Edwards' (2021) "*Ethical autoethnography: is it possible?*" In her paper, she draws attention to the distinctive ethical requirements of autoethnography as a valuable but ethically demanding examination of self-experience in interaction with others.

Raymond McDonald (2014) "*We are all musical: Investigating improvisation as collaborative creativity*", Nathan Riki Thomson (2021) *Resonance: (Re)forming an artistic identity through intercultural dialogue and collaboration* and Robert Davidson (2014)

*“Collaborating Across Musical Style Boundaries”* give interesting views on musical collaborations. Thomson’s research explores the distinctive nature of collaborative music-making processes reaching from intercultural contact towards transcultural collaboration. The differentiation and profound examination of these stages in creative collaboration offers an insightful perspective to self-reflect on my personal experience in Colombia. Thomson’s experience displays a relatively similar context as my research since they are both exploring the musical exchange between different people in multicultural settings. Davidson’s work concentrates more on musical differences. It aligns with my experiences during the field trip particularly as I was involved in an artistic collaboration based fully on improvisation and playing a tradition and genre previously unfamiliar to me on a practical level. Finally, a complementary perspective on musical collaborations is MacDonald’s paper, which addresses the unique features of constructing musical identities, especially through improvisation. He writes from the perspectives of a psychologist and a saxophonist, which offers a multifaceted view of the presented topic.

Before leaving for the field trip I read *“The reinvented music teacher-researcher in the making: Conducting educational development through intercultural collaboration”* by Vilma Timonen, Anna Houmann, and Eva Sæther (2020) to obtain insight on putting into action a practical, intercultural music project. The article is based on the assumption that the process of personal reinvention is one of the most important characteristics of intercultural and collaborative work. It assumes that it is inevitable to feel sometimes confused when working in a foreign culture and that successful intercultural collaboration requires personal qualities such as the capability to reinvent oneself, to be open-minded and understand the differences in culture, traditions, and values, to be aware of the micropolitics and cultural environment and to be able to build mutual and affective trust. Even though this article focuses on intercultural collaboration in institutional and educational contexts, I find this article important for my research project. It provides useful information and insights on the personal qualities and characteristics needed in intercultural collaborations and the context of the study is comparable to my field trip.

## 2.2 Literature presenting theoretical concepts of the study

To acquire an adequate knowledge of the theoretical concept of cultural intelligence I searched theoretical books and articles from the past 15 years from the most accomplished

researchers from the field of human intelligence studies. The selected readings were Ang, S., & Van Dyne, L. (2009): *Conceptualization of cultural intelligence: Definition, distinctiveness, and nomological network*; Ang, S., Rockstuhl, T., & Tan, M. L. (2015): *Cultural intelligence and competencies*; Earley, P. C., & Ang, S. (2003): *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across culture*, and Leung, K., Li, F., (2009). *Social axioms and cultural intelligence: Working across cultural boundaries*. The perspective of cultural intelligence was first introduced by researchers Earley and Ang (2003). The definition of cultural intelligence seeks to define an individual's traits and characteristics which explain the ability to adapt to culturally foreign environments and function effectively in such situations. This definition and further research on the field present the dynamic nature of cultural intelligence. In this artistic research, I regard cultural intelligence as the theoretical lens through which I reflect on my own experience as an artist in intercultural and transcultural collaborations.

To deepen my understanding of intercultural competencies, I also read American anthropologist Edward T. Hall's *The silent language* (1959), which presents the historical context for intercultural studies. Hall has a wide reputation in the fields of cross-cultural communication and intercultural understanding and being a leading researcher in establishing intercultural studies as a field of its own after World War II, I find this book relevant to my research also as it contains basic and fundamental theories on human communication in a cross-cultural context. In chapter 2: "*What is culture?*" (pp. 42–54), Hall defines culture as a form of communication and natural behavior of humans, and as a part of his basic thesis, Hall points out especially how non-verbal communication always follows cultural patterns. According to Hall, cultural factors influence individuals and their communication remarkably without them being aware of it. This theory offers useful insights into intercultural understanding and communication and it can be adapted to the concept of artists operating in multicultural, intercultural, or transcultural settings. Although the book is relatively old, the principles of communication and understanding across cultural boundaries have not changed but maybe even more important concepts to understand in today's global world.

To gain a broader view of intercultural communication and concepts closely related to the theoretical framework of cultural intelligence, I also read Milton J. Bennett's *Towards ethnorelativism: developmental model of intercultural sensitivity* (1993), *Basic concepts of*

*intercultural communication, part 1: Intercultural paradigms, principles and practices* (2013) and *Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity* (2017), *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence* by Michael Byram (1997), *A review of the concept of intercultural sensitivity* by Guo-Ming Chen (1997) as well as *Intercultural humility in social work education* by Anthony A. Bibus & Bibiana D. Koh (2019). These works describe intercultural competencies and how these skills and characteristics affect the behavior and worldviews of people.

In his article, Bennett (1993) presents the developmental stages of intercultural sensitivity. It describes standard ways of experiencing and interpreting cultural differences and interacting across cultural boundaries. The model presents developmental steps from ethnocentric to ethnorelative stages along which people can deepen their understanding and appreciation towards cultural differences and develop knowledge and skills to better negotiate and communicate in multicultural environments and intercultural settings. It assumes that these stages are necessary in order to understand and develop profound intercultural sensitivity and that this development is not natural but will happen consciously. The key assumption of the theory is that an individual needs to know enough about one's own culture and cultural environment in order to recognize and understand the cultural differences of others and to be able to develop cultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993). I find this theory a useful source for a better understanding of human behavior in multicultural societies and a helpful tool when conducting my field trip.

Additionally "*Basic concepts of intercultural communication, part 1*" by Bennett (2013) looks even deeper into the field of intercultural communication theory with a developmental learning focus on intercultural interactions. Different from his older works, Bennett now discusses the topic as a fundamental element of our daily lives in multicultural societies instead of regarding intercultural communication only as a practice in global work and business life. The book served as a practical tool when working on intercultural music-making projects during the field trip and when reflecting on the experience afterward. It defines the differences and distinctiveness of intercultural communication studies versus cross-cultural psychology.

Finally, Byram (1997) offers a pedagogical perspective on intercultural studies. His classic book represents a definition of what skills intercultural communicative competence involves. It is targeted to foreign and second language teachers, educators, and students of

language pedagogy, but also describes the theoretical concepts in an understandable and applicable manner offering a useful insight into the topics of linguistic competence and intercultural competence. Especially chapter 1: “*Defining and describing intercultural communicative competence*”, and chapter 2: “*A model for intercultural communicative competence*”, outline a precise description of different skills and abilities that are needed in order to acquire intercultural competence in a contemporary world where almost everyone encounters people of different cultural identities, values, behaviors and other languages.

The concepts of intercultural competencies are built up from various fields of academic research in psychology, human intelligence, and communications. It is relevant in my research to distinguish these academic concepts in order to consider and understand the observations of my artistic work through the chosen theoretical lens of cultural intelligence. Looking into the conceptualization of intercultural communication offers me a broadened view of understanding the nature of intercultural interactions in general. Finally, I am applying these theoretical concepts to this artistic research through the autoethnographic approach to self-reflection.

### **3. Theoretical frameworks**

Cultural intelligence and other intercultural communicative competencies construct a person’s ability to navigate multicultural and intercultural interactions (Ang & Van Dyne, 2009; Bennett, 2013; Earley & Ang, 2003; Leung & Li, 2009). In this chapter, I describe the theoretical frameworks used in this research and rationalize the reasons for choosing these concepts as the theoretical lens through which I reflect on my artistic work during my field trip to Colombia.

#### **3.1 Cultural intelligence**

Research in human intelligence is a popular branch of academic research and it has a rich history in the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Yet, the better-known concepts such as social and emotional intelligence do not automatically and independently answer the question of how people come to understand cultures other than their own. Culture influences people’s verbal and non-verbal expression, making communication distinctively differ in different parts of the world (Ang et al. 2015). The concept of *cultural intelligence* seeks a definition to the question of why some people thrive and function with

ease in unfamiliar cultural settings while for others culturally diverse environments cause trouble in adaptation and interpersonal interactions. Thus, cultural intelligence (referred to here as CQ) is defined by Earley and Ang (2003) and Ang & Van Dyne (2009) as a person's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse contexts.

Social and emotional intelligence are culturally bound notions of *interpersonal intelligence* (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008; Earley & Ang, 2003). Our behavior and social skills are naturally adapted to our own cultural environment and e.g. social norms of interpersonal interaction and the meaning of intelligence are culturally related. Therefore a person with high social intelligence traits in their own cultural environment might not show high social intelligence in a foreign cultural setting (Ang & Van Dyne, 2009). CQ is not regarded as culture-specific. It is similar to these culturally bound intelligencies as it also includes the abilities to understand and deal with the emotions of others, however, it is a distinct set of particular abilities to understand culturally different others. Ang and others (2015) address that CQ explicitly considers the capabilities of a person to effectively communicate across cultures and to successfully adapt to new cultural environments (see also Earley & Ang, 2003).

CQ is an individual capability based on a person's unique experiences (Ang & Van Dyne, 2009). It is not a stable characteristic feature, but can be taught, learned, and developed as a personal skill. Earley and Ang (2003) present the CQ model divided into four domains which are categorized as metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral cultural intelligence. These four domains are defined as follows:

“Metacognitive CQ refers to the mental capability to acquire and understand cultural knowledge; cognitive CQ refers to the extent of general knowledge and knowledge structures about culture; motivational CQ refers to the capability to channel energy toward learning about and functioning in culturally diverse situations; and behavioral CQ refers to the capability to behave properly in culturally diverse situations.”  
(Leung & Li, 2009)

I find CQ an adequate conceptual approach to this artistic research since it observes an individual's intercultural capabilities and adaptiveness to new cultural settings. It is not fit to measure group behavior and it is not culturally related (Earley & Ang, 2003). This means that CQ is culture-free in terms of explicitly defining how an individual can interact efficiently with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. CQ is a statelike assortment of

personal capabilities that can be developed (Ang & Van Dyne, 2009). As stated by Ang and Van Dyne (2009) CQ requires intention and action, and it should predict performance in situations characterized by cultural diversity. Therefore I believe it is possible to reflect these capabilities also through my personal experience and make personal observations of my own behavior in such intercultural situations.

### 3.2 Intercultural communicative competencies

Cultural intelligence belongs to the rich and actively developing field of cultural competence studies. Scholars present various closely related yet distinctive models and concepts of cultural competence that form and measure intercultural effectiveness. To better adapt the theoretical framework of cultural intelligence into this artistic research, I am also touching on related theoretical concepts such as *intercultural sensitivity* and *humility* as well as *intercultural communicative competence* (see Bibus & Koh, 2019; Bennett 2017; Bennett, 2013; Chen, 1997; Thomson, 2021) in order to comprehensively observe the relation of cultural intelligence in the collaborative intercultural music-making.

Chen (1997) conceptualizes intercultural sensitivity as “an individual’s ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promote an appropriate and effective behavior in intercultural communication”. Intercultural sensitivity consists of affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, which Bennett (1993) introduced with developmental steps from ethnocentric to ethnorelative stages. In his recent writing, Bennett describes intercultural communicative competence as “the forming of intercultural sensitivity into behavior that coordinates meaning across cultural contexts with more or less the same ease that one coordinates within one’s own culture” (Bennett, 2017). According to Bennett (2013), intercultural communication isn’t natural to humans whereas monocultural communication certainly is. Intercultural communication needs to be practiced and learned with consciousness and therefore it demands a lot of attention (Bennett, 2013, p. 5). Assuming others are similar to us leads often to misunderstandings and unsuccessful communication. An interculturally sensitive person should be able to see culturally different people as equally complex as oneself and be able to generate an alternative experience to understand the other, not only a different perspective (Bennett, 2013, p. 20). Also, making general assumptions about a particular culture or e.g. imagining “a typical” person of a certain country most likely leads to inaccurate stereotyping (Bennett, 2013, p. 56). The

assumption of similarity as “people are people ” may be comforting but draws significant challenges on the way of successful interpersonal interactions (Barna, 2013, p. 236).

Finally, I regard *intercultural humility* as a parallel theoretical concept to complement the theoretical framework. The concept is an evaluation of the terms intercultural sensitivity and cultural competencies, adding an emphasis on humility as a central virtue in building relationships (see Bibus & Koh, 2019; Thomson, 2021). Thomson especially ties this concept to the field of artistic research and the practice of intercultural musical collaborations:

“Intercultural humility can be seen here as an essential part of engaging in dialogue and collaboration to the point that, without the qualities of humility, self-reflection, openness, and a commitment to lifelong learning, meaningful interaction would simply not be possible.” (Thomson, 2021, p. 32)

#### **4. Methods**

My research falls under the umbrella of *artistic research* and uses *autoethnography* as the main research method. The research was conducted retrospectively as my decision to write autoethnography formed only after the field trip had taken place (Edwards, 2021). The additional guiding methods and terminology applied in this autoethnographic written work draw on reflexive ethnography (see Ellis et al., 2011), qualitative social research, artistic research, and practice-based research (see Leavy, 2015). Autoethnography is essentially focusing on *self-experience*, thus describing observations of others is not intended (Edwards, 2021). Yet, it is impossible to not include others in the writing since the essence of autoethnography is in the researcher’s “own experience in interaction with those who were present when experience occurred” (Edwards, 2021). As addressed by Edwards, writing autoethnography ethically needs careful consideration of research ethics and constant attention paid to self-reflection (2021). For writing this research, I have negotiated the consent of those who are identified in this paper and I will address the research ethics and its challenges more in detail in sub-chapter 4.5.

##### **4.1 Autoethnography in artistic research**

“Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.” (Ellis et al., 2011). Through the personal experience of the ethnographer, usually gained on an extensive field trip, it is possible to investigate cultural differences and build an understanding of culturally different others. Also as described by Ellis and others (2011): “Reflexive ethnographies document ways a researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork.” As a research method presenting significant emphasis on the personal experience of the ethnographer and interaction with others as well as embracing certain artful qualities, autoethnography allows the researcher to write aesthetically and emotionally rich and engaging text using accessible language and even include dialogues, sometimes based on memory only. Autoethnography tells stories based on true experiences but allows us to fictionalize stories by making the frames of reference, time, and context blurry and unidentified (Adams & Jones, 2017; Ellis et al., 2011). In my research, I use autoethnography as a way of studying and analyzing my personal experience during my field trip to Colombia, where I interacted in creative music-making projects together with local musicians.

#### 4.2 Data generation methods

In February 2022 I traveled to Colombia to execute an artistic *field trip* in the homeland of cumbia music and the fieldwork conducted during this trip serves as the main source for the data generation in this artistic research.

I spent 8 weeks across central and northern parts (the Caribbean coast) of Colombia and collaborated with local musicians by attending instrument lessons on various types of Colombian percussion and accordion and participating in collaborative music-making projects. The music lessons and creative collaborations took place in the rural villages of San Jacinto and San Basilio de Palenque in the department Bolívar, in the capital city Bogotá, in Valledupar in the Cauca valley near the Venezuelan border, and in the cities of Villa de Leyva, Cartagena, and Medellín. The field trip also included free time activities such as attending music festivals and live concerts of cumbia, vallenato, and bullerengue music as well as attending traditional carnival celebrations and spending a fair amount of time in the local nature in the jungle, islands, and mountains. I gave space and attention to the non-musical aspects of the trip by spending as much time as possible living at the homes of local people in non-touristic regions as well as spending time in the local nature such as

participating in a multi-day jungle hike in the indigenous lands. Due to the nature of the trip and the lack of solid personal contacts before the trip, it was not possible to pre-plan the actual musical collaborations (the fieldwork). However as the trip went on and I encountered and engaged with local musicians, it finally led to working in two different creative collaborations which resulted in professional artistic outcomes. In the following sub-chapter, I will introduce these two collaborative works, which present the main data investigated in my research.

On my field trip, I photographed and recorded videos and audio during the music-making collaborations that are studied in this research. I also kept a diary about my feelings, observations, and the development of the creative work processes. As stated by Adams and Jones (2017) “Ethnographers do fieldwork by meeting and talking with others”. In autoethnographic research the data generation includes actively and attentively participating in everyday life in the chosen location – this case in Colombia – and therefore the personal experience of the autoethnographer serves as one of the primary sources of data (Adams and Jones, 2017).

#### 4.2.1 Fieldwork 1: Caminos desconocidos

[Caminos desconocidos](#) is a cumbia song and a music video by Yeison Landero and myself. Yeison Landero is a renowned ambassador of cumbia (in the “style” of San Jacinto and Andres Landero) and representative of the younger generation of cumbia artists and accordionists. Together with Yeison we composed, arranged, and carried out a studio recording of our collaborative composed song, which is based on traditional cumbia elements with some subtle references to Finnish folk music. Finally, we filmed a music video including elements of traditional cumbia dance and scenery from the geographical birthplace of the specific style of cumbia represented in the composition. The collaborative creative process included working together with other professional folk musicians from the village.

I started working with Yeison first by taking accordion and cumbia lessons with him. After approximately a week of daily music lessons, Yeison proposed to work together on a collaborative songwriting project. His idea was to compose a new cumbia, which fuses with folk music elements from my home country Finland. The composing process took around three days, during which we created a demo track with an introduction, lyrics, and the song

with two accordions and a guitar. After making the demo, we spent four days finalizing the arrangement in the recording studio and recorded all the instruments and voices. Finally, we spent one day filming a music video for the song in Yeison's home village San Jacinto.



(Screenshot from the music video "Caminos desconocidos". A film by Alex Guete)

#### 4.2.2 Fieldwork 2: Cumbia de las almas extrañas

[Cumbia de las almas extrañas](#) is a three-track digital release of improvised music based on traditional rhythmic elements of Colombian cumbia played with acoustic accordion and its sound manipulated in real-time with live electronics. Before heading for the field trip, my only existing contact in Colombia was Diego Gómez, the founder of the Llorona Records record label. He is also known as a producer and DJ by his artist name Cerrero. I met him briefly at a showcase festival in Montréal Mundial, Canada in 2019 and later when I decided to focus on Colombian music during my field trip, he was the person I contacted, hoping to establish more connections in the country. In the end, he wasn't only the key person who introduced me to most of the musicians whom I met during the field trip but I also worked together with him to create a collaborative music project, which we finally named "Cumbia de las almas extrañas".

*Cumbia de las almas extrañas (Cumbia of the odd souls) is the first collaboration between Colombian producer Cerrero and a rising accordion star Viivi Maria Saarenkylä. Viivi Maria traveled to Colombia in 2022 invited by Cerrero to learn the secrets of sabanero and Cumbia accordion with the great masters of the tradition, such as Carmelo Torres and Yeison Landero, Andres Landero's grandson. After several months in a self-inflicted cumbia*

*retreat in Los Montes de María, Viivi Maria and Cerrero came together in the studio for the session of improvised electronic cumbia.*

*Cumbia de las almas extrañas is an acid, dark, and twisted cumbia song that represents the electronic and groovy sound of the duo. A match between longing spirits from both the Nordic forest and Los Montes de María soul. In concert, Viivi Maria adventures with her acoustic accordion around the hypnotic cumbia dub rhythms served and manipulated in real-time by Cerrero.*



**Cerrero** - Blend of ritualism and futurism. Rough ethereal, Colombian roots infused, electronic dub music. Colombian record label Llorona Records founder's solo project is a journey to timeless ancient sounds through echoes, reverbs, sampling, and dub mixing. Diego Gómez aka Cerrero has been recording and producing Colombian roots music for over 15 years. Having access and experiment with the original recordings of Llorona Records' catalog and artist roster, which includes names such as cumbia legends Los Gaiteros de San Jacinto and Nidia Gongora's roots ensemble Canalón de Timbiquí, has been the inspiration for Cerrero's unique sound. Recent releases include collaborations with artists such as Lucía Pulido, Coladera, Son Palenque, el "León" Pardo, Nicola Cruz, Uji, and Mitú.

(Extract from the media release of "Cumbia de las almas extrañas", 2022)

The creative process took four days, which I spent as a guest in Diego's house. During this time we did three days of improvisation sessions in a studio setting and recorded everything. On the last day, we listened through the best takes, which were selected instantly after the recordings, and chose three individual tracks to become the final release.

The musical process started from a rhythmic pattern created by Diego. This rhythmic pattern was a simple rhythm recognized in Colombian cumbia. We then recorded a separate loop of the accordion's left hand which presents the typical accordion bass in cumbia. This track set the base for the harmonic world of the improvisations. These pre-recorded elements were

then used as the beginning for the improvised takes, which we played on top of this supporting material. Over the three days, we recorded approximately 15 to 20 takes of 4 to 17-minute-long improvised tracks, where my acoustically played 5-row concert accordion was manipulated electronically live by Diego. Every day we finished by listening to the recorded tracks and on the third day of the recordings we started to recreate some of our favorite musical elements, such as a melodic loop, a rhythmic change, or a specific harmonic movement, and to implement those into new improvisations.

#### 4.3 Data analysis process

Inner dialogue is used in autoethnography as a valid method of analyzing the data (Adams & Jones, 2017). It allows the researcher to observe and speculate on what happened, why, and how. In this written work I present real dialogues between myself and the musicians who I collaborated with as well as display personal speculations and impressions during and after the field trip based on the diary, photos, videos, audio recordings, and memory. Due to the nature of the field trip and the fieldwork, it is impossible to collect all the data in recorded forms. As living the experience every day during the field trip is at the heart of this study and serves as the data, I will analyze the experience and observations often based on the impressions and memories of certain moments, interactions, and feelings as I remember experiencing them at the moment they happened.

#### 4.4 Researcher position

My relationship with Yeison and Diego was primarily collegial but it transformed into a friendship soon after we started to work together on our collaborations. This natural development of interpersonal relationships brings up several questions related to research ethics and my positionality in this research. In this sub-chapter, I describe my thoughts on the subject of the researcher position. When I began the writing process of this academic work, I contacted Diego via WhatsApp to ask him if he was fine with being identified in my writing:

- *“Feel free to use my name”*. He instantly wrote back to me, without hesitation.
- *“As long as it’s not a bad thing about Colombian macho behavior!”* He then added, jokingly.

(Personal communication via WhatsApp, 23.9.2023)

This conversation, more than a year after my field trip, pictures well the mixed feelings that I faced during my time in Colombia. Through my own experience and observations, I noticed cultural and social norms showing in family relations, personal relationships, and gender equality differing between Finland and Colombia, for example. On my field trip, I struggled to feel completely at ease when I was working long days with Yeison and Diego and then invited to stay with their families. Being colleagues and friends got naturally mixed, but at the same time, I was very aware of being a young woman and a guest in their families. Balancing all the dimensions of interpersonal relationships between myself, Yeison, Diego, and their own families, combined with being in a foreign cultural environment was not always simple for me, even though I was invited into their lives. From this perspective, Diego's WhatsApp messages allude to the fact that he might have shared the same concerns. Also, Diego seems to be aware of the differences in our cultural backgrounds and is now expressing concern about me presenting his behavior in an unfavorable light in this paper. Through our collaboration, I became momentarily part of his family life as well. He recognizes that my understanding of culturally related ethics and social norms is based naturally on my own cultural upbringing and maybe therefore he sees the risk of being presented now in a biased manner.

The messaging with Diego caused me to reconsider the ethical issues and possibly problematic power relations regarding friendships. Writing about one's own experience almost always includes others, hence autoethnography is also a description of interpersonal experience (Adams & Jones, 2017; Edwards, 2021; Ellis et al., 2011). It is only natural for an ethnographer to build friendships and seek lasting connections with intimate others during and after the field trip, but this makes it even more crucial to discuss relational ethics thoroughly as ethical issues may arise considerably from many directions (Ellis et al., 2011). As Adams & Jones (2017) describe, it is the responsibility of the researcher to carefully consider the relational ethics from all angles and discuss the impact of the writing with all those who are involved in the research and presented in the writing.

In line with the approaches of artistic research, it is fruitful and essential for this research to be able to include the actual artistic outcomes as part of this academic work and thus it is not possible to anonymize the people connected to these artistic products. Yeison and Diego are not just impersonal subjects for this research (Ellis et al., 2011) but my friendship with them actually represents the research process itself. With Diego, I share a common language and

therefore I have been able to discuss the ethical aspects with him. He has the possibility to read and comment on this text before it is published, as advised by Ellis and others (2011) and Edwards (2021). The same does not apply to Yeison, who does not speak English and I do not speak good enough Spanish to communicate this topic comprehensively with him. I have received Yeison's consent to identify him in this research and to the best ability I have explained to him the content of this study. I translated the research aims, methods, and theoretical lens used – in other words, I have discussed a brief overview of this research with him. However, I've made the decision to view and explain certain parts of this research based on the experience in only one of the artistic projects at a time in order to maintain good research ethics and to preserve the privacy and self-determination of the others. Instead of always regarding my experience in both of the projects, I will elaborate on the experience of specific moments rather than compare the experiences or consider them side by side. I aim to concentrate this research on self-reflecting on my personal changes and development during the collaborations with my Colombian colleagues. I will examine the role of cultural intelligence and intercultural communication skills from my personal perspective in this specific intercultural context of my fieldwork. I am not aiming to form a cultural presentation of musicians' lives in Colombia. Instead, I hope to focus on the interpersonal interaction of the collaborative music-making process.

#### 4.5 Ethics

During this research project I have been aware of the ethical guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board of Research Integrity (TENK, 2023) and I follow these procedures as applied in autoethnographic artistic research. The musicians identified in this research have first been informed about the content of this study verbally and informally through face-to-face discussions and WhatsApp messaging, and later they have confirmed their participation by signing a consent form (see Appendix: Consent form of the research). This research was conducted retrospectively (see Edwards, 2021). Therefore, while the field trip took place, both I and the participants didn't know that the music collaborations which are defined in this study, would be investigated within the frames of artistic research as such. The possibility of this was discussed but to allow spontaneous, natural development of the events, the projects were primarily conducted as personal artistic collaborations, not as experimental research processes on purpose. The ethical procedures of artistic research are varied and due to the great spontaneity of happenings, in this case, it was difficult, if not

impossible to predict the function of the process at any level, including personal, artistic, or academic levels. Thus, before deciding to write autoethnography, the participants were asked if they voluntarily participated in the process. The participants were informed about the possibility to deny the use of the artistic outcomes as part of this research and to withdraw from this study at any time.

## **5. Findings and discussion**

The initial aim of the field trip was to find new inspiration for my own creative work. Through the experience of exploring a foreign culture and being exposed to a faraway musical tradition, I hoped to enrich my music composing process and playing. By learning a different technical approach to my own musical instrument (the accordion) and learning previously unfamiliar rhythms, percussion, and songs, I wished to gain new interpretational qualities for my musical performance and productivity. Due to the lack of personal local contacts before the travels, I did not plan any actual artistic collaborations beforehand. Observing the matter now, it seems evident to me that I had to first arrive in Colombia and stay around for a while to find necessary contacts that could initially lead to artistic collaborations. The only way to show my true interest in the local music and how to learn it was to be present in person, and most importantly, be willing and able to build personal relationships with the musicians. Only after becoming friends with Diego and Yeison, it was possible for us to reach sufficient interpersonal trust and understanding, which finally led to a common will to collaborate on a creative process together. In the next sub-chapters, I self-reflect on the personal experience of intercultural and transcultural music-making and elaborate on these experiences through the lens of cultural intelligence and intercultural communicative competence.

### **5.1 Fieldwork 1: Adapting to the unknown (with Yeison)**

Traveling to the rural village of San Jacinto to meet and play with Yeison felt like a true leap of faith. Not only had I never even talked with him before hopping on the little doorless minibus driving towards the deep inland of Montes de María region, but the village is also known for having been in the heart and control of the major armed guerilla groups during the Colombian civil war that lasted for 60 years until as recent as 2016. Even though it was now relatively safe after the peace agreement was made and the national army had built a heavy presence in the village, I was feeling quite anxious sitting on the bus. I couldn't

imagine what would be waiting for me once I arrived at “some gas station by the road” as I was instructed by an unknown friendly Colombian who, unlike the majority, understood some English. There were no bus stops on the way but people just hopped on and off the bus on demand in what seemed to me completely random locations. I could expect though that things might not go as planned, and by trusting the unknown and surrendering to the uncontrollability of the following events, I would eventually find myself in the right locations safe and sound, and meeting Yeison.

It took me about a week of almost daily cumbia and accordion lessons with Yeison to first learn a way to communicate (my skills in Spanish were initially very poor and his English



non-existent), and consequently to form the beginning of a friendship. I noticed that I had some stereotypical ideas about outgoing, socially open, and chatty Colombians as well as expectations to find a rural community where a stranger, or a fellow musician like me, would be welcomed to the daily life of the villagers without hesitation. All this was probably based on my previous travel experiences but also very much a product of my imagination. I had made an assumption that as a solo female traveler, I would be welcomed to the houses of the local people just because they might be curious. I figured out fast that this was not the case. I was welcomed warmly, but not instantly invited to share more than the music lessons with anyone. As soon as I realized the existence of these false expectations, it became easier to let go of the need to be fast and functional all the time, and also just give time for the interaction with Yeison to develop. From then it would grow day by day towards a more friendly and fluent way of being, not only verbally with the new language skills that I learned every day, but also mentally.

Two weeks later Yeison proposed to compose a cumbia song together. He was excited about the idea of fusing something Finnish into his cumbia after he had heard me playing a

traditional Finnish polka. At this point, I needed to look back to the time we had already spent together. During the lessons where he had taught me some famous cumbias from his family and I had listened to him play, I also became aware that we had a very different set of skills as musicians. He has learned an oral tradition by ear, reads no Western notation nor sees the music in any context of Western music theory; he feels the cumbia. For me, it seemed like the knowledge just existed in him and there was no need or a way for him to put it on the paper. On the other hand, I had just learned the very basic playing techniques, trying to imitate the same sound as when he played his tradition. I wondered how I could adapt to the collaboration without a fluent common verbal or musical language so that the song would however have creative input from both of us equally. This alone would have been a challenge. However, an even bigger challenge than the music was the adaptation to the actual daily life during the collaboration. Reflecting back on it now, I realize that only having the basic knowledge of cultural differences, including how time is seen and managed, for example, didn't adequately prepare me to interpret things correctly when they appeared.

- *"Tomorrow we should start the new song... we can play something."*, said Yeison, sitting on his scooter after driving me back to my guest house.
- *"Will you pick me up from here?"* I replied.
- *"Yeah we will play... at my friend's house. You can play something Finnish."*
- *"I understand. But where is the house? Can you pick me up from here? And what time?"*
- *"Maybe in the morning! At three I will come."* He waved his hand and disappeared around the corner.

The next day Yeison didn't come to pick me up. I tried calling him and sent a couple of messages too, but he only got back to me two days later. He then spontaneously showed up to my door at a random time quite late in the evening to pick me up. However, we didn't go to compose but rather went to teach accordion to his young students. He was acting like nothing unusual had happened and would talk again about how tomorrow we could go and start composing our song together. Eventually, we got our hands on the songwriting only some days later.

This kind of situation made me confused. Yeison seemed motivated and excited about the collaboration when he spoke, but at the same time, I wasn't sure if he was serious and

committed. Cognitive CQ refers to an individual's knowledge of a cultural environment, which has been acquired through previous experiences or education (Ang & Van Dyne, 2009). I had enough knowledge of the cultural norms and practices to realize that Yeison's mindset clearly was equipped with quite an opposite understanding of the concept of time compared to mine. Regardless of this knowledge, his way of acting still made me doubt. It was hard for me to interpret his actions and words because to me they were contradicting. In my culture not keeping a promise is regarded as rather rude but here I was in an unfamiliar environment and I couldn't be sure how the interpretation is different there. I didn't want to show too much of my confusion to Yeison, because I realized it could also be interpreted as being inconsiderate. I clearly needed to give more time to learning the new surroundings, hoping to soon understand better what the concept of making plans is, and the relation between words and actions in certain contexts.

Reflecting back now on the events described above, I think it illustrates an example of a situation requiring motivational and metacognitive cultural intelligence. As described by Ang and Van Dyne (2009) "Metacognitive CQ reflects mental processes that individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge, including knowledge of and control over individual thought processes (Flavell, 1979) relating to culture." I was definitely lacking deeper cultural knowledge and therefore metacognitive CQ in this situation, where Yeison's actions made me feel confused. It shows how I initially interpreted Yeison's disappearance as failing our plan and therefore doubted his commitment. At the same time as I was able to also see the situation from another perspective as a manifestation of different cultural norms and therefore not fully judge it, I wasn't able to avoid being confused. Yet, I had the motivation to adapt to his way of thinking, which I understood was growing from a cultural environment unfamiliar to me. Thus, my previous cultural knowledge helped me to make sense of the events while aiming for higher motivational CQ would help me to adjust my reactions better in the future. As described by Ang and Van Dyne (2009), motivational CQ directs energy toward learning new and functioning better in situations defined by cultural diversity. The development I was hoping to achieve in the future was to grow from understanding a cultural norm to adapting it to my own thinking and experiencing the events around me. Adaptation to new settings requires cognitive flexibility as well as the capability to reshape one's self-concept and integrate new facets into it (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 71). As suggested by Earley and Ang (2003) "understanding new cultures may require

abandoning pre-existing conceptualizations of how and why people function as they do” (p. 71).

The collaborative composing process with Yeison was surprisingly straightforward. The stylistic choice to compose a cumbia honoring the tradition gave necessary boundaries musically. Whereas the verbal limitations for interpersonal communication were challenging us, the musical limitations had the opposite function. As there weren’t an endless amount of rhythmical, harmonic, or structural options, the choices were easier to make. Our personal expertise in music was definitely helping us to communicate understandably. Musically speaking I believe we actually shared rather firm common ground with Yeison. Even if we didn’t speak the same language of music theory, I recognized that our understanding of the songwriting process itself and some key musical elements was similar. For example, proposing melodic ideas by playing them felt natural for both of us. The feeling of parity was reinforced by the fact that we are both accordionists, which was naturally a strong bond on its own.

Considering the language barrier between me and Yeison, I see it as being both difficult and fruitful in terms of the formation of a musical connection. Earley and Ang (2003) propose that when using a foreign language, the speaker will be evaluated and judged less when the language use is not too perfect (p. 180). This is of course related to the dynamics of a verbal interpersonal interaction and how it is interpreted, but I find it relational to my experience in the musical interaction as well. With such limited verbal connection as I had with Yeison, I believe it freed us from unnecessary musical restrictions. When there was a limited possibility to verbalize all possible concerns, musical wishes, details, etc., I needed to rely on the instant feeling and on the music itself. The same applies to how I interpreted Yeison. Since I didn’t understand all of the words he spoke, I needed to rely more on interpreting other forms of non-verbal expression, such as facial and musical expressions (see Earley and Ang, 2003).

“Some individuals are highly efficacious concerning unfamiliar social settings and how to mix and learn more about people from unfamiliar cultures. Further, high efficacy means that as individuals confront obstacles, setbacks, or failures they will re-engage with greater vigor rather than withdraw.” (Bandura, 1997, in Earley and Ang, 2003, p. 76).

The most challenging times occurred during the three days of studio recordings for our new song. Suddenly I was surrounded by a loud and ever-changing group of musicians engaging in a non-stop Spanish-speaking conversation wild and fast. I was forced to find the most creative ways to build and reform new vocabulary at the moment, and through failing and trying again what felt like a million times, I finally found ways to succeed in communicating my ideas and opinions. From the point of view of CQ, self-efficacy, and a sense of confidence are considered to play remarkable roles in how to succeed in intercultural communication (Earley and Ang, 2003). Cultural adaptation is likely to occur slowly, if reluctance or the fear of embarrassment and low efficacy of the conversation comes in the way of using a foreign language (Earley and Ang, 2003, p. 75). From my previous international and intercultural experiences I have learned to leave behind certain self-criticism when it comes to using a foreign language. Assessing motivational CQ into learning a language and consequently being able to function with the newly adjusted skills, even if it feels difficult, is probably the most concrete development of CQ one can experience in a relatively short time frame (Ang and Van Dyne, 2009).

## 5.2 Fieldwork 2: Improvisations inspired by shared oddness (with Diego)

“A new cultural encounter is unique in that the cues and information relied on from past experience are largely absent or misleading. Many times the actions and apparent intentions of others are so unexpected as to appear bizarre and random.”  
(Earley and Ang, 2003, p. 91)

This citation describes my thoughts well as I reflect on my memories from the time I met Diego Gomez. Before traveling to Colombia, I had contacted Diego to ask for help in finding a network of local musicians. I was amazed by his instant willingness to contribute to helping out a stranger like I was for him. Over some months before the trip, we spent hours on video calls constructing an initial travel plan for me. The only question that remained unanswered was if I should visit his recording studio too or not. We had plans to meet on the very first week of my travels, but due to some political situations and instability in the safety of certain areas in the country, his travel plans got canceled and I did not meet Diego in person until the very end of my field trip. As I interpreted it at the time, he was not directly inviting me to visit his hometown since he couldn't commit to a plan for weeks or months ahead. We were discussing the possibility of collaborating together in some way, but things were left hanging in the air.

Again my interpretation of Diego's involvement before meeting him was misleading me into doubting, in a similar way I had done with Yeison, as described earlier. I was unsure of his



Photo: Viivi Maria Saarenkylä's home album

contribution to the possible artistic collaboration because I felt it was difficult for him to make solid plans with me. I ended up encouraging the meeting to take place. Then as I actually met him, I was once more completely surprised by his instant commitment to our project and willingness to share so much of his time with me. I was staying at his house, introduced to his family, parents, and friends, and invited on sightseeing trips, nature walks, dinner gatherings, etc. I was worried that I would be too much effort and trouble for him, but suddenly his hospitality made me feel completely the opposite.

As I am reflecting back on these memories now, it seems to me evident that my in-depth cultural knowledge was lacking a general understanding of the new environment.

Decision-making varies across cultures just like almost everything we are used to at home does (Earley and Ang, 2003, p. 93). My interpretations were based on the subtle cues in interpersonal interactions typical in my own cultural environment. I wasn't used to the nature of everyday life's certain spontaneity for things to come and go or the room that is left for allowing such changes. My initial interpretation of these events as a lack of commitment and motivation happened even if I was actively trying to keep my mind open and remember that I was still a cultural outsider. In these kinds of situations, the ability to find inventive ways of conceptualizing and acting in novel settings is one of the key elements in developing one's cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003, p. 93). As proposed by Earley and Ang (2003), knowledge about culture is collected in various manners such as through observation of behavior and reasoning, but also through personal interaction and

experience with people and furthermore the capability of reshaping self-concept within these interactions.

Collaborating with Diego was different from the process with Yeison in many ways. There were fewer challenges on the practical level since we were able to communicate in a common language and we had some more time to get to know each other already before meeting for the first time. Musically speaking the collaboration had a different approach too.



Photo: Viivi Maria Saarenkylä's home album

With Diego, our musical collaboration was based on improvisation. Following his idea, we started to record long improvised takes of myself on the accordion and Diego manipulating the sound electronically in real-time. We used the cumbia as the reference point, keeping harmonies repetitive around just a few chords and the rhythmic world around the feel of the cumbia. We had a lot of time for the music, for countless repetitions and experiments.

Musician and academic Raymond MacDonald (2014) writes “Improvisation enables certain freedom of communication because it is happening simultaneously by everyone participating, where else in discussion people take turns.” This thought is interesting also from the point of view of intercultural communication. I felt improvising with Diego was a deep dive into a musical exchange in a transcultural setting. The situation was equally novel for both of us since we had never played a note together. For me, it was also a jump into new territory, as I did not know what kind of creative input I could expect from either of us until we started playing and hearing each other. At the same time as being on unknown ground musically, I was also living in the moment on this unknown ground and sharing it with a person I had only just met. In his article, MacDonald (2014) discusses the positive effects of collaborative improvisation on wellbeing and the feeling of peer support. He

suggests that improvisation as a personal and interpersonal phenomenon increases relaxation, self-confidence, and the generation of positive feelings (p. 81). I believe that improvising music for a couple of consecutive days with Diego and thus allowing a lot of space for non-verbal communication while getting to know each other, helped me to adapt to the new and quite exciting situation. When we discussed the music, e.g. which recorded tracks were our favorites, I recognized many differences in our personal opinions. Diego saw the music as something spontaneous and raw in the sense that for him there were no mistakes or not so much need for editing things. Whereas for me, I would have wanted to fix some notes and other musical moments or be more precise in my playing technique or other such details. However, as we were playing the music, I felt a strong feeling of support, connection, and like-mindedness present, like we would have been talking the same language all the time. This followed me later when spending time with Diego's family and friends as if I had known them for much longer and not only met them for the first time.

Bennett (1986) proposes that "interculturally sensitive persons possess an internalized broadened concept of the world" (in Chen, 1997). As I retrospectively reflect on my experience of collaborating with Diego, I believe that the improvisational music-making supported my personal adjustment to the cultural environment and contributed in general to the never-ending process of learning about oneself in interpersonal encounters. On the other hand, my existing cultural knowledge and personal characteristics in intercultural communication helped me facilitate and foster a stable foundation to feel comfortable and productive in the creative artistic process in the present circumstances. Since I did not interview Diego for this research, it is impossible for me to know what made him feel comfortable or uncomfortable in my company during the creative work.

If considering successful acculturation, the research on cultural intelligence suggests that persons with high CQ are welcomed and better accepted by the members of the host culture due to their ability to create an impression of culturally consistent behavior (Earley and Ang, 2003, p. 181). From my point of view, being aware of one's own strengths and weaknesses in interpersonal interactions as well as being able to observe those of others, will contribute positively to any creative work. Additionally, when acting in the distinctive field of intercultural or transcultural collaborations, paying attention to the unique qualities of the present environment plays an important role in creating successful interpersonal contacts and therefore establishes a fruitful foundation for creative outcomes.

## 6. Conclusion

In this research I self-reflect on interpersonal abilities as a mediator for creative collaborations in Colombia. Academics propose that *cultural intelligence* is critical to everyone who engages in *intercultural interactions* (Earley & Ang, 2003). It is viewed as a unique individual trait that requires action and intention (Earley & Ang, 2003), and therefore I also aimed to self-reflect my experiences in Colombia on a practical level in everyday situations as well as when making music. Through this research, I wished to create knowledge of the personal skills needed for successful interpersonal interactions and the distinctive characteristics of communicating with others from diverse cultural backgrounds. I hoped to contribute to understanding the nature of intercultural and transcultural creative collaborations. Artistic collaborations in environments defined by cultural diversity form an especially interesting framework to examine interpersonal encounters as I believe it demands developed cultural intelligence and a broad set of communicative and artistic skills from the individual engaging in such events. In the context of artistic research individual's skills and knowledge are considered as the foundation in understanding artistic practice (Varto, 2018). When it comes to intercultural collaboration, I view cultural intelligence as an inseparable individual trait present in such artistic practise.

Engaging in intercultural music-making collaborations in Colombia, I found myself in the middle of unique artistic and interpersonal encounters that challenged me towards attentive and constant self-reflection. Through my personal experience, I noticed the significance of successful cultural adaptation and mutual understanding affecting the fluency of a collaboration. Without succeeding in the interpersonal interaction and mutual communication collaborative music-making would have been difficult, if not impossible. Furthermore, as introduced by researchers Christensen-Scheel, Aure & Bergaust (2022) "Being an artist is not only being a producer of objects, it also entails being a producer of meaning." When creating art with culturally different others, I find the most remarkable meaning within the diverse and mindful interpersonal contact.

The essence of cultural intelligence is in understanding social behavior (Earley and Ang, 2003, p. 145). As cultural anthropologist Edward Hall (1959; 1966) proposed already 60 years ago, the ability to recognize and interpret the "silent language" of others is at the heart of intercultural competencies and acculturation. However, more than often culturally related

behavioral cues are so subtle that it is hard to notice them if one is not paying conscious attention to recognizing them. Noticing differences may be difficult and even unpleasant, and thus sometimes it is easier to fall into the assumption of similarity (Barna, 2013).

Instead of assuming that people are similar enough to see the world the same way or share a common view on basic needs, for example, it would be much more beneficial for us to assume that we are not similar. Recognizing these inevitable differences in the ways we engage in communication actually allows the space for fluent encounters and furthermore for fruitful collaborations. While I was collaborating with Yeison and Diego, I tried to remind myself to not make any assumptions about how they are thinking or why they might act in certain ways. I didn't find it easy, as often when I thought I knew what to expect, I ended up being surprised by the unexpected nature of life. Additionally, I noticed the importance of not generalizing a cultural pattern in an intercultural situation based only on my own behavior and previous or current experiences. During my field trip, I met and collaborated only with a handful of Colombian artists, and of course, these experiences do not allow me to make general assumptions about a certain cultural environment. If I did so, it would very likely be both stereotyping and inaccurate (Bennett, 2013, p. 56). This view is brought even further in Nathan Riki Thomson's doctoral thesis (2021), where he describes his experiences in *transcultural collaborations* as follows:

“Regardless of the environment and musical upbringing of each collaborator in this project, each individual represents unique forms of hybridity, bringing with them multiple, diverse strands, approaches, and musical aesthetics that are not easily categorized within singular ideas of culture. With this thinking, I consider hybrid musical identities as unique entities, or perhaps individual cultures, which may not sit within stereotypically defined notions of culture” (p. 36).

I find this observation an insightful remark about the nature of creative collaborations. In an artistic collaboration between two musicians, the individual characteristics and musical identities of both are not only diverse, but may also be developing and changing forms through the interaction. Yet, looking into my own experience, I believe that developing my personal *intercultural communication skills* will benefit my ability to connect with people and engage in collaborative creative work characterized by cultural diversity. Observing the intercultural and transcultural music-making projects in this research through the lens of

cultural intelligence has helped me to pay attention to my own, usually unconscious habits when interacting with others. I have gained new perspectives on how I experience cultural differences and adapt to sometimes challenging situations and I believe these observations may help me grow as an artist in a global world.

At times I found it challenging to combine the very practical concept of CQ to the reflective and even creative concept of *artistic research*. The nature of autoethnographic artistic research makes it favorable for contradictory critique. It is criticized for both “being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful” (Ellis et al., 2011). The critique includes questioning the length, extent, and content of the field trips and claims of autoethnography being a research of self-absorbed narcissists written too emotionally or even therapeutically (Ellis et al., 2011).

When writing this thesis, I have experienced self-doubting over the criticized matters. I found it hard to maintain a self-reflective, discerning yet also objectively observing attitude while recognizing personal positionality and ethical aspects in this research, which is viewing my personal experience as the primary source of data, often based on memory. As mentioned in Chapter 4.5 *Ethics*, this research aimed to follow the procedural ethics and TENK (2023) guidelines. However, during the research process, I came to the conclusion that more discussion about the ethical aspects of artistic and arts-related research should be carried out among the practitioners. I hope in the future artistic research and artistic practices in general can be conducted in *ethically sustainable* ways as I believe the impact of such research and artistic processes and outcomes does not limit to individuals’ personal development but might contribute also in a wider social context. Engaging in artistic and creative collaborations with culturally different others inevitably impacts an individual’s worldview and contributes to seeing cultural diversity as a fundamental part of interpersonal interactions. The motive of creating together something tangible supports reshaping self-concept in order to achieve mutual connection. Consequently, it might help in building trust and understanding as well as growing awareness of the interminable and evolving diversity around us.

I have asked myself “Why does my experience matter?” and “What broader useful information could I draw from it?”. The answer may not come out as a concrete list of skills gained through my travels but rather as a picture of an experience that could resonate with

others as well. Through this self-reflective description of events in Colombia, I hoped to capture a humane experience of traveling unknown paths and transmit the essence of those colorful and always fascinating moments that one encounters on such paths shared with other odd souls.

*Recorriendo caminos desconocidos  
Buscando en el alma consuelo y alivio  
Recorrer naciones llanuras y valles  
Por cerros y ríos  
por nubes y mares*

*Así se baila mi cumbia  
Así lo goza mi raza  
Bailando polkkaa y valssia  
de Colombia con Finlandia*

*Que bella es la vida por donde camino  
Cantando y bailando ese es mi destino  
Alegrando el alma y los corazones  
Melodías de cumbia que inspiran amores*

*Traveling unknown paths  
Searching the soul for comfort and relief  
Travel across nations plains and valleys  
Through hills and rivers  
through clouds and seas*

*This is how my cumbia is danced  
This is how my race enjoys it  
Dancing polkka and valssi  
from Colombia with Finland*

*How beautiful is life where I walk  
Singing and dancing that is my destiny  
Cheering the soul and hearts  
Cumbia melodies that inspire love*



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UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS HELSINKI

PO Box 1  
FI-00097 Uniarts  
-  
+358 294 47 2000  
www.uniarts.fi

**Consent for use of personal data**  
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**Helsinki 18.10.2023**

## **Consent for use of personal data**

### **Consent to participate in the research: Cultural Intelligence in Intercultural Collaborative Music-making (Title TBC)**

I have understood that participation is voluntary, and at any point in the research, I am at liberty to notify the researcher that I no longer wish to participate in the study.

- ☐ ( ) I want to participate in the artistic research as an artist/composer, and I want the information to be published including my name.
- ☐ ( ) I want to participate in the artistic research project anonymously.
- ☐ ( ) I give permission related to the law of copyright to use my piece of art/performance as a part of the research.
- ☐ ( ) I give permission related to the law of copyright to show my piece of art/performance publicly.
- ☐ ( ) I want to be identified as the author of my piece of art/performance
- ☐ ( ) I want my piece of art/performance to be published unnamed.

I have received sufficient information about the research project. I have understood the information and I wish to participate in the research study.

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Signature of research participant

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Print name

---

Email address

### **Researcher's Contact details:**

Viivi Maria Saarenkylä

E-mail xxxxxxxxxx

Phone xxxxxxxxxx

Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki

UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS HELSINKI

PO Box 1  
FI-00097 Uniarts  
-  
+358 294 47 2000  
www.uniarts.fi

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## Consentimiento para el uso de datos personales

### Consentimiento para participar en la investigación: Inteligencia cultural en la creación musical colaborativa intercultural (Título por confirmar)

He entendido que la participación es voluntaria y, en cualquier momento de la investigación, tengo la libertad de notificar al investigador que ya no deseo participar en el estudio.

- ☐ Quiero participar en la investigación artística como artista/compositor, y quiero que la información sea publicada incluyendo mi nombre.
- ☐ Quiero participar en el proyecto de investigación artística de forma anónima.
- ☐ Doy permiso relacionado con la ley de derechos de autor para utilizar mi obra de arte/actuación como parte de la investigación.
- ☐ Doy permiso relacionado con la ley de derechos de autor para mostrar públicamente mi obra de arte/actuación.
- ☐ Quiero ser identificado como el autor de mi obra de arte/actuación
- ☐ Quiero que mi obra de arte/actuación se publique sin nombre.

He recibido suficiente información sobre el proyecto de investigación. He entendido la información y deseo participar en el estudio de investigación.

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Firma del participante de la investigación

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Nombre impreso

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Dirección de correo electrónico

### Researcher's Contact details:

Viivi Maria Saarenkylä

E-mail xxxxxxxxxx

Phone xxxxxxxxxx

Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki