Transcultural Improvisation as a Diplomatic Resource

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Abstract

   This study aimed to explore the decision-making processes of musicians during transcultural improvisation. My focus was specifically on situations where the musicians represent different cultural backgrounds and ways of creating or perceiving music. Studies on improvisation in transcultural context are scarce. I wanted to find out what kind of mindsets the musicians present when improvising together in those situations, and how those mindsets could be developed in pedagogical contexts.

I used qualitative methods of arts-based study and instrumental case study. I started the research process by facilitating an improvising session with three musicians, including myself, who all came from different continents. For helping to remember and to identify the decisions we made while improvising, we used the method of stimulated recall. In practise this meant that the improvisation session was recorded and listened through immediately afterwards, each part at its own turn. After each part, we verbally described what kind of decisions we had made during improvising and how we ended up making them. After that, I transcribed all data, coded the recurring words and gathered up other relevant thoughts brought up by the participants. Based those I brought up four most relevant themes: *experimenting mindset and evolving identity as an improviser, realising the need to exit the familiar ground and comfort zone, qualities that helped in finding the common ground* and musicians finding it *natural to seek equal roles instead of being in charge of the direction alone*. I familiarised myself with the relevant background literature on the themes, which I will cover in the chapter Conceptual framework and reflected on how those compare to my own findings.

The outcome of the study identified following kinds of elements in the musicians' mindsets: open-mindedness, interest to experiment, an aim to be inclusive, and *a growth mindset*. Many elements connected to the participants describing wanting to explore and evolve, which presented *a learner identity*. The participants expressed willingness to exit their comfort zones for greater good, which in this context was the goal of involving everyone equally to the decision-making. The mindsets presented were found helpful for establishing a space for diplomatic creating processes in transcultural improvisation. Diplomacy in the context of transcultural improvisation is understood in this study as a process of musical negotiation, where the musicians can experience contributing meaningfully to the music even when

differences arise, and compromises need to be made. As a central principle that the musicians used as basis for their decision-making, my study displays a constant reflection about how much space they were giving to others and taking oneself. Hence, this study adds cultural responsibility and reflection of one's own position in relation to others to the list of elements used as basis for decision-making during free group improvisation.

Keywords

Transcultural improvisation, diplomatic improvisation, equity in improvisation, intercultural encounter, growth mindset, learner identity, improvisation pedagogy

I also want to thank Sid Hille and Sergio Castrillon for the professional and heartfelt insight to free improvisation in the form of different lessons on and discussions on the theme.

Also, I want to thank my husband Troels, who has during the last months of this research process been doing so much to make our daily as a family life work out, like in so many other occasions where I have needed to pursue towards a big goal. I hold in the highest regard our teamwork for letting each other pursue towards our dreams and letting each other focus in accomplishing our goals at our own turns, even now when we are in the middle of the most crowded times of our lives. I hope I can in my own turn be as valuable support for you as you are for me.

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Chapter I

1 Introduction

My research is based on interest to understand the decision-making processes of musicians from diverse backgrounds during transcultural improvisation.

I have personally experienced how the process of creating music together with people who have a very different musical background to mine can humble the ego, undress it from its mannerism, and have the ability to give space for everyone's voice and sound to be heard. While I say this, I acknowledge my own bias – I am saying this as a professional musician who has voluntarily sought out to improvise with different people throughout my life as a musician.

In my global music studies, I have most often found that when creating music together with other people from various cultural backgrounds, everyone needs to have an open mind, be flexible and willing to work on the common ground where everyone can feel included and capable of contributing. Even if all the musicians would be seasoned professionals in their own genre and instrument, when improvising with each other they suddenly cannot count on being able to use all the same skills and knowledge that they are used to drawing from when collaborating with people from a similar background to themselves. Even though the musicians would know the vocabulary of their own genre or tradition, know which scales to play and when in it, recognise the references to famous pieces of one's own tradition, could enter different familiar grooves or recognise common rhythm patters used within it without an effort, in these situations the musicians cannot necessarily use all of that knowledge to better understand musicians that come from a very different background in relation to them. Instead, each musician has to find other, new ways to work together. This study aims to open this aspect by introducing improvisation as a tool for transcultural musical communication and analysing how musicians coming from different cultural backgrounds make decisions and navigate when they face those differences in communication when improvising together.

During my studies in the Global Music department of Sibelius-Academy the diversity of student population has been prominent and my role as a contributing musician has often been

coloured by the ideal of equity while being aware of my own positional privilege as a white, European citizen living in my home country with educational background based strongly on the Western classical music and jazz tradition, which both already have long, established traditions of education all the way from early education to university level. Sometimes, when I have worked with methods that are efficient with people from a similar background to my own, the same methods have turned out being exclusive when working with people from completely different backgrounds. On the other extreme end, sometimes trying to be as inclusive as possible has led me to invertedly mute down my own artistic identity and impulses to the extent that I haven't felt that I contribute so much to the artistic context as myself anymore but rather accompany the others. I am interested in an intercultural and democratic creating process, the meeting point, where everyone feels included and contributing and where the music itself is the main event.

This subject doesn't only interest me musically, but also in a wider socio-cultural perspective of finding ways for embracing difference and for supporting the development of a mindset that allows people from different backgrounds to feel equal, included and able to contribute meaningfully. Now, in 2025, we live in a world where people and political leaders who express the most provoking thoughts dominate the media space and where social bubbles float further away from each other, losing their conversational connection. The algorithm bias and personalisation of social media channels narrows the information and perspectives that their consumers are exposed to an even greater extend and have a massive impact on people's opinions and values getting more polarised (Garimella, K., 2018). I am concerned about this development and think that, following the values of intersectional feminism, for all humans to exist peacefully together we need to find meeting points where people with different backgrounds, values and traditions can communicate and collaborate in an environment where everyone feels included. I believe in a humanist view, like philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that humans are inherently good and naturally seek ways to collaborate and understand each other. That's why I think that even though in our current society those social bubbles are currently floating further from each other, we should find ways how they could in the bigger picture at least float in the same current towards a common goal – a peaceful co-existence with others.

In addition to the previous observations, the inspiration to make a study about transcultural improvisation came from noticing that the subject hasn't been studied so much earlier, especially in the transcultural context. The decision-making processes of musicians during group improvisation have been studied earlier (Wilson & MacDonald, 2016), but the focus hasn't been specifically in transcultural improvisation, like in my study. In addition to the previous paper mentioned, the literature I familiarised myself with for this study is covering themes of transformational learning (Siljamäki, 2021), improvisation as a learning tool (MacGlone & MacDonald, 2018; Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020), learner identity and growth mindset (Dwek, 2006; López-Iñiguez & Bennet, 2021), improvisation as a democratic creating process (Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020; Thomson, 2007), improvisation as a way to cope with uncertainty (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015) and improvisation's universal, musical qualities and elements (Bailey, 1993; Ferand, 1961; Nachmanovitch, 2007; Oliveros, 2005, 2007; Wilson & MacDonald, 2016).

My study is aimed at professional musicians who actively engage to, or are interested in, group free improvisation in diverse settings. In addition to wanting to find out how musicians that come from different cultural backgrounds and are unfamiliar to each other navigate in the novel and unpredictable musical situation of improvising together for a first time, I wanted to see if there would rise elements that could be considered to be utilised in music-pedagogical approaches where people from different musical cultures work together, that would develop qualities of flexibility, adaptability and inclusion. Therefore, this research is also aimed at music pedagogues.

The field of music education hasn't always seen improvisation and creating music as something that everyone can start do from the very beginning and the earlier generations of music educators have not necessarily been equipped to support students with this. This I base in both my own experience in the elementary music education and discussions with peers and colleagues of my own generation. Because in some fields of music education improvisation is still not widely used, I aim to bring out the significance of improvisation and also find ways for music students to connect with each other even in circumstances where they wouldn't have a similar educational or even cultural background together.

Putting together my own empirical experiences, the findings of this paper and the literature read for this study, I argue that is a universal human experience that music has a power to

access the consciousness and physical being of a human immediately and that it carries the power to deliver experiences beyond words.

My study concludes that improvisation is a great resource to use when musicians meet each other for the first time, no matter how different their backgrounds are. In music education, where students are experts with their own instruments, it can also be a great way for setting an inclusive and accepting environment.

1.1 Biography

I am a pianist, composer and singer specialised in jazz and Brazilian rhythm music. I have been educated in different music schools and academies throughout my whole life since the age of 5, with the education based on Western classical music for the largest part before my studies in the global music department in Sibelius-Academy, from where I have graduated as a Bachelor of Music in 2019.

Ever since I have started to sing and play instruments, I have wanted to create music myself and have been looking for new sounds and grounds with it. I have never been satisfied with defining my musical identity within a certain box and I have always been interested to experiment and to expand my musical understanding and identity.

I am currently leading multiple projects of my own from a jazz-trio with my own singer-songwriter material to a reduced 10-piece instrumental jazz big band. In those projects I draw most of my influences from the genres I have expertise in. When comparing to how I work in the setting of jazz music, I have had to work in a very different way when playing with people from different parts of the world in my global music studies.

I have also actively worked as a pedagogue in a private music school with teaching piano and singing for over 5 years. In my own pedagogy I include improvisation in the lessons starting from the very first lesson and believe that soon as one can get any kind of sound out of one's instrument, one can already start to be creative with it.

1.2 Research aim and questions

The aim of my research was to investigate the decision-making processes of three professional musicians from different continents when improvising together for the first time. The research questions that will address this subject are:

1. How do the musician's make decisions during transcultural improvisation?

2. What kind of mindsets do the musicians present when improvising together?

Chapter II

2 Conceptual framework

In this study I understand the nature of improvisation between musicians as something that forces the improviser to focus on the present moment and roots the improviser to a state of presence and heightened alertness. Because the improvisers need to respond to the stimuli immediately and make decisions on-the-spot to contribute to the improvised piece, there is no time to perceive others through lenses of preconceptions. That displays improvisation as a particularly diplomatic way of communicating with the unfamiliar - in the space that improvisation creates it is easy to meet other people as they are. Because when exploring the unknown fields there can often appear surprising obstacles, I am also delving into the importance of exiting the comfort zone in order to learn and to find novel insights and solutions. In the end of this section I am, through the relevant research that I have familiarised myself with, reflecting on how improvisation can be used in music pedagogy in situations where the members of the group are from different backgrounds.

In this section I am presenting the most topical features in relation to musical improvisation through the following themes:

- Opening the mind with improvisation and transformational learning – creating readiness to face the unfamiliar
- Seeing improvisation as a diplomatic tool that promotes acceptance
- Pedagogical means for exiting the comfort zone – synthesising prior literature
- Supporting learning in improvisation

2.1 Opening the mind with improvisation and transformational learning – creating readiness to face the unfamiliar

In this section I am investigating improvisation as a tool for establishing an accepting and open mindset, where it is easy to connect with the unfamiliar and with people as they are. With the term mindset, I mean the beliefs, thoughts and attitudes through which an individual perceives the world and that determine the individual's reactions and actions in different situations. During improvisation most of the things that happen are unexpected. For this reason, it creates an excellent space for learning how to face novel experiences and presents a tool for encountering people from unfamiliar backgrounds.

I approach learning as a process that has a power to cultivate growth, expand the views and change habits of an individual. In her doctoral dissertation Eeva Siljamäki (2021) calls the process, where individual's points of view transform because of critical reflection and discussion, transformational learning (Siljamäki, 2021). She elaborates this with bringing together theories of Mezirow's (1997), who, paraphrasing Siljamäki, portrays transformational learning as something that happens when an individual becomes aware of one's habits and assumptions, thus providing a chance for changing them. To this, she connects John Dewey's thoughts on The Collected Works of John Dewey, where society is seen as something that is constantly in transmission, created by ongoing social communications and social connections. Another view on the same process is by Pauline Oliveros, who has worked for decades with improvisation, composing, performing and her concept of deep listening, a method that combines meditation and improvisation, that she developed as means "to heighten and expand consciousness of sound" (Oliveros, 2005, p. 13). She argues that "we can evolve and expand our consciousness by changing our habit

patterns, changing our habitual responses" (Oliveros, 2007, p. 402) and sees improvisation and sound-awareness exercises as a way access this transforming potential in her own work.

In her doctoral dissertation Siljamäki further connects the concept of transformational learning to a socio-ecological perspective on improvisation, where music and improvisation are understood as a social action in relation to the social surroundings. With studying the effects of choral improvisation on well-being through empirical case studies of two improvisational choirs that she facilitated for her research to "understand the holistic affordances of improvisation by highlighting the significance of social ecology in music education and musicking" (Siljamäki, 2021, p. 61), her dissertation thoroughly brings out how improvisation and transformational learning interconnect and overlap. Both phenomena include facing and absorbing something new, something unrehearsed, conscious or nonconscious processing of novel data, creating new connections and meanings, and they have the potential of changing the person doing them as the new information and experience it is absorbed. They both cultivate a perceiving state of mind (Ibid, p. 49-54, 238-240) and create opportunities connect with others and one's own feelings (Ibid, p. 113) and to learn how to face and tolerate uncertainty in not just improvisation, but in life in general (Ibid, p. 1).

In their paper *Learning to improvise, improvising to learn,* MacGlone and MacDonald (2018) introduce multiple aspects on both improvisation and learning as ways to access each other, and present how musicians learn more about music by improvising, often in informal settings. The paper presents multiple ways on how musicians creatively use multiple different learning methods of improvising, interplaying between "autodidactism, mentoring and learning in social setting" (p. 289). While MacGlone's and MacDonald's paper is mostly focused in the music itself, more precisely on how musicians gather material, ideas and vocabulary for improvisation, in their paper *Mapping visions in improvisation pedagogy in music research* Siljamäki and Kanellopoulos (2020) also present improvisation *as* a learning tool, but also present four other chosen, central visions on how to approach improvisation in in the context of improvisations' applications in music pedagogy. One of the five visions of Siljamäki and Kanellopoulos portrays improvisation as a way to connect with the reality and others, as a "return for the natural beginning", connected to "the search of humanness" (p. 125-126). This section of their paper arches over a point of view where improvisation is seen

"as a mode of elementary creativity, as a primordial creative practice" (p. 126) and "as a central element of the human disposition to living and creating." (p.126). This point of view sees improvisation as something that is universally available and accessible for all humans that transcends "genres and levels of training or experience" (Wilson & MacDonald, 2021, p. 558).

As a lover of ontology, the study of *being, existence* and of things *as they are*, I am tempted to compare improvisation as way to connect with the "natural beginning" (Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020) to the thoughts of improvisers and musicians Stephen Nachmanovitch and already previously quoted Pauline Oliveros, that both view improvisation as a way to understand something new of the reality itself. As Oliveros sees awareness of sounds as a way to connect with surroundings: "(i)f you are too narrow in your awareness of sounds, you are likely to be disconnected from your environment" (2005, p. 15), Stephen Nachmanovitch, also mentioning Oliveros' work as one of his inspirations, continues on the subject by stating that "improvisation is a way of investigating reality" (Nachmanovitch, 2006, p. 1). According to Nachmanovitch, "(o)ur experience as improvisers is one of direct encounter with what is in front of our noses -- (i)n improvisation, we get as close as we possibly can to the data of experience."(Ibid, p. 1).

Both Nachmanovitch and Oliveros define the concept of reality as something that exist beyond our names for things: "Because of the incredible convenience of language, we hypnotize ourselves into believing the reality of linguistic symbols, especially nouns. -- Nouns -- do not represent anything except for a very provisional and temporary kind of reality." (Ibid, p. 4.) and see improvisation as a way to access places beyond that. Oliveros describes the same with her words: "I don't think one can create change just with words. -- Without engagement of the body, though, words are literally disembodied and become more and more abstract." (Oliveros, 2007, p. 393). This way of describing the curtain between human definitions for phenomena in words of language, and reality *as it is,* bears similarities to other attempts of describing the human urge to get beyond barriers in the human mind and understand reality as it is, starting all the way from Plato's realism, where he sees the world of ideas to be the unhindered, absolute reality as opposed to the visible world that he sees as changing and more ambivalent. The way of seeing reality as something that reveals more of itself to a human when one is in a present and perceiving state, undressed from distractions, I identify both Oliveros and Nachmanovitch seeing reality as something that always has more

to give and that is something bigger than a human and seeing improvisation as a very holistic act that one can discover more of it with.

While Oliveros's writings and Nachmanovitch's speech aren't scientific publications and also reflect their spiritual views that have taken influences and interpretations from Buddhism, I quote their words not as scientific arguments but as reflections of experiences as professional musicians and artists, who have worked with improvisation for decades, and have found their own way to put their experiences and observations in words, that I find similar to each other. Artists, after all, constantly deal with interpretations, modifications and alternative representations of reality. When making an arts-based research (Leavy, 2017) about the subject where transcultural, free group improvisation was the starting point of my own research, I was also literally using improvisation as a way to investigate reality myself. The take on these thoughts in the context of my research is that I see this mindset highlighting a certain Socratean quality of accepting that by seeking to understand the reality, only becomes more aware of how little one knows – when the field of vision become larger, one can always see how much bigger than that the reality is. The humbleness created by discovering that, connected to the mental, perceiving space that improvisation can create, can help with establishing a space that is empty of many of the barriers that otherwise hinder us encountering the reality, and each other, as we are. Nachmanovitch describes the barrier, and the potential of improvisation to surpass it, as:

> "…not just of a music stand as a physical barrier, but also the virtual music
> stand of a memorized score. To have nothing at all between you and your fellow
> players -- and your audience, is such a remarkable experience."
> (Nachmanovitch, 2006, page 2).

Oliveros offers music's and musical improvisation's ability to access the body, that is "continually sensing and recording all of the information that is delivered to the auditory cortex, even though we may not be conscious of this constant activity" (Oliveros, 2007, p. 393) as a gateway to surpass barriers of words and abstractions. This relates to the concept of transformational learning in a holistic context, especially when Oliveros brings together the concepts of bodily experience and change in the words: "…people have to feel in their bodies what they have to do in order to create change..." (p. 393). Nachmanovitch (2006) also refers

to the innate intelligence of our body and its potential by describing what happens during improvisation: "…we are able to handle these encounters with immediate reality that are so fast and so minutely organized because we allow our nervous system to operate at its own very considerable speed – unimpeded by scripts and plans." (p. 2), bringing out a point of view that in improvisation there is simply no time for acting based on preconceptions, but instead the decisions are made in a level that is perhaps less conscious, but a more instinctive and intuitive response.

2.2 Seeing improvisation as a diplomatic tool that promotes acceptance

The previous section focused on the potential of cognitive and holistic growth that improvisation cultivates, while having a universally accessible quality in it that has the potential to cross boundaries. In this section I will further continue to analyse on how improvisation could serve as great tool for intercultural communication, providing an excellent way to encounter people from unfamiliar cultural backgrounds. The viewpoint of improvisation I will use is free improvisation in its widest meaning, defined by Derek Bailey as "(f)reely improvised music, variously called 'total improvisation', 'open improvisation', 'free music', or perhaps most often simply, 'improvised music'" that "suffers from — and enjoys — the confused identity which its resistance to labelling indicates." (Bailey, 1993, p. 83).

This section focuses on group free improvisation as a tool for intercultural interaction and the diplomatic potential of it – of the potential to not cross boundaries just within a mind of an individual in a personal level, but ones of cultural differences as well, as means to create a ground for understanding and acceptance. With diplomacy in this context, I mean an act of creating mutual understanding by focusing to what is common in us, while simultaneously finding ways to accommodate, preserve and celebrate the differences.

Where there are multiple people improvising together in a group, the processing of novel information and of creating becomes a social situation that requires and develops skills that are necessary also when people from different backgrounds or cultures work together. In this world, where global and local continuously blend, where there's a need to find ways of collaborating without losing ourselves and our unique characteristics, and want to escort the

theme of this section with a quote by Tracey Nicholls from the book *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*:

> "(W)e need to improvise a diverse and multicultural world—united by love (political solidarity), not an imposed, coercive homogenization—through an aesthetic of otherness. (…) (D)rawing attention to the ways our art shapes us and the ways we shape our art requires us to consider closely who we are—the differences that distinguish us from each other and the common projects that can bring us together. It requires us to cross borders, to share ideas and strategies for change, and to build a world that has input from, and space for, us all." (Nicholls, 2017, page 228).

Even though free improvisation and group improvisation have been studied very little in the context of transcultural improvisation, and even less literature can be found about it made by non-western researchers, the idea of improvisation's power to surpass cultural boundaries is hardly a stretch, as improvisation has always been present in all cultures in the history and the present day. In practice transcultural improvisation is not a new idea, as cultures have always mixed together, and improvisation is such an integral part of humanity. This kind of collaborative creating method has been an integral part of courses such as the *transcultural ensemble* in the Global Music Department of Sibelius Academy since the establishing of the studying programme in 2016.

In his book *Improvisation in Nine Centuries of Western Music: An Anthology with an Historical Introduction* Ernst Ferand, despite focusing on his book to Western Music, acknowledges this universal nature of improvisation as an essential and inseparable part of all cultures: "The whole history of the development of music is accompanied by manifestations of the drive to improvise." (Ferand, 1961, p. 5). Derek Bailey, who analysed discussions on radio programmes on improvisation and himself interviewed multiple professional, improvising musicians representing different music cultures from around the world for his book *Improvisation – Its nature and practice in music* to portray views on improvisation in its vastly different forms in the different parts of the world and in different musical traditions, writes how "(i)t did become increasingly clear during my contacts with different musicians and their musics that the main characteristics of improvisation could be discerned in all its appearances and roles." (Bailey, 1993, p. 10), concluding to confirm these universal qualities.

In their paper *The sign of silence: Negotiating musical identities in an improvising ensemble,* Graeme Wilson and Raymond MacDonald present group free improvisation as a "a unique psychological phenomenon and universal capacity…" (Wilson & MacDonald, 2012, p. 558) and as a "form of collaborative creativity crucial to the landscape of contemporary music, and as spontaneous musical communication that is universally accessible regardless of technical proficiency." (p. 579). While this thought of improvisation being accessible for everyone on some level, despite differences in technical proficiency, is presented in their study in the limited context of the findings of this study that compares the identities of free improvisers to jazz improvisers two different improvisational segments that don't share identical "vocabularies", "grammar" and rules as processes of evaluation, the same perspective can be used with its capability to surpass an individual musician's inevitable lack of expertise in not just unfamiliar genres, but also in unfamiliar musical traditions; the musicians' limited skill level within a context of being foreign to each other's musical traditions. Siljamäki and Kanellopoulos describe the potential of group improvisation "actualising a kind of collectively-shaped sense of unity where individual and collective freedom co-exist" (Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020, p.106) as well and bring out this same quality of it being a space "where communication can override technique" (Ibid, p. 106).

Even though the differences in background always come through in the playing: "classically trained orchestral musicians (…) can hardly fail to display elements of their background in their performing, as will musicians with backgrounds in jazz, pop and folk music who play freely improvised music" (MacGlone & MacDonald, 2018 p. 279), MacGlone and MacDonald (2018) suggest the option of seeing free improvisation "as a unique form of socially situated collaborative creativity rather than as a genre of music." (p. 279) to establish a common ground. There lies the fertile space for diplomacy.

Even though the improvisers cannot, nor would they need to, escape their own musical background affecting in their choices in free improvisation, and from it being heard in their expression and choices, musicians are able to improvise together with other musicians from very different backgrounds to their own, because in free improvisation they have the liberty to define the aesthetical direction of their co-creation themselves and treat all its elements as valid and equal. As Bailey further describes free improvisation: "The lack of precision over its naming is, if anything, increased when we come to the thing itself. Diversity is its most

consistent characteristic. (…) The characteristics of freely improvised music are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the person or persons playing it." (1992, p. 83), he brings out that it is the very ambiguity of the concept of free improvisation that simultaneously allows the freedom in it. This liberty to create own, aesthetic meanings within a co-created context is very democratic, understanding democracy as a power of decisionmaking returned to individuals, instead of outer institutions or authorities having it, and evaluation happening as a collaborative process instead of it being defined by outer criteria.

Transcultural improvisation naturally happens in a broader societal spectrum as well, when cultures come to meeting points, and existing groups meet other existing groups. In the book *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics*, in chapter 11 *Wayde Compton and the Performance of Black Time* Winfried Siemerling writes about the "improvisational crossroads where different transcultural and migrant resources meet" (2017, p. 255):

> "Improvisation often proves to be an effective practice in the contact zones of diasporic and transnational cultures. Transcultural improvisation can adapt and appropriate existing archives, materials, and techniques and combine them through inventive sampling to produce new effects and solutions in a present defined by local circumstance." (p. 256).

As Siemerling brings out, in this bigger picture, when local musics and cultures dislocate from their origin, relocate and/or blend together with others, exciting collaborations happen and new genres emerge in their meeting points, but there raises also concerns about fairness, sensitivity and inclusivity. That brings out the necessity of being aware of one's own positionality with privilege in the society to be able act as a culturally responsible and ethically sustainable way. A helpful tool for reflecting on one's own position with privilege is "Wheel of Power, Privilege and Marginalization", as presented in an illustration by Sylvia Duckworth (Salmenkangas, M., 2021). The image portrays a circle where the middle represents the most privileged place in a society and places different qualities to the wheel according to their status in the society. Of them, for example the section which shows how white citizens living in the country are on the end of most privileged and in the other end, furthest from it, in the status of marginalised, there are undocumented people and people with dark skin colour, is relevant to the subject of my research.

As in those meeting points of cultures fascinating hybrid genres can emerge, there also inevitably appears possibilities for misuse of the music of minority cultures by the dominant cultures, especially in any commercial adaptations of musics (Aubert, 2007, p. 12). While acknowledging the colossal nature of that subject and needing to keep the focus on the theme of this paper, that is about individuals improvising together not as representators of their musical tradition but themselves, musicians should be aware of their own position in relation to others.

In the moment of free group improvisation there can optimally be inherent elements that can prevent many issues related to imbalance of power, as it can provide a space for each improviser to have an equal space with others. From the more intimate settings of small groups of individuals from diverse backgrounds improvising together as equals, a change can spread even to a bigger scale; in the same book's introduction Georgina Born, Eric Lewis, and Will Straw describe the power of improvisation to change even the very concept of art and of who is legitimate to create it in a societal scale with the following words:

> "Moreover, the vernacular space of art making is one in which the possibility of participation is extended to ever increasing numbers of people, refuting the social and cultural closures inherent in the institutionalization of the arts and music, just as the ongoing improvisation of novel and hybrid artistic forms challenges the exclusionary conceptions of artistic legitimacy that prevail in the art world." (Born, Lewis, Straw, 2017, p. 21).

Eeva Siljamäki (2021) processes the viewpoint of democracy in free improvisation in the section *Egalitarian and democratic values in free improvisation* (p. 25-28) in her doctoral dissertation, bringing together multiple studies that portray free improvisation as an act that has potential to be egalitarian. Seeing improvisation as a social process, she summarises that in free improvisation, an authoritative role is seen as antisocial and instead democratic and collaborative processes, in which the responsibly is shared and leading role is circulated, are expected (Siljamäki, 2021, p. 26). Scott Thomson (2007), to whom Siljamäki often refers in her section as well, writes that while indeed in free improvising communities a democratic creating process is an expectation and " "(a)uthoritarian" musical practice (…) is rarely reconciled in successful group improvisation" (Thomson, 2007, p. 1), he reminds later on the

paper that "despite the absence of rigid distinctions of authoritative roles, however, it would be grossly over-simplistic to suggest that all players in a free improvisation are always equal" (Ibid, p. 5) and refers that pre-conceptions that the improvisers have of each other always affect the social status of an individual within the group: "The musico-social relationships in an ensemble are inflected by pre-existing social dynamics between players." (Ibid, p. 5) – even though this assumption includes that the people would know each other or of each other beforehand, which is not always the case, such as in my own inquiry, these are important considerations to make.

I bring together the works cited in this section to conclude that the absence of outer norms of quality in free improvisation create an empty canvas where the participants can create the meanings and aesthetic evaluations themselves.

2.3 Pedagogical means for exiting the comfort zone – synthesising prior literature

This inquiry and the literature that this section is based on does not argue that transformational learning and transcultural improvisation are easy for everybody, or that improvisation is an automatic gateway to equality and world-peace.

Earlier literature acknowledges that not everyone finds it natural or easy throw themselves in a situation where they don't know what is going to happen next. People can experience discomfort related to participating in an event that includes so much uncertainty and there can sometimes be unwillingness to participate in improvisational activities in the first place for various reasons, which are good to be aware of and to be prepared to deal with for example as a pedagogue facilitating group improvisational activities. Related to means exiting the comfort zone, I will next address social anxiety, prejudice towards improvisation and fear of change.

2.3.1 From social anxiety to feeling safe

In Siljamäki's (2021) dissertation, students with social anxiety participated in choir singing and vocal improvisation. Inevitably participating in the project has meant actively having to

find ways to process the social anxiety during the improvisational activities. According to Siljamäki, "…being exposed to the uncertainties and discomfort of free improvisation, as well as performing in a concert (…) could be something that a person with social anxiety would prefer to ignore." (Siljamäki, 2021, p.106). In her dissertation, Siljamäki identifies having had to deal with the subject of not finding it incredibly natural to jump into the world of improvisation from a classical, educational background herself either, even as a professional musician, describing that " after years of one-to-one instrumental lessons and following sheet music this sudden jump into a world of embodied expression and creativity was somewhat anxiety-laden. " (Siljamäki, 2021, p. 5), something that many musicians can relate to.

The choir project was successful in reducing the social anxiety of its participants. The study concluded that "the experimental project -- offered the participants a safe environment and social space for developing interaction skills and coping with social anxiety." (Ibid, p. 2). And importance "of the quality of social interaction in education, and of recognizing each student as an individual with specific needs in learning. " (Siljamäki, 2021, s. 2).

As a pedagogue, when trying to help people with social anxiety to have the courage to engage in group improvisation, one can derive solutions both in the level of rational argumentation and practical level from the results of Siljamäki's study. A rational, study-based argument to present is to highlight how participating in group improvisation can efficiently offer ways to cope with the original issue of social anxiety in a wider perspective. In a practical level, a pedagogue should approach making participating in group improvisation a positive experience for someone with social anxiety by acknowledging that people feel safer to exit their comfort zones when there's a change for everyone for being heard, and when there's social interaction, communication and a compassionate attitude towards others within the group. Trying to secure these elements within the improvising group is important. As doing unfamiliar things together with others feels safer when others around you are taking the same risks, starting with small exercises that offer people a change of noticing this and getting a personal experience of this is a good way to start.

2.3.2 Alleviating prejudice towards improvisation

For some individuals it can be hard to believe in the efficiency of improvisation as a tool for learning. For the ones who have an expectation of a learning experience as something vastly different, such as it happening in a formal setting and following an expected line of events, it can be hard to understand the importance and meaning and value of improvisational games and to have an open attitude towards them (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015, p. 89). Some people might have strong prejudices or misconceptions about what improvisation is in the first place, as Nachmanovitch suggest: "Many people have the idea that improvisation means acting wild and crazy or behaving without pattern or procedure. They tend to associate improvisation with randomness." (Nachmanovitch, S. 2006. Page 1.) and this might hinder them from being willing to participate in it in the first place.

As a way to try to alleviate these attitudes as a pedagogue, one could point out how common improvisation actually is in everyday life in the form of needing to find creative solutions on the spot, and the importance of the ability to make decisions under high pressure not just in everyday circumstances, but in very serious situations as well. In their paper *Games for learning and dialogue on humanitarian logistics - Applied improvisation training for disaster readiness and response* Tint, McWaters and van Driel (2015) go through the benefits of applied improvisation exercises as an efficient tool when training humanitarian workers to be better prepared to act during disasters, when they need the skills of making quick, independent decisions in uncertain and chaotic circumstances, concluding that:

> "Applied improvization training can facilitate increased capabilities to respond when faced with chaos, uncertainty, and when under pressure to act, and greater skill and agility working across cultural, language and contextual differences. -- It does this by building skills in thinking on one's feet and at the very same time being able to reflect on what's happening in a meta-perspective. This results in more collaborative relationships and greater creativity and innovation. Individuals operate with increased presence and authenticity. " (Tint, McWaters, van Driel 2015, p. 90).

As prejudice towards things is often caused by a mere lack of knowledge about the subject, a pedagogue dealing with this issue within a group could try to demystify improvisation and connect it to the everyday activities that are already familiar to people. Helping people to acknowledge that having readiness to act in uncertain and unpredictable situations, where one

needs to potentially be able take charge of a situation independently (Ibid, p. 76) can be a useful argument to present, when facing this kind of attitudes as a pedagogue. This can make it easier for people with prejudices towards improvisational exercises to understand the value of them as a way to prepare them to act under pressure, train the ability to observe the immediate surroundings and to induce a mental space for heightened alertness (Ibid, p. 85). When introducing improvisation to my students for the first time I have sometimes heard a response "but I don't know what to do and what notes to play". In these situations, it is good to have thought of how to understandably and simply express what improvisation is in the first place to someone who is not familiar to the concept at all and cultivate seeing not knowing "what to do" as a possibility to become aware of what one actually already knows, which Nachmanovith describes like this:

> "As we improvise in both our art and our daily life, there are tunes that are rattling around in our heads, from the commercial we heard on the radio this morning, or some piece of music that we have always loved (…), all of those things coexist with the present moment of our real-time artistic creation, and they are available for us to draw upon." (Nachmanovitch, 2006, p. 4).

As long as the pedagogue gets the improviser to have courage to take the first step and start the improvisation in the first place, it seems that for the rest it is likely that improvisation's value, power and potential will speak for itself.

2.3.3. Alleviating fear of change

Fear of change, wanting to avoid change, or seeing change as a potential threat, is another common reason for finding the idea of improvisation uncomfortable or intimidating.

Guadalupe López-Iñiguez and Dawn Bennet (2021) bring forth learner identity that means identifying oneself as a learner, seeing oneself as changing and moulding through life, on the process of constantly becoming something.

Learner identity is connected to *fixed mindset* vs. *growth mindset* (Dweck, 2006)., of which the latter one aims to cultivate a positive attitude in the students towards dealing with

acknowledging the gap between ideal version self and current self. The *growth mindset* is "based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others" (Dwek, 2006, p. 6) while *fixed mindset* means a mindset where one sees one's qualities as something more and "set in stone" (Dwek, 2006, p. 5). López-Iñiguez and Bennet applied these concepts by promoting defining one's identity not as "(w)hat we are not", which would be a characteristic of fixed mindset, but instead "(w)hat we are not *yet*" (López-Iñiguez & Bennet, 2021, p.137).

While the participants in the study had found aspects of the process challenging, such as identifying "previously unrecognised reasons for their stress" and articulating "their developmental needs" (Ibid, p. 146) they also found the process "illuminating and transformative" (Ibid, p. 146) and described becoming more aware of their "career abilities and opportunities", expressing also that reflecting on those perspectives during the intervention was the first time they had that in such a deep scale (Ibid, p. 146). This finding connects to also to the concept of about transformational learning that was presented in the first section on my conceptual framework.

Even though it is not an automatic remedy to the uncomfortability of facing discomfort in unfamiliar situations, cultivating a positive mindset towards learning helps to establish an open attitude towards trying unfamiliar things and acknowledging the potential of growth within oneself as opposed to seeing oneself as static helps with having a more accepting attitude towards facing one's own current inadequacies.

Reflecting on how to tackle the fixed mindset in students, I think that the pedagogue needs cultivate the growth mindset in the students by reminding them that improving skills always requires effort and pushing oneself to a place that is at its time achievable, but not impossible. Then slowly, with continuous, gentle pushing of the limits, and with effort and resilience, something that earlier was impossible eventually becomes achievable.

The uncomfortability of facing uncertainty and also acknowledging one's own inadequacy while not bashing oneself about it, but seeing it as something that has a potential to change, is at the same time very humane and also an inevitable part of discovering new things within the world and oneself. That being said, I conclude to argue that exploring often means exiting the comfort zone. But it is good to remember that when one explores, there exists a never-ending

stream of new things, experiences and thoughts to discover beyond the limits of that. And as stated in the previous section, exiting the comfort zone doesn't need to be done alone. Exploring the unknown together with others can be a good and safe place to start.

2.4 Supporting learning in improvisation

In this section I am presenting two more relevant tools that a pedagogue could potentially find useful when facilitating musical group improvisational activities: seeing the student as an equal co-creator in improvisation and presenting universal qualities in the music itself that the improvising musicians could find each other in despite of their differences in musical vocabularies and backgrounds

2.4.1 Seeing the student as an equal co-creator in improvisation

MacGlone and MacDonald (2018) bring forth three central elements on how the professional improvisers taking part in their study mention having learned to improvise. One of them was *autodidactism*, a self-guided way of learning (p. 283), that has been driven by the natural curiosity to explore what they can do with their instruments since infancy. This has taken the participants to seek out different experiences with improvising in different settings throughout their lives. However, providing the same kind of experiences that people get from exploring with improvising out in the wild world can be really difficult if not impossible as a pedagogue in a class setting. *Mentoring and learning in a social context* (p. 285) are equally important and perhaps more easily utilised in improvisation pedagogy. Even though all benefits of autodidactisim can't be as easily repeated in a class setting, a pedagogue can still encourage and inspire improvisers to the direction of seeking out versatile experiences with improvisation in informal settings as well by for example telling how autodidactic learning has helped them learn more about it themselves and showing an open and appreciative attitude towards it.

MacGlone and MacDonald (2018) bring forth the significance of a mentor who encounters the less experienced musician as an equal collaborator, be it in a formal setting on the role of the teacher or someone experienced with improvising that has taught them more informally:

"(m)entoring through improvising in this way represents a dynamic collaborative process in which the less experienced musician is recognized as contributing creatively, empowering the learner by being inclusive and generous. " (p. 285). Mentoring is a significant part of learning free improvisation (p. 286). A pedagogue could seek a "nonhierarchical relationship" (p. 287) to help the student get past insecurities related to the beginner playing with someone more experienced. This is a useful way of creating a safe space where it is easier to support the students with expanding their identities as musicians towards engaging in free improvisation.

MacGlone and MacDonald (2018) argue *learning in a social setting* encourages the development of independent thinking in musical decision-making and exposes musicians to situations where they have to learn to understand people from different musical backgrounds. They write that:

> "Improvising musicians tend to come from a range of backgrounds -- in half of the interviews the musicians expressed a desire to move beyond the genre confines of their previous experience of learning music. As a result, improvisers are able to create their own pedagogical narrative in a world where travel and the accessibility of music and information have rapidly expanded." (p. 289)

In a multifaceted environment improvisers need to learn how to balance with "complex negotiations between personal and group identities" (Ibid, p.290). Furthermore, the optimal result is not automatic and "a cohesive group composition is not always achieved." (Ibid, p.290). For this problem the interviewees present a solution in which "other musicians are recognized not only by virtue of their instruments but also through their idiosyncratic sound and techniques of sound-making." (Ibid, p.290) This opens multiple possibilities for including, accepting and creating very different ways of sound. In the social setting this negotiation is not only musical, but it's also a negotiation between people with different expectations and skills in a wider perspective. Hence, it creates a setting also for "learning to take equal creative responsibility for the music produced can emerge only from more complex and distributed social processes." (Ibid, p. 290).

MacGlone and MacDonald (2018) view learning as a "social phenomenon, in which dialogue plays a central role." (p. 292), such as Siljamäki in her dissertation (2021). One can conclude that learning free improvisation in social settings promotes acceptance and develops social

intelligence, thus it unarguable presents itself as something that can be very useful in an intercultural setting as well as a tool to make everyone feel included and contributing. I want to also further connect this to the ability of improvisation serving as a diplomatic tool where the participants can define the setting and its aesthetical standards themselves as individuals (Bailey, 1993; Thomson, 2007; Siljamäki, 2021), which was the theme of the second section of my conceptual framework and of my research paper in general.

2.4.2 Universal elements to come together in

Wilson and MacDonald (2016) found to the participating improvisers in their study consider the following criteria of evaluation in their decision-making: *texture, rate of innovation, novelty, diversity, structural concerns, practicality, enjoyment* (p.1036-1037).

As none of these elements are relying on musicians being familiar with each other's backgrounds or musical traditions, these are qualities that can also help students in a setting of transcultural improvisation to navigate and focus on finding what can be done together despite of different vocabularies and possible limitations set by instruments or lack of knowledge of each other's genres. One central decision-making tool often presented by free improvisers, was the "choice either to initiate a new direction or to respond to another improviser." (Ibid, p. 1029). In principle this means "to adopt, augment or contrast the contributions of others within the ensemble."(Ibid, p. 1029).

As a pedagogue, presenting and bringing out these concrete meeting points where everyone can contribute can help people who are unfamiliar to the concept of free improvisation to trust the process and see that there are multiple ways of coming together and meeting each other despite a lack of a common musical or cultural background. These tools are simple and easy bases for inventing different improvisational exercises for musicians from various backgrounds, and also useful tools that they can use in any form of free improvisation outside the settings of the academia as well.

Chapter III

3 Research design

3.1 Methodology

   This research is arts-based (Leavy, 2017). The data gathered from improvisation sessions and the following discussions with the participants were the base for my research. One of the key elements in an arts-based research project is a social aspect, which has been established through the improvisation and discussions in my research. Arts-based research mixes together theory and practice "in holistic and engaged ways" (Leavy, 2017, p. 10), which comes through in my research with the improvisation being a part of the research process itself. All the participants have engaged in the improvisation sessions as creators of art and have after that described their experiences and decisions during it freely, in their own words. The aim of this research is also to evoke new thoughts and points of view, which is one central characteristic of arts-based research (Leavy, 2017).

This study is qualitative, because it analyses the participants experiences and opinions while having allowed the participants to use their own words to describe them. (Hammersley, 2012, p. 12-13). In the discussion, data was gathered through freely chosen words and free conversation, not in a form of structured set of questions.

Because this inquiry focuses on the experiences of three musicians as means to understand more about the decision making, and the "case serves to help us understand phenomena or relationships within it" it is also an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995, p. 77).

3.2 Data collection

   I was both a data-collector of the study and a participant in the artistic part of the study. The artistic part of the study was an improvisation session done in five different parts. The improvisation session was held in the Sibelius Academy in the fall of 2024 with me and two other musicians that had not played together earlier. Furthermore, all three musicians, me

including, originated from different continents of the world. The improvisation session in five parts was recorded. Immediately after the improvising session, the recording was listened through together by drawing on a stimulated recall session (Patrikainen & Toom, 2004) to allow the participants to recall and identify the decisions they made during the improvisation session. The stimulated recall session, the participants verbally described the decisions they identified and recalled having made during the improvisation session and these descriptions were also recorded.

The musicians were found by sending an email to a student mailing list at the author's university. In the email, I briefly introduced the context of my study and the improvisation session. Out of 7 volunteers, I chose two based on their geographical location of origin being as far away from me and each other as possible - in addition to me, the author being born and raised musically in Northern Europe, one participant was born and raised musically in South America, and one was born and raised musically in East-Asia. With this setting, the aim was to create a situation where the musical and cultural backgrounds could deviate from each other to the extent that it would be unlikely to predict how the musical process would unfold. Thereby, all three participants would possibly need to adapt in the improvisation in a way that differs from improvising with people from similar musical and cultural backgrounds.

The purpose was not to find musicians who would define their identities as musicians to represent a certain musical tradition, nor to compare and contrast musical traditions, but to create circumstances where the different cultural backgrounds would hopefully cause surprising situations for the musicians during the improvisation session. My idea was that those surprises would make it easy for us to identify and analyse how we reacted to them and what decisions we made in order to adjust to them.

The improvisation session was planned so that we started the improvisation right after having set the instruments up and tuned them. In advance we only knew each other's names, what instruments there were going to be in the session and which countries the participants had grown up in and gotten their earlier music education in. The reason for deliberately creating a surrounding where there will be surprises is that I wanted to get as much decision-making during improvisation recorded and for us to be able to easily recognize and point out the decisions we have made in the reflective discussion.

The improvisation session was performed as free group improvisation.

In this study the participants have been given the following pseudonyms:
Mei Ling, who played the guzheng
Diego, who played the double bass
In addition to this, I played the piano myself.

With this structure of the improvisation sessions, one of my aims was for the participants to be able to compare the first and last session, which were the ones with equal roles as players. In the first session the starting point was that the musicians hadn't played together at all, while before the last session there had already been one equal session and all the soloist sessions. Another aim was for the musicians to be able to introduce their identities as an improviser to each other. My idea was that the soloist-lead pieces would allow the individual musicians to introduce their identities to each other by playing and that during those pieces they could take as much space to show who they are with permission, without fear about stepping on other people's ideas and contributions and without having to analyse if the roles were staying equal.

The improvisation session was done in five parts, instructed to last from 5 to 10 minutes each, in the following order:

Part 1
Everyone improvised together, all in an equal role. Length: 6 minutes 5 seconds.   Equal role in this context meant that there was no soloist or a leader, an opposite to the following soloist parts. As Thomson suggests that free improvisation can never be completely equal as "the pre-existing social dynamics between players" (Thomson, 2007, p. 5) always affect to their balance, I tried to combat this issue by in this research by the people not knowing each other or having played with each other beforehand.   In this session the musicians were instructed to contributing input to the piece equally much and not dominating the direction of the piece too much, based on their own judgement.

Parts 2-4
2 Mei Ling as soloist. Length: 5 minutes 30 seconds. **3** Diego as soloist. Length: 5 minutes 9 seconds. **4** Emmi as soloist. Length: 4 minutes 22 seconds. Each improviser had a part as a soloist on one's own turn. The soloist could freely do whatever they wanted, and the others accompanied and followed that. They were instructed to play in a way that would represent their own musical background to the others. The idea behind this was that in the soloist sessions the unique characteristics of the individual musicians be allowed to be shown as much as possible, without hindering them for example for the reason of worrying about taking too much space. The order of the soloist parts was chosen spontaneously by the musicians.
Part 5
Everyone improvised together again, all in an equal role. Length: 7 minutes 16 seconds.

The stimulated recall was conducted as a reflective discussion immediately after the improvisation session. First, we verbally answered to the question: "Shortly describe your identity as an improviser". Then, together, we listened each piece through and commented freely on the decisions we made during the session at hand after listening to each piece individually.

Even though I had prepared a list of questions for helping the reflection on the decisions, I had made the list more as a precaution, if it would have been hard for the participants to come up with things to say. During the conversation it quickly became clear that the descriptions of the participants were already elaborate enough in the form of free conversation and that there was no need to go literally through the set of questions.

Of the questions I had readily made, we ended up answering to the following two questions that addressed themes that hadn't been otherwise discussed yet:

"How was the first session and the last session different to each other?" and

"How was the improvisation done now different to improvisation that you have done earlier?".

3.3 Data analysis

In the data analysis I used elements of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), categorical aggregation and direct interpretation (Stake, 1995).

As elements of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) I both listened through to the recorded data multiple times to get a general understanding of it and also transcribed all the data. I coded recurring words, phrases and themes, such as *explore, discovering*, *new to me, breathing, texture, intensity, nice, difficult, space, together, responsible*, by highlighting them. This also connects closely to categorical aggregation, where separate instances are collected together to identify a more general pattern or phenomena (Stake, 1995).

In addition to just focusing on how many times a certain word was mentioned, direct interpretation (Stake, 1995) was also needed, because it as a method that allows the use of the data in situations where "important features appear only once" (Stake, 1995, p. 74). To compliment the thematic analysis, direct interpretation allowed me to add important aspects to the data even though they were mentioned only by one participant.

Based on this thematic analysis, direct interpretation and categorical aggregation four following essential themes rose up: Experimenting mindset and evolving identity as an improviser, realising the need to exit the familiar ground and comfort zone, qualities that helped in finding the common ground and it being found natural by the improvisers to seek equal roles instead of being in charge of the direction alone.

3.4 Ethics

This study complies to the ethical guidelines of Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (2020).

Before starting the improvisation sessions, the participants were given a consent form (appendices) that stated their rights, that were following the ethical guidelines (TENK, 2020) and had all information details of people they can contact. The participants got their own copies of the consent form.

Possible features that have affected the outcome of my results are all selected to study in the same department by partially the same people. Also, the fact that the participants themselves have applied to study in a programme, where flexibility, creativity and willingness to throw oneself in new situations is preferred, has as such combed out participants, that would present different kind of mindsets and would not be interested in . The participants were paid a travel reimbursement.

I had originally thought to have the recordings of the improvisation sessions as a part of this research, but the plan soon faced the complex the contradiction between the participants having a right to not have any personal data in the final paper and being pseudonymised (TENK, 2020, p.13) and them deserving to be credited for their artistic input with their real names. Having participants in the research with their own names always poses a risk of withdrawal from it. For those reasons I opted to not include the improvisation session as a part of this written work, to be able to pseudonymise the participants and ensure the research integrity.

The participants have been offered a change to see and review the parts pertaining their own direct quotes and have been given a possibility to withdraw the direct quotes.

3.5 Positionality

   I participated in this study both as an improvising musician and the researcher who collected the data and wrote this inquiry. While being also in the role of the facilitator of the study, I was aware that having a complete equality was impossible, as the researcher is always in a power position in relation to the participants of the study.

As Thomson (2007) argues, preconceptions always affect in the power dynamics during free group improvisation. This I tried to deliberately alleviate by choosing musicians who didn't know each other beforehand. As well as trying to balance the roles between the participants by choosing people who didn't know or know of each other earlier, I kept myself as much in the dark about what was to come during the improvisation sessions as others. In this way, even though I was the one who chose the participants out of the volunteers, all of us had equally little knowledge of each other in the beginning of the sessions. I also tried to balance my position as the facilitator of the study for example by printing the structure of the session and the few structured questions there were to a paper and outsourcing asking the questions to the paper. We all answered to the questions at our own turns as a free conversation, instead of me interviewing the other participants.

I am an improvising musician, and I actively do pedagogical work in music as well. This position gives me understanding of musical concepts that the research deals with and allows me to use professional vocabulary of the field fluently. This insider-position has also allowed me to pay attention to the relevant issues and aspects of this research.

Chapter IV

4 Findings

This section I will introduce four central themes that rose up in the discussions of the stimulated recall session.

The themes are

- Experimenting mindset and evolving identity as an improviser
- Addressing the challenges: realising the need to exit the familiar ground and comfort zone
- Finding solutions: qualities that helped in finding the common ground
- Equal roles feel more natural than being in charge of the direction alone

4.1 Experimenting mindset and evolving identity as an improviser

All participants described having originally started their musical studies as children with Western classical music but having eventually ended up playing other genres as the main focus of their instrumental studies. Two of the participants, Mei Ling and Diego, also told having ended up playing other instruments as their main instruments than what they originally started with.

None of the participants had learned improvisation during their classical instrument lessons in their childhood. Instead, all participants told having first started to learn skills as improvisers outside of the academia by actively seeking out to play with different kinds of musicians from various genres and listening to what they were doing, and only later in their lives starting to learn improvisation also in their academic studies. All participants expressed having always had an experimental and exploring mindset towards music-making: they described that they have always been trying out new sounds and new roles with their instruments and that they have been curious to explore musical styles and traditions that are new to them since the beginning.

When the participants were asked to describe their identities as improvisers, all of them described seeing themselves as being on the process of learning more and thinking that they are not readily masters or experts of improvisation. While I am in the end of my master's studies and have been studying jazz improvisation formally in my main instrument lessons as well as doing free improvisation in various forms during the global music studies, the two other participants described not having any formal training on certain styles of improvisation, but instead described making decisions during improvising based on intuition:

> "My improvisation is largely based on intuition. (…) (W)hen I improvise with other instruments and play music from other cultures, I like to change the tuning and see how much of the tuning I can stretch to achieve a different sound.(…) I learn from my friends, not in an academic way, but they show me different things and I listen to how they improvise." -Mei Ling

> "I (…) tried to find my way to do solos and find other ways that are further away from the normal role of the bass player as an accompanier. (…) I am now developing my identity as an improviser. I'm trying to look for the sounds that I like and to apply different techniques in my playing." -Diego

Meanwhile, having formal training on improvisation myself, I expressed sometimes feeling conflicted my identity as an improviser, because in jazz improvisation the improvisation is, for well-argued reasons, expected to be done using the stylistic vocabulary and references, while the improvising I do as a free improviser is very different to that and more ambiguous and limitless. I expressed feeling less sense of freedom while improvising than the other participants, and doing more conscious analysing and monitoring of how much I let those two different identities as an improviser blend together – while improvising freely I am constantly guarding and regulating the amount of jazz I can bring in it and on the other hand, while improvising in jazz music, I also restrict myself from following some impulses that I would follow otherwise in order to keep it stylistically coherent. While thinking that knowing something about improvisation in the context of jazz improvisation limits the freedom in the setting free improvisation and replaces some of it with a certain level responsibility, I also highlighted seeing myself as not ready and expressed during the conversation to not know how to define myself as an improviser:

"(I)f I would need to define my identity (as an improviser), the only thing I could say is that it is in a constant change. (…) Working with so many different musical and social bubbles have made it impossible to believe in the righteousness of just one." -Emmi

4.2 Addressing the challenges: realising the need to exit the familiar ground and comfort zone

During the sessions all participants realised that they were not able to rely on their mannerisms or most ways of improvising that were familiar to them and noticed being on an unfamiliar ground where very different kind of decision-making and adapting was needed. This instrumentation and also this combination of the musicians' musical backgrounds together was new for everybody. All that was similar or different in our ways of improvising and understanding music came through by playing only and for that reason there were also moments in which it became obvious that the ground was unfamiliar for another player, requiring a lot of on-the-spot decision-making to accommodate everyone.

The biggest and most obvious difference in the participants' way of perceiving of music was, very roughly simplified, between some basic elements of East Asian and Western way of understanding music. In the big picture of a global scale, I shared some rough similarities in musical backgrounds with Diego, for example with both of us perceiving music through sense of bpm-based timing, rhythmic ostinatos and polyphonic, harmony-based thinking typical to Western music. Neither of us were at all familiar with Mei Ling's guzheng as an instrument nor with thinking of music in a more monophonic way, that Mei Ling described being more familiar for her and her musical tradition. Mei Ling on the other hand was not very familiar with chords, Western modes and groove-based thinking. The soloist pieces of mine and Diego's were both rather percussive, in which Mei Ling specifically needed to find new ways for her to navigate in.

Me and Diego were neither aware in advance that the guzheng was tuned according to a pentatonic scale. The tuning and other differences in perceiving music were realised only by playing and during the improvisation, as the study was deliberately designed in a way that we

didn't communicate with each other beforehand verbally. Because everyone realised these differences only when the improvisation started, with more unfamiliar elements revealing themselves throughout all improvised pieces, each participant described having had to pay more attention to the playing of others from the start than normally and needing to be very alert constantly. As a result of the lack of the familiar ground for all, the participants all described having also had to occasionally exit their own comfort zones in one way or another to be able to adjust and tune in to the playing of the others.

Regarding the pentatonic tuning of guzheng, me and Diego both realised needing to analyse a lot which notes would be available for us, based on Western harmonies, scales and key signatures, in order to not dissonate, if the meaning wasn't to so deliberately. The more chord changes there were, the more theoretical analysing of the root note, available modes and keys the decisions required, which me and Diego identified as something that took more mental effort than what we were used to.

Another significant difference between mine and Diego's and Mei Ling's way of improvising was, that me and Diego tended to start to slide into playing rhythm patterns, grooves and thinking Western harmony based, but always soon noticed needing to adapt our playing to Mei Ling, who was not familiar with playing with Western harmonies and rhythm-based music. Mei Ling on the other hand needed to find ways to navigate on an unfamiliar grooves, rhythmic divisions and harmonies that were not always easy to enter to for her and that required making decisions she wouldn't normally make. Having to exit the comfort zone was evident in Mei Ling's description of one of her decisions during a one piece that started very groove-based and was taking place in an especially unfamiliar ground for her:

> "(W)hen I hear bass music with groove it's not that easy for me, because I have played Western classical music and Chinese music and they're not so rhythmic. I was not playing so much because I was trying to figure out how does this (rhythm) actually go. I thought that as the piano and bass sounds rather percussive, I should add some long notes on top. All these sounds are new to me, so it was harder. It was not what I wanted to do but I was trying to manage through other ways." -Mei Ling

At this point of the text it is important to note that while there were moments for each participant in which they needed exit their comfort zones and sometimes opt to playing against their own impulses in order to create a coherent or synchronised soundscape, as Mei Ling described in the previous quote, all these points have been deliberately picked up from wider conversations and put together as means to address the challenges and differences in the premises. For these challenges all of the participants found multiple solutions to, which the next chapter will bring up and shine light on more closely.

All participants also brought up that everyone having to navigate in an unknown field to them and having to make decisions that they would otherwise make brought up new and surprising ideas and from them there emerged music that was unlike anything they had heard before.

4.3 Finding solutions: qualities that helped in finding the common ground

While it immediately became obvious for all participants that this group improvisation was different to the group improvisations they had done earlier, all participants searched and found multiple ways where they could find common understanding and common direction in and through this process, a creative flow was accomplished in all pieces.

In the first and last session where the aim was to have equal roles as players, and the second session where Mei Ling was the soloist, there was not an established tempo based on a beats-per-minute or groove-based way of thinking, but instead the tempos naturally became freeflowing and not groove-based. Participants described this tempo as "breathing" and "organic". Instead of relying on a bpm-based tempo, they mention having paid attention to the intensity and texture.

In addition to intensity and texture, the tempo being perceived as "breathing" connects also to comments about doing volume shifts together. One fascinating remark was that the participants also described, independent of each other and without verbal communication or eye contact, having even visualised and thought about a similar kind of landscape during one of these moments:

"(…) "At some point I was thinking that it was sounding very much like an old Chinese landscape. (…) (E)verything was breathing. There was never an established tempo but it was breathing." -Diego

"(W)hen listening I started to see a landscape of a wide scenery with fields and mountains, calm sunshine and bees flying around, a countryside landscape. Then there also started to come some simultaneous rhythms, there was this really cool moment where you (Mei-Ling and Diego) were playing a stroke simultaneously at the same time in a surprising place, in a place that was not a part of the subdivisions but some kind of a polyrhythm. It (the piece) clearly found its own scenery." -Emmi

The participants described that as one of their main guidelines, they were seeking a balance in sounds and equal roles as contributors to the music by constantly evaluating and adjusting the amount of space one would be taking oneself and how much space there would be for others. Participants described balancing in between of contributing new elements to the music and not taking too much space in general and also balancing the pitches in the whole spectre sound in way that when someone else was playing in low register, one would opt to playing the middle or the high register instead and vice versa. Participants also described trying to find the empty space to fill and balancing between repeating, mirroring or emulating each other's sounds and bringing up new ideas, describing this constant balancing as follows:

"(…) I noticed that there was this kind of empty space for the melody there so I started to fill it with different kinds of melodies and riffs. Then there was a moment where I thought that am I taking too much of a leading role if I am playing the melody. (…) When you (Diego) went to higher pitches in the end I went to lower pitches myself and started to play more melodic riffs there instead. I was trying to find the empty space to fill there." -Emmi

Diego and Emmi, who noticed during the improvisations that they shared some similarities in their musical perception, also mentioned trying to be constantly aware that they wouldn't make their way of thinking about music a dominating element and then end up excluding Mei Ling, who wasn't familiar all the elements:

> "I feel like we both (Diego and Emmi) understood that there was a part where we were not giving so much space to the guzheng and I stayed in one note and you were also doing a less commenting groove, and then guzheng appeared very nicely and it naturally turned into a solo part." -Diego

When the participants were facing moments where they needed to navigate in a new way for them, they all described having listened more and played less, each describing the intensive listening leading to different forms of discovery. The participants also describe having opted to embrace the "accidents" and bring them deliberately to be parts of the music:

> "Before the first session I was changing the tuning but forgot to change the top strings. I thought that I will just play them anyway to add more notes." -Mei Ling

> "There was a moment in the beginning that I played some chromatic notes as the first thing I did and only just after that realized that oh, the guzheng is staying in the same scale. Then I thought that, oh, those chromatic notes I played didn't fit there, but I then decided to keep on bringing the chromatic sound back there every now and then. It's something that I have learned from jazz improvisation – if I accidentally play a note that is off the key in a solo, I repeat it to the extent that it becomes a part of the story and create a meaning for that 'wrong note' that there was." -Emmi

Participants also described having learned a lot during both musically and about each other during the sessions and becoming more comfortable with each other, having the confidence to take more risks towards the end. A delightful outcome was also that Mei Ling, who was the only improviser representing a more East Asian way of perceiving music, referring here to the monophonic nature with more flowing sense of rhythm, and who was therefore most of us on the unfamiliar ground in the improvisational situation considering that me and Diego had a lot of similarities in our way of thinking about music, concluded in the end that she thinks that improvisation is a good primary way of making music together when the musicians unfamiliar to each other in the following words:

""Learning through the three sessions in the middle was evident in our improvisation. (…) I think we became more attuned, I won't say in terms of understanding each other's styles, but in terms of being comfortable with each other. That was achieved in the last improvisation. So I think in settings where people are kind of new to each other improvisation is a nice way, a preliminary way to make music together even without completely understanding each other. I guess that being comfortable with each other is also very important. So it was very nice that we could do this." -Mei Ling

This finding suggests that it is possible to accommodate very different kinds of perceptions of music and to find a common direction together in group free improvisation despite of big differences in musical backgrounds, and that the aim to find ways for creating space for all participants to express themselves in this inquiry was successful.

4.4 Natural to seek equal roles instead of being in charge of the direction alone

When comparing the experiences of the musicians in the parts of the session where they had equal roles to the parts where one musician at their time was a soloist, all musicians described having found the role of the leader difficult and having enjoyed the playing more while they experienced having equal roles.

The participants described having found the leading role in their soloist parts difficult in ways of feeling a sense of responsibility of the direction of the piece, and finding the role of the leader unnatural in the context of free group improvisation:

"I felt some sense of responsibility and I needed to come up with more contrasting ideas in order to bring the piece to another direction." -Mei Ling

"It was even a little bit unnatural role to be so much in charge as an improviser. Normally when you improvise on a composed piece it is clearly defined that you are for example supposed to improvise a melody, and you are kind of "allowed" to do that, but here it felt easily like you are stepping on other people." -Emmi

Participants also pointed out that in the first and last part of the session, where the roles were directed to be equal, it felt very responsible to of play the first note:

> "In the first session we didn't know how to start or who would start, I think I usually wait for someone to start. Whoever starts has a big responsibility. " - Mei Ling

> "I also feel that the first moments defines so much the direction of the improvisation that it feels like a big responsibility to play the first note. " - Emmi

During the soloist pieces (the parts 2-4), the musical process was experienced as less flowing when there was one leader, and everyone was not contributing to the direction of the piece equally. This became evident in the improvisers expressing different levels of difficulty to find one's own role not just as the soloist but as accompanying players as well, and often not feeling confident while playing.

This finding suggests that there is something in the nature of free group improvisation that makes improvisers experience that the whole process works the best when everyone can contribute to the music and are free to listen, react and adapt on the spot without too much limitations or rules.

Chapter V

5 Discussion

   All the participants described making decisions that resulted a way of playing that didn't represent what they would have normally done, creating in new ways of playing with others, new ideas and discoveries. Furthermore, all participants described having learned a lot during the five parts of the improvisation session. Despite the improvisation session being relatively short, the learning happening during the session and reflective discussion was *transformational.* As Siljamäki (2021) described, *transformational learning* is changing the way of thinking as a result of critical reflection and observation of one's own thoughts and actions and being able to identify one's own habitual responses (Oliveros, 2007; Siljamäki, 2021). This was evident in immediate decision-making situations where they became aware of doing something that they would do in a more familiar setting and noticing needing to change that in order to adjust their playing to the others and the new circumstances, and as a result of that, trying out and discovering new ways to improvise together.

As the findings show, the participants described their identities as improvisers as a process of still learning and having an exploring attitude towards improvisation. They were aware of there being a lot more for them to learn about improvisation and simultaneously actively pursue to develop their skills in it. They have all voluntarily sought out to improvise in different settings in different parts of the world earlier and now by participating in this inquiry also presents a *learner identity* (López-Iñiguez & Bennet, 2021). The participants described that they are still learning and acknowledged "what they are not *yet*" (p.137) and had a positive attitude towards learning more about the subject. That displays a *growth mindset* (Dwek, 2006, p.6). Instead of displaying the opposite, *fixed mindset* (p. 5) and having avoided the situation where they needed to improvise while being aware of their own limited knowledge on the subject, they saw the situation as a chance to develop their skills and understanding on the subject. They saw it as a possibility to approach the version of self that represents their goals and what they want to become.

My inquiry's findings suggest that the learner identity and a growth mindset holds great potential not only for development in an individual level as means to achieve personal goals,

but also in a broader level of learning about other people's cultural backgrounds and traditions that are yet unfamiliar to them with open-mindedness and humbleness. I see open-mindedness and humbleness as being an automatic feature of a learner identity, as it involves seeing oneself as a growing, albeit limited, being in front of something that is way greater than our knowledge of it and includes the will to transform.

The participants were not able to count on familiar ways of creating music or even some familiar musical concepts, such as their way of treating harmonies or rhythm. The participants were often operating in an unknown ground to them similarly to what was described in Tint, McWaters and van Driel's (2015) study about facilitating applied improvisation training exercises for humanitarian workers. The learner identity and growth mindset, an open, humble and flexible mind, helped the the participants to be ready and willing to also exit their comfort zones. The participants mentioned listening more and playing less in these situations, displaying similar mental space of heightened alertness when having to act under pressure that Tint, McWaters and van Driel (2015) described in their study as creating "increased presence and authenticity" (p. 90). Similarly, the participants in this inquiry did not find exiting their comfort zone to be always easy for them. Instead, there arose "more collaborative relationships and greater creativity and innovation" (Ibid, p. 90). That is, learning ways to deal with uncertainty in those given situations that they likely wouldn't otherwise come up with.

The premise of my study was seeing improvisation as a universal capability and resource (Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020; Bailey, 1993; Wilson & MacDonald, 2021) that has the power to connect people regardless of their backgrounds. In this inquire, the participants communicated with each other directly through collective improvisation instead of using words in the first place. We were investigating each other and reality using improvisation as a tool (Nachmanovitch, 2006) and encountering each other for the first time in music instead of through words that might have affected on how we interpretted each other (Ibid, p. 4). During the improvisation session we had conversations with each other through music by reacting and adjusting continually to new impulses and new information given by others. In a way, my attempt with this was to "return for the natural beginning", and trust in the "humanness" (Siljamäki a& Kanellopoulos, 2020, p. 125-126) in us by surpassing the chackles of words (Oliveros, 2007; Nachmanovitch, 2006) and instead using improvisation as the method of

communication, hoping that we would be able to communicate in that space in a way that everyone's perspective would have an equal weight.

Using improvisation as the first tool for getting to know each other also connects to seeing learning as a social phenomenon that holds dialogue in high regard (MacGlone & MacDonald, 2018, p. 292) albeit the dialogue here in our case happened musically first. My premise was also a trust we would want to understand and be understood by each other, and through combining these two premises we would find a common direction despite of the different backgrounds. This ability to co-create and move to the same direction was described as being achieved by all improvisers in my study, despite not claiming to completely having resulted to understanding each other, which wasn't the goal either. Here I also want to bring out and remind that the main goal of the study was to understand how we can move to the same direction despite understanding each other.

The participants of my study intuitively used identical qualities for finding the common ground to communicate as the findings of Wilson and MacDonald (2016). In this way my study is not reinventing the wheel, but it confirms the universal usability of those musical qualities in free group improvisation. However, an additional element from my study to that of Wilson's & MacDonald's elaborate list, is the musician's awareness of one's own position as basis for their decision-making and the aim to play in a culturally responsible way. This came up by paying attention to creating equal space for everyone by not making musical elements that were culturally familiar to them, but unfamiliar for others, dominating and defining elements of the music. This connects to MacGlone & MacDonald (2018) describing free improvisation as a space where musician can recognise each other through their own unique way of sound-making. In this way of thinking the musicians aren't expecting the music to fill aesthetic criteria established by others, but their own "sonic-musical identities" (Bailey, 1993).

Improvisers in my study found it difficult to have a leading role in the soloist parts, where the task was for each musician at their own turn lead the direction of the piece by playing in a way that they thought musically represents their backgrounds, while the role of others was to accompany that. While one can argue that seeking for a power balance where participants are seen as equal contributors can be a personal quality in the participants as well, it is good to

point out that as this kind of democratic approach was mentioned and described in the background literature as being an inseparable element in free group improvisation generally as well (Thomson, 2007; Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020). A democratic creating process is often the norm in free group improvisation and that taking an authoritative role over others would be seen as anti-social and going against the expectation. All of the participants in my study felt conflicted about leading the direction even though it was according to the task that they had the leading role, suggesting that something in the setting of free group improvisation canvas makes people prefer equal input and equal roles, inherently encouraging participants to that way of communication. The act of group musical improvisation makes it easy to be aware of the space one is taking and to listen to the others. As in all the background literature and my study this was the way the musicians preferred to take roles in free group improvisation. This also leans towards the belief that humans inherently want to resolve dissonances in balance and seek equality.

In transcultural improvisation we show same kinds of elements as in any other kind of act of diplomacy: we acknowledge that we all have our own distinct identities and we all want to contribute to this world, that we want to understand each other and co-exist peacefully, and that we can negotiate, find solutions even when we need to compromise and step out of the comfort zone. It is easier to face the unknown together with other humans. Instead of polarising groups of people and putting each other in juxtaposition, which feeds only confrontation, we should see what we first see as otherness as an opportunity to find yet undiscovered resources both in individual level and as a society.

Creating music together transculturally, with new people, almost always requires a different and new approach than what the individual members are used. For it to work in a way that everyone feels included, it needs the elements of each musician having an open mind, being present and listening and learning from others. Improvising music together is a great way to get comfortable with others when people are unfamiliar with each other, and unfamiliar to each other's musical traditions.

Transcultural improvisation and music creation also offers a way to create something nobody else has done before. In transcultural improvisation there is a never-ending pool of possibilities of instrumentations and musicians behind the instruments bringing and creating their stories. While differences in cultural backgrounds are inevitably noticeable when

improvising together, improvising with people promotes seeing people as individuals, as they are, instead of as representators of their cultural backgrounds. A huge benefit of free group improvisation, also in the transcultural setting, is that the participants can define the aesthetical standards and ideals themselves instead of being tied to meeting the aesthetical standards set by others. While the results of my own study bring out that in transcultural improvisation musicians need to be prepared to not have all the familiar musical tools from their toolkits available with all the possible instrumentations and all diverse combinations of people, a lot of the elements found in this study can be used directly as they are in settings where transcultural improvisation is initiated.

While my study in some aspects connects to the field of ethnomusicology, I come to one central dilemma and highly complexed theme that is related to cultures encountering each other and working together in the globalised world, which I now deliberately set in thoughprovoking words: do we face the inevitable changing and evolving of traditions with growth mindset or fixed mindset? And while in this study and the referred background literature the fixed mindset was dealt as something to avoid, is anyway a fixed mindset sometimes a good thing, for example if it preserves an endangered tradition? If everything is "allowed to" change, transform and evolve, how can we promote decolonialisation in transcultural musicmaking when people representing dominating cultures create music together with people from minority cultures?

I was a participant in the artistic part of my study myself while I also was the researcher. I saw my own identity as an improviser as very hard to define and even conflicted, and chackled in the chains of knowing something about how I am supposed to improvise within the genres that I have expertise in, constantly rationing and evaluating which impulses to follow in which setting. Reading all the background literature and reflecting on the findings of my research have lead me to see my identity as an improviser in a more merciful light. The issue that I confront with my complexed feelings seems to be an inseparable and symptomatic part of having a mindset that doesn't settle in believing in only one truth, and of dealing with multiple different cultures and navigating in different value-systems. It seems to just be another side of the coin, the inevitable responsibility that comes with the freedom of exploring the world. It is deliberating to discover that perhaps there's no escape from it and noticing, that instead of there being a problem with this in a personal level that just awaits to resolve, maybe this just reflects the complexity of the world and awareness of it.

<center>**Chapter VI**</center>

6 Conclusions

Meeting the condition that the free improvisation is treated as a democratic process by the participants and the participants have reflected their positionality and possible preconceptions within the improvising group, I conclude that transcultural improvisation can be a great tool for diplomacy. Liberating the act of creating from the pressure of trying to meet the norms from the outside returns the power of the judgement of quality, meaning and beauty to the improviser.

This research makes a valuable contribution by studying transcultural improvisation and portraying how multiple musical qualities are used as basis for improvisers decision-making. It offers an insight to how participants of transcultural group improvisation make conscious decisions for initiating new elements to the music and deliberately contrasting or joining in on ideas of others. The findings of my research add awareness of cultural responsibility to this elaborate list as one of the criteria in the decision-making process. This entails the musicians evaluating their own creative input in relation to the others: how much space they take or give for others and how they adapt to unfamiliar situations, that sometimes also require operating outside of their comfort zone.

As an answer to the second research question, the improvisers' mindsets presented a growth mindset, which in layman's terms means an open, curious and flexible mindset that is willing to transform and not afraid to face challenges. Presenting courage and willingness to take a step towards something that is not easy is a key in creating flexibility, understanding and diplomacy. This also entails an inclusive mindset and willingness to treat all participants as equals.

My argument and one of the central findings of this study is that there lies an invaluable potential for diplomacy in a situation where everyone is by default aware of their own limits and where everyone has to act in unfamiliar ground. In that situation people are more likely to see each other being on the same side than as competitors. They accept being learners and are willing to transform. Improvisation's ability to touch something universally humane that

surpasses cultural boundaries highlights its importance as a tool for helping musicians act in a setting where there are people from different cultural backgrounds. Free group improvisation promotes acceptance towards the unfamiliar and can create an experience where the individuals discover having the ability to communicate with each other and being on the same page as creative agents even when they know that there's no shared cultural background with each other - a situation that would otherwise be prone to creating insecurity if one is aware of that starting point.

A relevant question to ask from me might be that why did I think having musicians from different continents would represent cultural diversity better than something else in this context of transcultural free group improvisation. The answer for that is an answer of the artist side of me – it was a symbolic way of bringing the whole world together in improvisation. Also, continents are limits drawn by nature, not humans. That reminds us that they existed before us and had unique characteristics even before we came to existence and invented words to describe them with.

In a pedagogical context I encourage music pedagogues expose music students to transcultural free group improvising by facilitating workshops and courses that focus on the subject. Providing the students the space and possibilities to also reflect on their decisions during improvising is important both for the development of their artistic identities. It also increases the students' awareness of the meaning of the innately collaborative and inclusive working method used in it, in wider social and societal contexts.

In pedagogical settings this subject could be researched more in multiple ways. Does the lack of a teacher observing or facilitating the improvising create some kind of circumstances for learning that are hard or impossible to recreate in an academic setting where the teacher is present? Can the student express one's ideas with the same level of liberty as with peers in a non-formal setting and with an observing teacher present and so forth, can these findings really be utilised as efficiently in improvisation pedagogy? And in transcultural setting, when teaching improvisation to someone who is not from the same cultural background with the teacher, can the teacher involuntarily be colonialistic by teaching ways of improvisation that are typical to their own tradition and thus hindering the student from showing their own background with pride? Does the enjoyment of improvisation and music decrease with the amount of education increasing?

It is clear that free group improvisation in a transcultural context needs to be researched more. Further studies could expand my research of transcultural free group improvisation to include more musicians in the improvisation, and to see what elements still stay the same and what elements change when we would increase variables, traditions and instrumental limitations. Another point of interest is that that how many people's individual visions can we accommodate in free group improvisation at once in a way that there is still space for everyone to be contribute meaningfully and the communication doesn't start to melt in a mass, where unique characteristics can't be distinguished well anymore.

The social processes in a society are processes of ongoing and constant improvisation. As we communicate with each other, moments with chances of changing habits, attitudes and thoughts are on offer all time. This is broadness of opportunities brings me hope. It is easier to prevent things from going bad than to fix them when they have gone wrong. That is why education plays such a crucial role on how the future will evolve to be like. While world peace is not yet the reality, we already have an existing tool for creating peaceful coexistence and preventing conflicts and we should use it. Improvisation is a diplomatic resource to be taken seriously.

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Appendices

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
PRIVACY NOTICE

Working title of the study: Decision-making during transcultural improvisation

Request to participate in a research project

You are invited to participate in an artistic and qualitative research study that examines decision-making in transcultural improvisation. Data generated in this study will be used in the Master's thesis of Emmi Uimonen.

The central focus of the master project is to research the decision-making processes made by musicians during transcultural improvisation. For this purpose, three musicians, including the student, from diverse parts of the world will have an improvising session together and afterwards a reflective discussion.

You are asked to participate in this study, because you are an improvising musician born and raised outside of Finland, which is the country of origin for the student researcher.

Voluntary participation

Participation in the research is voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the research or discontinue your participation at any time without reporting the reason and without consequences. If you want to cancel your participation, inform the researcher: █

Research process, risks and benefits

If you accept this invitation, you will be asked to participate in an improvising session of approximately 30-45 minutes with two other musicians, including the student researcher, and a reflection discussion session of roughly 2 hours facilitated by the student researcher. The improvising session will be audio recorded at Sibelius Academy on the █. The reflective discussion will be held immediately after the improvising session. The discussion will be audio recorded. The audio recording of the discussion will be used only to verify speakers for the transcription and destroyed immediately after the transcription is completed. Information given during the discussion will be treated confidentially and used only for research purposes.

The researcher is committed to following the responsible conduct of research by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity and the Code of Conduct of the University of the Arts Helsinki.

With the participant's consent, the audio recorded improvisation session will be uploaded to researchcatalogue.net.

The continent which the participant is from will be mentioned in the research. The participant's comments regarding their own cultural and educational background made during the discussion might be quoted in the research.

Although personal data in the written report of the Masters' thesis will be pseudonymised, it is possible that the participants can be recognized based on connecting data about their main instruments, the continents of their origin and their own quoted comments made during the discussion.

Participating in the study has the following benefits:

-        The research will help better understand what aspects/perspectives to pay attention to when people from diverse cultures and parts of the world meet to create music together.
-        The research might help develop tools for creating a safe and inclusive setting for transcultural improvisation.
-        The research might help better understand what to consider in transcultural communication, not just musical, but from a wider perspective. - There will be a reimbursement of 40€ for travel costs per participant.

Data controller of this research is:

Emmi Uimonen: ▮
Personal data are processed by the student Emmi Uimonen, the thesis supervisor Dr. Eeva Siljamäki, and the following platforms that are used for working: Cloud services managed by Microsoft Uniarts (O365, OneDrive, Teams, JYU Teams), Microsoft Word, Zoom.

Personal data to be processed in the research

The following personal data about you will be collected: name, e mail address, country of origin, participant's instrument, phone number, audio recording of the improvisation session, notated transcriptions of excerpts of the improvisation, audio recording of the discussion and a transcription of the discussion. Legal grounds for processing personal data in research/archiving (Archives Act 831/1994)

<u>Personal data in reflective discussion:</u>

> The processing is necessary for scientific, artistic or historical research purposes or for statistical purposes and it is proportionate with consideration to the aim of public interest pursued (section 4 (3) in the Data Protection Act (1050/2018))

In the research, your data will not be transferred outside the EU/EEA area.

Protection of privacy and data

The purpose of processing personal data is to gather research data for the study. The amount of personal data collected and stored will be minimised to only the amount necessary for the research. Personal data not necessary for carrying out the study (e.g., addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses and contact information) will be deleted within 3 weeks of completion of the research.
Personal data in reflective discussion to be processed in the research will be protected:

- by allowing access only with a user account and password
- by storing the data in a locked (physical) space
- pseudonymisation of discussion

The personal data will be pseudonymized on the research report, which will include short excerpts from the transcribed discussion session.

The discussion participant's personal data will be pseudonymised on the transcription.

All the recorded audio will be destroyed within 3 weeks of the completion of the research.

RIGHTS OF THE DATA SUBJECT

- You have the right to ask questions about this study and to have those questions answered before, during or after the research. Please feel free to contact the student researcher at ▮ or the thesis supervisor Eeva Siljamäki at ▮.
- You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting Emmi Uimonen ▮ however all pseudonymized information already generated before withdrawal may be used for the research purposes described above.
- You have the right to contact the data protection officer of the University of the Arts Helsinki or if you have questions or requirements regarding the processing of personal data: (privacy@uniarts.fi).
- You have the right to file a complaint to the supervisory authority, the data protection

ombudsman, if you believe that your data has been processed in violation of the General Data Protection Regulation (see www.tietosuoja.fi).

Regarding the consent of processing personal data in the publication of the improvising sessions' audio and video recording

<u>Withdrawal of consent (article 7 of the GDPR):</u>You have the right to withdraw your consent, if the processing of personal data is done based on consent. The withdrawal of consent shall not affect the lawfulness of processing based on consent before its withdrawal.

<u>Right to data portability (article 20 of the GDPR):</u> You have the right to receive the personal data that you have provided in a structured, commonly used and machinereadable format as well as the right to transmit the data to another controller, if it is possible and if the processing is carried out by automated means.

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CONSENT FORM

By signing this form I give consent for my participation in this masters' artistic research project by Emmi Uimonen as part of their master's degree in Global Music, Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki.

- I have read and I understood the contents of this document.
- I understand that participation is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time.
- I understand that data generated in the study will be used for the purposes described above.
- I have received sufficient information about the study and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered.
- I agree to participate in the study.
- I am at least 18 years of age.

I agree to be audio-recorded during an improvising session and using the audio for research purposes as described in the information sheet

Yes ☐   No ☐
I agree to be audio-recorded during the reflective discussion.
Yes ☐   No ☐

Consent to the processing of personal data

The audio recording of me improvising can be uploaded and opened to the public at Researchcatalogue.net

Yes ☐   No ☐

My name can be published in the Researchcatalogue.net Yes ☐ No ☐

_____ (Place and date)
_____ (Name and signature of the participant)
_____ (Place and date)
_____ (Name and signature of the student researcher)

This agreement is made in duplicate, one copy for each party.