Ethical considerations of transcultural composition

Sami Karkar

Global Music Programme

Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki

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Abstract

Through an artistic research process, I examine the ethical issues that arise in transcultural music composition, a context familiar to the students of the Global Music department at the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. Through reflexive autoethnography and musical analysis of the composition used for my Bachelor concert, I look at the questions of cultural appropriation vs. appreciation, and imitation vs. plagiarism. In the discussion I use a reflexive and investigative process for navigating these questions, and in the conclusion I expose my reflections and ideas on how to tackle this elusive yet important subject.

Keywords

Composition, Transcultural, cultural appropriation, colonialism, ethics, Global Music, reflexive autoethnography

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Introduction

Context of the thesis

This work has been carried out during the second and third years of my Bachelor studies at the Sibelius Academy – University of the Arts Helsinki, as part of the Global Music program. This program proposes a unique environment to the students and aims at training global artistic citizens (Thomson, 2024) by placing interculturalism, collaboration, and community engagement as central elements of the curriculum.

Naturally, such environment puts students in contact with a wide variety of musical traditions, for most of which a given student is an outsider. While cultivating the notion of "cultural humility" (Dolloff, 2020) or "intercultural humility" (Thomson, 2024), this curriculum does not necessarily address head on the issue of cultural appropriation.

Yet, transculturalism, and music creation specifically in this context are at the heart of the everyday occupation of students in this program. The curriculum naturally leads students to experiment, to imagine, to hybridize worlds without *a priori* notions of hierarchical value of the musical material they use or take inspiration from. But are the ethical considerations, in connection with the outside world, overlooked? Is all transcultural music ethical, as long as the creator values all cultures equally? How does the background of the compositor, their positionality in this yet-to-decolonize world, influence what is or is not ethical to do in that regard?

In our department, the term "cultural appropriation" is conceptually present at the corner of each course, but not always named, and rarely examined and discussed, looking at the state of the art and the current good practices, and possibly contributing to the discussion.

Cultural appropriation in general has drawn a lot of attention, including from scholars, although not always in the same direction: some view it as a positive force driving innovation and renewal in music, while others see it as a continuation of colonialism in the sphere of culture, among which music. Starting from the definition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Kendall, 2025), cultural appropriation is the "adoption of certain language, behaviour, clothing, or tradition belonging to a minority culture or social group by a dominant culture or group in a way that is exploitative, disrespectful, or stereotypical".

At the basis is this assumption of power imbalance between a dominant culture, and a minority one. For this reason, it is often looked at from a black vs. white perspective, or at least colonized vs. colonizer, the latter one being the appropriator and the former the one whose culture or tradition is being appropriated.

However, the concept as formulated above may equally apply to what one could designate a white-white context: a local, white minority culture, appropriated by a white dominant culture. This is especially the case in France where the central Capetian power has ruled for centuries over various regions that initially each had their own language and traditions, which later continued under the republic in the form of an "internal colonialism" as identified by the regionalist movement in the 1970's.

Finally, this thesis also examines with a critical lens the act of composing by imitation, in the form, inspired an author or a work of art, questioning the line between creation, inspiration and plagiarism in music.

Research aim and research questions

The overarching aim of this study is to question the lines between cultural appropriation and appreciation, inspiration and plagiarism, in the context of transcultural music creation.

The research questions driving this study are:

- How does a composer navigate the issue of cultural appropriation when incorporating elements of another culture (or several) than its own in a transcultural composition?
- What kind of guidelines could help students with navigating the issue of cultural appropriation in a transcultural composition context?
- How much can a composer take inspiration from an existing work or artist, without committing plagiarism?

Structure of the thesis

First, I will explicit the research design of this study, exposing the methods, the theoretical framework, as well as my positionality in this context and the ethical implications of this research. Then I will dive into the matter with a detailed autoethnography of my bachelor project. In the following part, I will propose a musical

analysis of, first, *La Grande Folie*, a piece by the French band San Salvador that I took a lot of inspiration from, and then of the composition that I created during this project. Then I will discuss the ethical questions that this composition process has raised for me, and how I try to address it.

Research design

This work uses artistic research to explore the questions of ethics in the context of transcultural composition. Artistic research is defined by Varto (2018) as a joint enterprise of artistic practice and research methodology, that seeks to generate new knowledge through creative processes. According to the Vienna Declaration on Artistic Research (2020), it is a "practice-based and practice-led research in the arts".

Coincidently, Lonnert (2015), writing about qualitative research, compares the role of the researcher to that of an artist:

> For a qualitative researcher the aim is not only to be able to understand an unlived life him- or herself, but primarily to be able to transmit an unlived life for someone else to understand. The researcher here has a task in between those of a composer and a performer. (Lonnert, 2015, p. 22)

Hence artistic research could be a good way, hopefully, for the readers of this thesis to "live an unlived life", if not to identify with their actual life if they are composers and do evolve in the realm of hybridity and transculturalism. While the unlived life that I wanted my audience to live on my bachelor concert was that, for example, of a Palestinian civilian, the one that I would like my readers to live through this work is that of a composer who engages with cultures and traditions other that their own, in a context of activism.

Through a research-creation process, I propose to address the research questions outlined above with a critical, reflexive autoethnography approach. In addition, I will use a musical analysis of the work composed, in regards with a work that had a major influence on it, and discuss the singularity and originality of the new work, in the context of hybridity and cultural appropriation.

Methods

Autoethnography

As Gröndahl (2022) writes about artistic research, "the artistic process can at the same time be the subject, medium and outcome of research". As a practice-based inquiry, my research relies on a composition work, as well as on the context in which it was realized and later performed. I use both the composition process, the result

of that process, the preparation of the performance, the performance itself and maybe reactions to that performance, as well as all the discussions before, during and after the composition process and the performance: my own interrogations and reflections, group discussions within the band, group discussions with friends and colleagues, informal discussions with peers or teachers, etc. In the light of this proposition and within the context of my bachelor project, the methodological framework best suited for this project seems to be reflexive autoethnography.

According to Ellis and Adams (2014), autoethnography is a research method and writing that seeks to link autobiographical stories and personal experiences to the social, cultural and political. They insist on the necessity to be familiar with existing research, which is a critical point in the context of this study where the literature is both extremely profuse, and at the same time quite lacking: try typing “cultural appropriation” in a scholarly literature search engine, you get over 200 000 results, but add the term “transcultural composition” and you get only a couple of results.

Theoretical framework

Hybridity

Neither the Oxford Music Online nor the Grove Music Online propose an article on the topic of cultural appropriation. However, we can first look at the concept of hybridity, which is discussed and connects to cultural appropriation. According to the Grove Music Online, hybridity is “a concept for describing musical mixtures that are explicitly enmeshed in identity politics, most often involving racial and ethnic identity, and its effects on culture” (Goldschmitt, 2014). The concept seems to have emerged in the late 1980's, early 1990’s in reaction against notions of authenticity and purity in music, and multiculturalism. Especially for diaspora groups, hybridity relates to “the ambiguity of simultaneously feeling connected to more than one place” (Goldschmitt, 2014). However, hybridity was also sometimes criticized over concern of cultural appropriation, for instance in the context of white western producers of electronic dance music using “exotic” samples from non-western traditions.

In contrast, Indian English scholar and critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha discusses in an interview with Rutherford (1990) the possibility of hybridity as a “third space” where different cultures co-exist without a priori hierarchical structures. It is the

edge, the liminal space, the in between, “that productive space of the construction of culture as difference, in the spirit of alterity or otherness” (Bhabha, as cited in Rutherford, 1990, p.209). This space allows for the emergence of something new, not less “authentic” than its constituents, and that prefers to ascribe a form of “anteriority” rather than “originality” to the cultures it sprung from (or between).

Cultural appropriation

Cultural appropriation is not a new topic. However, it is often addressed as such, maybe because the discussions are still ongoing and good practices are still to be defined. The trend on worldwide searches for the term on a popular search engine gives us an idea of how the interest of the general internet users for the topic have varied over time (*Google Trends*, n.d.). The following table shows an index related to the number of searches, with an index 100 for the peak of searches attained in May 2018. It shows that the number of searches really starts to raise around 2012. It also shows a general envelope with a peak that has already passed, and we are now on the decline. This would seem to support the idea that the topic is indeed not new, but further than this, that the topic is getting old. Or at least the interest of internet users for it. Of course, that does not mean that the discussion is over, or that we have found all the answers.

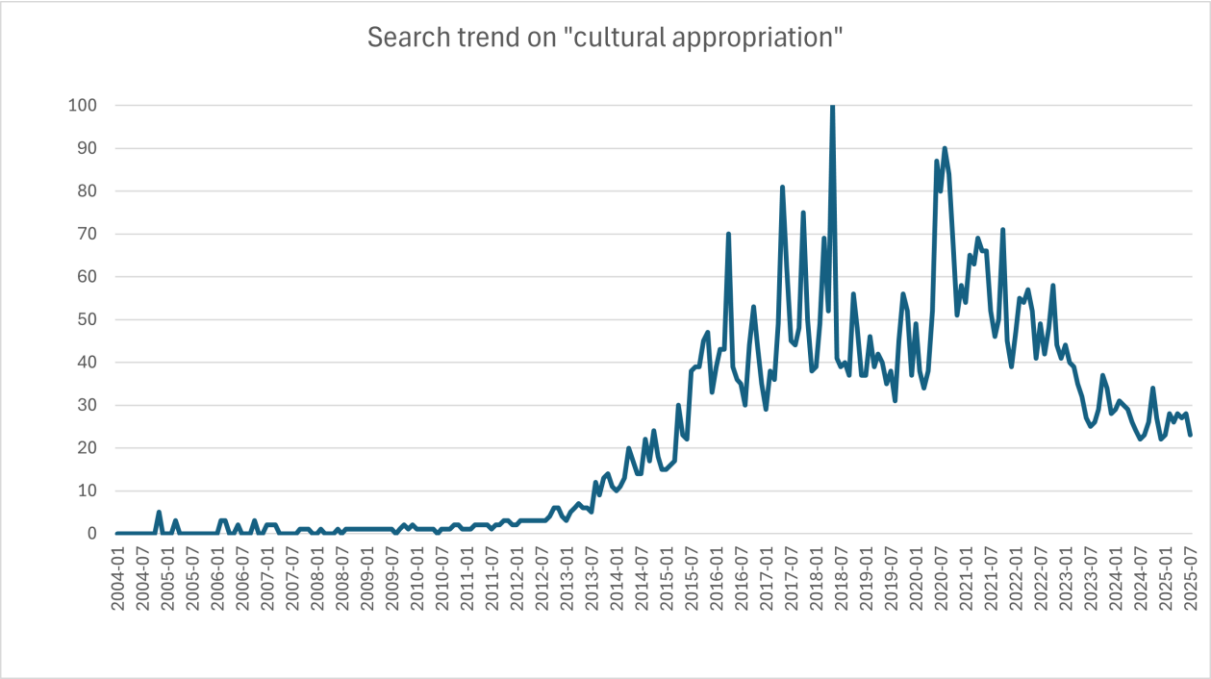

Figure 1 - Search trend on the term "cultural appropriation"

On the one hand, certain scholars even argue mostly *in favor* of cultural appropriation, in defence of artistic freedom. In one of his early papers on the topic, Young (2000) advocates for a largely inoffensive and beneficial use of cultural appropriation. His views are however not necessarily shared by the whole community, and his claims are mostly supported by his own (White Euro-American) intuition, rather than demonstrated properly. One of his favourite phrasing is "I am skeptical about [...]", which he often uses to conclude an argument against the possible harm, or seriousness of the harm caused by cultural appropriation, and declare that (in his view again) cultural appropriation is for instance necessary and beneficial to the evolution of western art music, and such great benefit should not be hindered by the small harm (if any) caused to a few people.

His later and larger work on the same topic (Young, 2008) delves on the same kind of White, Euro-American-centric point of view with little regards to the experience of the indigenous or other people whose culture has been nearly destroyed, forbidden, before being appropriated, despite a foreword where he assures that he has discussed with indigenous people, and that he acknowledges that he lives on their ancestral land, etc.

On the other hand, inspired by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Born and Hesmondhalgh place their discourse around cultural appropriation within the framework of postcolonial analysis: "to examine musical borrowing and appropriation is necessarily to consider relations between culture, power, ethnicity, and class." (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2001, p. 3) . The main example of cultural appropriation they bring up is that of African-American musical traditions:

> At the heart of debates about cultural identity, property, and belonging in popular music have been controversies over "black musics," largely because African American music (and other Afro-diasporic forms such as reggae) have been so popular and significant throughout much of the world. [...]

Do the worldwide popularity and significance of musics of black origin represent a triumph for African American culture? Or a cultural consolation for political

suppression and economic inequality? Is the “borrowing” by white musicians of putatively black forms, and the vast profits generated by the recording industry on the basis of such traffic in sounds, merely another form of racist exploitation? The existing debates often take simplistic, polarized forms, reliant on overly bounded notions of the relation of musical form or style to social grouping. Nevertheless, they raise crucial issues about music, identity and difference.” (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2001, p. 22)

Most of the literature (including the Encyclopaedia Britannica) refers to examples of appropriation by white Euro-American persons of elements of either black, African American cultures, or indigenous peoples like Native Americans. Examples, such as that brought forward in Steven Feld’s *A Sweet Lullaby for World Music* (2000), are clear cut instances of misappropriation, in general pure theft, and usually involve financial gain for the appropriator.

For some scholars, there exist several forms of appropriation. Thomas Prestø (2025) proposes that not all forms of appropriation are problematic, and that we can distinguish, from those forms that are problematic and generally labelled as cultural theft, between *misappropriation*, *expropriation*, and *arrogation*. Misappropriation is defined as a form of misrepresentation, “in a way that makes it difficult for the originating culture to continue to use the [borrowed] cultural element in its original intent or purpose”. Expropriation is a form of exploitation, defined as taking an artifact or cultural element in order to make it accessible to “others for which it was not intended. Often for commercial use.” In a way that does not benefit (or not mainly) the people with the culture from whom the elements were taken. Arrogation is another form with a less clear definition: “to take, copy, or misrepresent a cultural element or artifact without justification, misrepresented to such a degree that it would not be acknowledged by the criteria of the originating culture.”

Rogers (2006) distinguishes between “exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation” (p.474). For Rogers, the concept itself is undertheorized and the term is often used without enough discussion and framework. Exchange is the ideal case where there is reciprocity and equality between the two (or more) cultures taking elements from each other. Dominance is the case of a minority culture taking

elements from a dominant culture, often under the influence of oppression, colonialism, or cultural and media imperialism. Exploitation refers to the reverse case of the dominant culture appropriating elements from a minority or oppressed, or subordinated culture. In that case, which is the one we are most concerned with, Ziff and Rao (1997, p. 9) bring up four different types of concerns: cultural *degradation*, *preservation* of cultural elements, deprivation of material advantage, and last the failure to recognize sovereign claims.

However, Rogers warns us against the underlying concepts of sovereignty and ownership, which tend to essentialize cultures and see them as bounded entities. The concept of degradation also points to a concept of subordinated cultures being (or needing to remain) pure, and thus static, denying agency, not unlike how primitivism operates.

Internal colonialism

As mentioned previously, the concept of cultural appropriation has been mostly used in the context of neo- or post-colonialism, whereby a member of a white, dominant group appropriates elements of a BIPOC, subordinated group. However, I think we can also talk about cultural appropriation in a purely white-white context, especially when it comes to the traditional music of certain regions like South-West Occitania in France, subordinated by the central power in Versailles or Paris. Eliza Zingesser documents for instance the French cultural appropriation and gallicisation of Occitan lyrics from the troubadours' tradition in medieval times (Bolduc, 2021; Zingesser, 2020). By arrogating lyrics and transmitting them in gallicised, French language (*langue d'oïl*) without crediting properly the lineage, the troubadour origin of the songs are effaced, or associated to unintelligible text, noise, low-register literary forms and "primitive" themes.

According to Alcouffe (2009), the notion of internal colonialism, and maybe the term itself, already appeared in the late 19th century in Spain and East Germany, and appears in France in the second half of the 20th century. In 1966, the politician Michel Rocard, who would become prime minister twenty years later, wrote a report entitled "Decolonising the Province" to the socialist congress of Grenoble (Rocard, 1966). Around the same time, Robert Lafont, one of the founding members of the

Institut d'Études Ocitanes, published *La Révolution Régionaliste* (Lafont, 1967) in which he not only points out how certain French provincial regions are under-developed, but also reads the situation through economic and political processes, to build the concept of *colonialism intérieur*. He lists five main components of this concept: industrial dispossession and colonizing investment, the importance of extractive industries over transformation ones, dispossession of land for agriculture, dispossession of distribution circuits, and dispossession of touristic resources. For him, these same mechanisms that operate on the economy also operate on the cultural and linguistic sphere. Lafont also proposes a class struggle reading of the situation, and links regionalist claims to anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-racism (Lafont, 1975).

Positionality

I am a French-Tunisian musician and physicist. As a musician, I am nowadays mostly interested in musics from various parts of the world, in particular folk and traditional forms, that are often not market-oriented. As a scientist, I specialised in music acoustics, thus linking science and music.

I have not been raised within a particular musical tradition, or then it would be described as vaguely as "western music", as someone from a non Euro-American perspective could say.

The sound of my family home was sometimes that of western classical music, or The Beatles, as well as popular French singers like Julien Clerc. My own teenage subculture was more that of hip-hop (US and French) and rock (mostly US) at first, as well as the popular commercial dance music from the 90's (coming almost exclusively from the US at that time), later complemented by reggae (Bob Marley and The Wailers in particular), ska, but also jazz, funk, metal, or electronic music (in particular Jean-Michel Jarre), as well as "chanson française": Brel, Brassens, as well as more modern bands from the late 90's and 2000's of a similar kind. I was hardly rooted in a specific tradition, but rather grew up in a cosmopolitan environment, simultaneously belonging to and building many identities at once, neither belonging here or there in particular, or rather belonging to both here and there at the same time (Appiah, 2019).

As a musician in training, I have first followed a western classical curriculum in my local “conservatoire” (although there was also some occasional and optional jazz and “African percussion” ensemble classes). Despite this environment, I did not grow a love for or a sense of identity within this “classical music”, but the conservatoire was where you could learn music, and I really loved music in general. I dropped out on my last year of conservatoire, not seeing any future for me in that competitive musical and educational tradition, and already starting to play in bands as a drummer (rock, metal, jazz, funk). At the time, I was not in a very close contact with traditional music from any region, whether of France or Tunisia, or elsewhere. But traditional musics where nonetheless always close by, in my hometown: musics from the Maghreb and West Africa in particular, the main regions of origin of the largely immigrated population of this northern suburb of Paris.

Most of the non-western and/or non-classical musical traditions that I got to hear, I encountered later while traveling and meeting foreign musicians, especially during the past decade when I was intensely involved with the “Ethno” series of traditional music exchange summer camps all around the world (Jeunesses Musicales International, 2025). These experiences also made me discover various musical traditions from “my country”, or rather from my *countries*. It was an opportunity to discover that France is composed of diverse and contrasted entities. Each region has a distinctive musical tradition, and sometimes its own language (rather than a local dialect of French). Similarly, I started to discover the musics of the Arab world, only to realize how rich and diverse those are and that there is not just one “Arabic music”.

These realizations are also connected to my position as a (half) White-European, which sometimes leads me to adopt, by default or by lack of awareness, the dominant’s point of view, although I also belong to (one of) the (many) subordinated people, considering France’s colonial history and its imperialism. This is important for talking about cultural appropriation, because I can be on either side of this power dynamics, and it can be confusing. From the point of view of racism, for instance, I am sometimes seen as a White person, and people can project on me all the prejudice that they have against the White, racist, colonizer. But I am also sometimes viewed as a person of

colour (POC), depending on the situation, the place, the people around me. This latter case having been my most common experience as a child and teenager in France, it has been, at times, easy to forget that I am also, partly, the White person, the indirect beneficiary of colonisation and slavery, and a native speaker of a language that was imposed by force on so many people, etc.

Within the French context, I also grew up in the capital region, close to the centres of power, learning the "proper" French, going to elite education institutions, and growing up not knowing that France also contains regions with their own language and culture, regions that have been -or some maybe still are- underprivileged and underdeveloped by the central power, exploited and dispossessed from their local resources, and repressed against the use of their language and the expression of their culture.

Research Ethics

This research was conducted following good practices of research integrity with regards to reliability, honesty, respect and accountability, as proposed by the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (ALLEA - All European Academies, 2023), similar to the guidelines promoted by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2023). In addition, the collection, processing and storage of data, especially personal data, follows the EU General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679, 2016), often referred to as GDPR, concerning the use, storage and transfer of personal data.

However, the ethical considerations of this work are somehow intricate because, as an auto-ethnographer, the other subjects of my accounts are easily identifiable. So even when I did not conduct specific interviews, where I would have explained the research goal and received an informed consent, people around me in my daily life are part of the story I write, so there is a balance to find between revealing certain details and preserving the confidentiality and privacy of those around me. As Starfield (2019) writes about autoethnography:

> The self that is studied is part of a community of others who will inevitably be described in relation to the self. Consideration should therefore be given to issues of informed consent, protecting anonymity and confidentiality, and other matters that may arise in other strands of ethnographic research. Privacy concerns may be more urgent in autoethnography as the participants may be more easily

> identifiable due to their closeness to the author of the study. (Starfield, 2019, p. 168)

Here, there is no “one size fits all” recipe on how to tackle this problem, and it is through writing, reflecting, reading, and writing again, that I tried to find this balance. I kept my reporting as vague and anonymous as possible, but I also took the liberty of naming, not people but institutions, to better situate myself and the context of this study. To only one exception, I did not conduct specific interviews on the subject. The reflections mostly come out of informal discussions, an accepted method of qualitative research (Swain, 2022), whether with individuals within my academy, or within groups of practitioners, such as bands with which I have played.

Autoethnography

Genesis of the project

The composition I used for my Bachelor concert is *Pierrot et La Guerre* (‘*Pierrot and The War’*), a musical suite for 6 vocalists and percussionists imbued with storytelling. The start of the creation process dates back to November 2023, and in the first version it was meant to be played without pause, like a rhapsody, and there was no storytelling element.

The initial intention was to make a piece that talks about war, about how disastrous it is for civilians, and how horrible it is and will always be. It was partly about the war and genocide that was going on in Gaza, as we were already after October 7th 2023, but it was also about war in general, as I had the situation of Ukraine in mind as well, and I was thinking about other conflicts, some more visible than others. Hence, the music and its purpose were strongly influenced by this context from the start.

While I started composing without knowing precisely in which context I would perform that piece at first, at some point I decided that I would use it for my “pre-Bachelor” concert, a 30-minute concert that is performed at the end of the second year of the Bachelor studies at Sibelius Academy, in the Global Music programme.

What message I wanted to give was not clear to me from the start. I wanted to present the war not only as something binary, where one bad country attacks another, and the second one is just a victim. I wanted to show something more nuanced, and I wanted to bring the point of view of people, as human individuals, not that of the army, the politicians or the media. Eventually, I decided to take the point of view of a deserter, of someone who refused to be drafted in the army.

I heard a lot of stories from the First World War in France about drafted soldier who did not want anything to do with the war. Some of them were condemned for desertion or treason. I was also inspired by a famous anti-war song, *Le Déserteur (The Deserter)*, from French poet and songwriter Boris Vian (2018). In essence, the song is a call for refusing to be drafted and refusing to participate in war.

The genocide was still going on in Gaza, but I did not think it would last long. After deciding that I would use this composition for my end of year concert, I genuinely

thought the war would be over by that time, so it made sense to keep the topic of the composition more general. However, the situation in Gaza was getting worse day after day and week after week. Observing the lack of reaction or attention of people about it, as opposed to how the war in Ukraine was watched, listened, and talked about, a big frustration started to rise inside of me, which subsequently reshaped how I wanted to use the opportunity of my concert and turn it into a political act, a moment of reflection and public education, somehow.

The aim was to bring awareness on the absurd silence and avoiding strategies, and to enable the discussion on a topic that touches us particularly in the Global Music department, having Palestinian members in our community, both among the students and the staff. Besides, this department has by essence, with its name and its values, the topics of justice, human rights, equity, at its heart. Considering the people, however distant and different, as "Other", and more serious even, indifference to the suffering of this "Other" is the exact opposite of our values. So, it seemed extremely important to me then, to bring that topic forward, to expose it loud and clear, to break the deafening silence and to, hopefully, open a conversation that was lacking.

I wanted also to propose another image of Palestinian civilians, who were being erased by the Israeli army, civilians who were being constantly dehumanized by Western mainstream media, which reflected in the apathy of most of the general public that I was noticing around me in Finland.

Also, from a wider point of view, I thought this topic, this intolerable genocide and the silence around it, should be everyone's concern. War crimes and a possible crime against Humanity were (and still are, as I am writing this) being committed while we watched the news or our social media feeds. How could we stay silent? How could we not side with all the victims? How is it "complicated", as we sometimes hear? How could our compassion and empathy only go towards one "side" of the conflict, moreover, the occupier's side? How could we, Europeans, be so supportive of Ukrainians and at the same time so apathic to what the Palestinians were subjected to?

From the start I had been wondering if the music, with its few lyrics in French and Occitan, would be enough to carry the message. I believe music can carry and

communicate strong emotions. But when it comes to a very specific and direct message, are not words, sometimes, more efficient? That is the reason why I decided to turn my pre-bachelor concert, which was to happen on 15th of May 2024, into a sort of political and educational moment.

Concretely, I prepared a "teach-in" where I would have a public discussion with Prof. Syksy Räsänen, an academic from Helsinki University and long-time activist advocating for the Palestinian cause through the Finnish-Palestinian organisation Sumud (*Sumud - The Finnish Palestine Network*, 2024). We would talk about the history, the current situation, the boycott movement (*BDS Movement*, 2025) and especially the academic and cultural side of it. Räsänen also invited a Palestinian artist in order to give a voice to the Palestinians themselves: they invited Nemat Battah[1], who decided to talk about the *Nakba* (the "catastrophe") since May 15th is Nakba Day (*UNISPAL: About the Nakba*, n.d.), a foundational date of Israel but the "catastrophe day" for Palestine, its occupation, and the start of Israel's exactions against civilians.

So, the event also became an opportunity to learn about Palestinian history firsthand, the invited artist recounting the events of 1948 through her family archives (Karkar, 2024). At the end, the audience was also invited in the auditorium next door for the screening of "Palestine is Still the Issue", a documentary film from John Pilger (Stark, 2002).

At that point, the silence inside academic institutions worldwide, and the silencing of people who dared to raise their voice against the genocide was at its peak, even in the University of the Arts in Helsinki. For that reason, I decided to keep my new plan secret and to make it a "happening". Officially I was still preparing a concert, but there was no open conversation going on and it was hard to know who to trust, how my teachers would react, or how the technicians would react if I told them, so I did not tell anyone. Eventually, a week or two before the performance, I let the band -and only them- know what was going to happen, so that we could discuss it and decide how much and in which way they wanted to be involved in the "show". As a result of this discussion, we

[1] The irony is that Nemat Battah is also one of my teachers at the Global Music department, although she was invited by Prof. Syksy Räsänen who did not know that.

agreed to perform only the first 2 minutes of my piece before I interrupt it and introduce the teach-in with a speech.

Second version of the project

Context of the performance

The new version of my piece was performed at the Festival of Resistance(s) (Karkar & Reba, 2025), that Mia Reba and I organised together on the 27th of May 2025, a context which also shaped the composition and creation process during the first semester of 2025.

This festival idea emerged around the end of 2024 as a follow-up to the previous happening, from the will to bring my Bachelor performance outside of Musiikkitalo (the Music Center of Helsinki, where the Sibelius Academy is located and where Bachelor concerts are usually performed), and to touch a wider audience, people who might not necessarily enter conventional venues and institutions like Sibelius Academy.

The concept matured, and I wanted to "zoom out" of the case of Palestine, to look at occupation as a more general and systemic problem. I also wanted to propose more than just a concert. So, the idea of a festival was born, which was themed on "resistance to occupation". In this frame, the Palestine issue resonated with Kurdistan, Ukraine, Karelia, Western Sahara, Tibet and many other places in the world. It also resonated with the struggle of indigenous peoples, everywhere in the world, including in Finland with the Sámi people.

In January 2025 I started contacting a couple of organisations who seemed to like the idea, so the festival started to sound like it could become reality. The idea was to build a platform to bring together and amplify the voices of those who struggle against or denounce occupations of various sorts - a consequence of colonialism, imperialism, and racism. There would be artistic performances of different kinds, stands from partner organisations, as well as panel discussions around the theme of resistance to occupation.

In January and February, I applied to various funding, and from February to May 2025, our organising committee consisting of only two people managed to gather different actors around this cause and to make it happen.

Eventually the festival brought together various Civil Society Organisations: transversal like Amnesty International – Finland, Elokapina, Catalysti, or more locally oriented such as A.I. Sápmi chapter, Sumud – The Finnish-Palestine Network, Student for Palestine Finland, the National Kurdish Democratic Center. It also brought artists whose background, practice and works reflected the theme and values of the festival (music, dance, theatre-inspired participative practice, and visual arts).

The goal was to raise awareness of the general public on the main theme, as well as to be a forum for artists and actors of different organisations to meet and discuss around their common issues, to learn from each other's experiences, and to discuss and discover what remains common to all of them, while recognising the specificity of each struggle in their own local context.

The will to bring not only my voice, but also others', on a public square, out to the masses who might be simply passing by, through this festival, had an influence on my processes of composing, arranging, writing, and on the reflections that nourished my work all along the way.

A new element: storytelling

In October 2024, I decided to work again on my composition, to rearrange and extend it for my Bachelor concert. This time, I thought, we would perform the piece. But then the message had to be very clear.

I still had the feeling that words, in a more widely understood language like English, would be beneficial. First, I thought of including other arts, visual art, theatre maybe. I even passed on a message to fellow students at the Theatre Academy, as well as at the Fine Arts Academy, but with no result. And then I thought of stories. The stories I heard or read as a kid, but also the ones I heard as an adult. I think storytelling has a power to fascinate, to transport, and to get people to follow you into your world. So that they see, as best they can, the part of the picture you would like to show them. Then, I thought that I could mix storytelling and music. This way, I could tell the story to my audience with both words and music, and the audience could then understand my language, both textual and musical.

I remember struggling with this idea at first: it is debatable, and some people would argue that less is more, and that sometimes not being too explicit in an artistic performance actually invites the audience for more reflection. But I felt it important to address not only my fellow musicians from the Global Music community, trained artists, but a wider audience who maybe do not analyse and decode as deeply the music they listen to. Hence, I decided that adding words, in the form of storytelling, would be beneficial.

I had a story in mind already since 2024, if not earlier, but putting it into text only came around April 2025, and the text was subsequently reworked with Kata Vuoristo, who also took the role of the storyteller.

About the (new) message

At first, the core message of the piece is pacifist, similar to what it was in the first version. It could consist of the alternate title: *Maudita Sia la Guèrra (Damned Be the War)*, which are the lyrics of one part of the work. But after reflection, there is a bit more to it than that. But while extending the project and the story after the first, unperformed version, the message evolved a bit, although its seeds were already present in the earlier version in 2024.

What I wanted to communicate with this whole story and musical suite, is how the conditions under which certain peoples, like the Palestinians (but not only), are treated, ruled on, discriminated and oppressed, is only a fertile ground for more violence, feeding back into a reaction loop with the oppressor. My intention was to advocate for peace, but also to underline that there can be no lasting peace without justice.

Claiming for “peace”, in a situation of occupation, from the occupier to the occupied, is ignoring (or even worse, denying, erasing) the actual situation of oppression and asking the oppressed one to accept it. It is asking the oppressed to be silent and to accept their position as dominated, as “less than”, as not deserving as much human rights as others. It is inherently racist and colonialist.

In 2024 already, in resonance with this idea, I was thinking of including a rearranged version of Bob Marley’s song *War* (Barrett & Cole, 1976), whose lyrics are almost word for word an excerpt of the 1963 speech of Haile Selassie the Ist, Emperor of Ethiopia and

head of the Organisation for African Unity, in front of the UN General Assembly (Selassie, 1963). This speech calls out discriminations, racism and colonialism, and calls for the application of the same human rights for all humans, whatever their skin or eye color. While this speech was focusing on Africa, it resonates today with many places and peoples in the world who still do not enjoy the same rights as the citizens of "W.E.I.R.D." countries (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic)[2].

Back then, I chose not to include this song, for aesthetic reasons, to avoid bringing in another totally different style into the project, as well as for its length. However, it undeniably influences and resonates strongly with the message I want to channel through my musical story.

[2] A term coined by researcher Joseph Heinrich and his colleagues. They found that the usual population samples used for psychological experiments are the "worst" sample to extrapolate on other populations. I use it here as it seems adequate and accurate to describe the type of population who enjoys the most human rights, such as peace, freedom, justice, etc...

Henrich J., Heine S. J., Norenzayan A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral & Brain Sciences*, 33, 61–83.

Analysis

Influences as a composer and musician

I lived in various places in France and abroad (Australia, Turkey, Switzerland, Germany, Finland) and travelled to many places. Through a series of music exchange camps, part of the Ethno program (Jeunesses Musicales International, 2025), I encountered traditions from more countries and regions that I could count, including musical traditions from various parts of France, and from North Africa, including Tunisia.

In France, among other cities, I lived five years in Marseille, which is part of Provence, a subregion of South-East Occitania and where the Occitan dialect is *Provençal*. I am partly influenced by the musical tradition of Provence that I discovered through bands like Massilia Sound System (*Massilia Sound System*, n.d.) and Lo Cór de la Plana ('LO CÒR DE LA PLANA - THE LAMPARO COMPANY', n.d.).

More recently, I took a strong influence from the South-West of Occitania, from the Pyrénees Gascognes where the local dialect is *Languedocien* in its Gascon or Béarnais version. Through a friend, several years ago, I discovered traditional songs from Vallée d'Ossau, one of the valleys of the Pyrénées near the city of Pau and got immediately transported by the music. I really enjoyed this multipart vocal tradition with (mostly) synchronous movement of vocal parts (homophony), where the main voice is in the middle, and secondary voices are added on top of and below it. There is no metric and no clear pulse, and it requires the singers to watch and follow each other, to breathe together. The part of the repertoire I discovered is mostly shepherd's songs, talking about the beauty of the mountains, praising the beauty of a shepherdess they met, or lamenting because they might never see them again.

Although I came to be a musician first as a percussion player, I always found myself fascinated by the power of vocal harmonies. This style in particular, despite the lack of rhythm, or at least of a pulse, touches me deeply. Maybe because of the connection the singers must have, because of how the notes are stretched and dissonances become strong beats and are contemplated for a while. Maybe also because this tradition is still alive, evolving, and it is kept alive in great part by non-professional singers, by simple amateurs. Polyphonic singing in this region plays a social role in bringing (normal)

people together around a meal, at a bar, or at a festive occasion, and it is not performance oriented. It is merely a moment to experience together.

As a percussionist and drummer, I have also encountered various musical traditions from West and North Africa, as well as from South America, especially from Brazil. I have internalized elements of some of those traditions in my musicianship. Others are more recent, and notably Maracatu, a rhythmic tradition from North-East Brazil, that I quote in my composition and which I discovered and learned during my studies at Sibelius Academy.

Several months before starting composing for this project, or perhaps a year or more even, I discovered a French band called *San Salvador* (*San Salvador*, n.d.). Their music could be described as a modernized version of traditional Occitan music from Corrèze (South-West of France, in the "deep" countryside) with many additions of external elements.

Sometimes described as hairs to the Nova Cançon occitana movement from the 1970's, a folk and traditional music revival movement accompanied by a regionalist political stance, they use mostly traditional texts and songs that they re-write, re-arrange, re-imagine to the point where it is a completely new song in the end (Gailh, 2021).

Their piece *La Grande Folie* (San Salvador, 2020) is a 12-minute long work with which they often conclude their concert. It features rich harmonies, energetic drums laying down interlocked rhythms that at times turn into an acoustic trance music party. This band, and this piece in particular, have played a special role and strongly influenced my composing.

Truly amazed by their work, I started analysing and writing for myself a list of musical elements they use in this piece, thinking how I could use those elements, to what end, and how to integrate that into my own music-making. Eventually, I stopped writing down everything but kept listening, to get inspiration from the most salient and enjoyable moments, to let it sink into my brain, to "pickle" as one of my teachers like to say, ready to be reused in its own form when I need it.

***La Grande Folie*: a short musical analysis**

Comprised of six singers (three lower and three higher voices), the range San Salvador use is most of the time compact, which inevitably leads to some narrow intervals, which is, perhaps why it is reminiscent of traditional Bulgarian singing tradition (Gailh, 2021).

The piece uses at first a sort of Hijaz scale (dominant minor harmonic), with a slightly lower major third (maybe closer to a natural third, as could be useful for vocal resonances). Later in the piece, a mix of Phrygian and Hijaz scales are used on different voice parts, introducing more contrast between voices and provoking unexpected intervals.

In general, they display rich harmonies, with more than three sounds at the same time. While fourths and fifths play a big role, as is the case in some Occitan repertoire like that of Polyphonic singing of Gascogne (Castéret, 2012), dissonances like major and minor seconds and sevenths are used so commonly that they do not pass as a dissonance anymore, merely a tension, sometimes even used on a strong beat or on a long note.

Structure wise, the piece mostly revolves around the use of grooves and loops: each section could be summarized as a short cell, a few bars of length, from which elements are exposed by piece, and by layers, building up the rhythm, before what seems like a climax, but is quickly de-escalated or sharply transitioned to the next section.

I have used this type of layered progressive arranging in the past already when arranging traditional music, as some pieces only have one or two short melodic elements, and this use resonated with my practice. It is also similar to the Vocal Painting and Ritmo con Señas conducted improvisation techniques, in the sense that there is a musical loop going on, a groove, to which the arranger or the participants usually make slow, progressive changes, adding, modifying and removing layers on the go. Two systems of collective improvisation with their sign language, that I have learned and used for a few years (Daus, 2020; Vazquez, 2013).

What was a bit newer to me was how some of those sections turned into a trance, somewhere between a Sufi progression, and a progressive electronic dance music build up. This new aspect was very exciting, and I wanted to reuse it.

In terms of rhythm, both the drumming and the singing feature rich polyrhythms, and numerous motor-interlocking patterns. The two floor toms are most of the time

interlocked, and use both skin and rim hits. The tambourine sometimes brings a tarantella-like vibe, with more insisting subdivisions and less powerful than the toms, but it is still tuned quite low and competes in the same frequency range as the toms, adding to the dynamics in the low and medium-low range. The band also uses clapping as an instrument, sometimes in unison, sometimes using interlocked patterns or polyrhythms.

Motor-interlocking pattern is a device that I practiced a lot for instance in vocal painting and circle music, and which I like to use in my music. Besides, my first instrument being percussion, I am naturally drawn to using polyrhythms. So, all of these elements resonated strongly with my own aesthetics.

A musical analysis of *Pierrot et la Guerre*

For my Bachelor project, I chose a format and instrumentation quite similar to *San Salvador*: six voices, three low and three high, and percussions played by the singers. I felt that this format worked well for many reasons, both for the vocal parts and the percussion parts. The difference lays mostly in the instruments used, and in the fact that I liked more the idea of having everyone both singing and playing, while most of the time San Salvador has only two to three of their members playing percussion.

The voice parts in my composition are distributed as Tenor, Baritone, Bass for the lower parts, and Alto, Mezzo-soprano 2 and Mezzo-soprano 1 for the higher voices. I like to list them in that order, because it is often in that order that I thought of it while composing, rather than thinking in terms of “SSATBB” where the higher voice would have a more important role.

The main scale used is what we could call Hijaz A, similar to the dominant mode of a minor harmonic scale. Almost all sections use this scale, to the exception of the fifth section, which consists of a rearranged traditional song that is in A minor harmonic. However, there is a key change to D minor harmonic in the very end of that section, which leads back to the main scale of the suite.

1. *Ouverture: La guerre menace (Opening: The threat of war)*

I started composing as an exercise of imitation, in search for that energy that San Salvador is able to communicate. Along the way, I naturally started to put more of my

own ingredients into the music, but the opening section of *Pierrot et La Guerre* is maybe the part where the imitation is most recognisable.

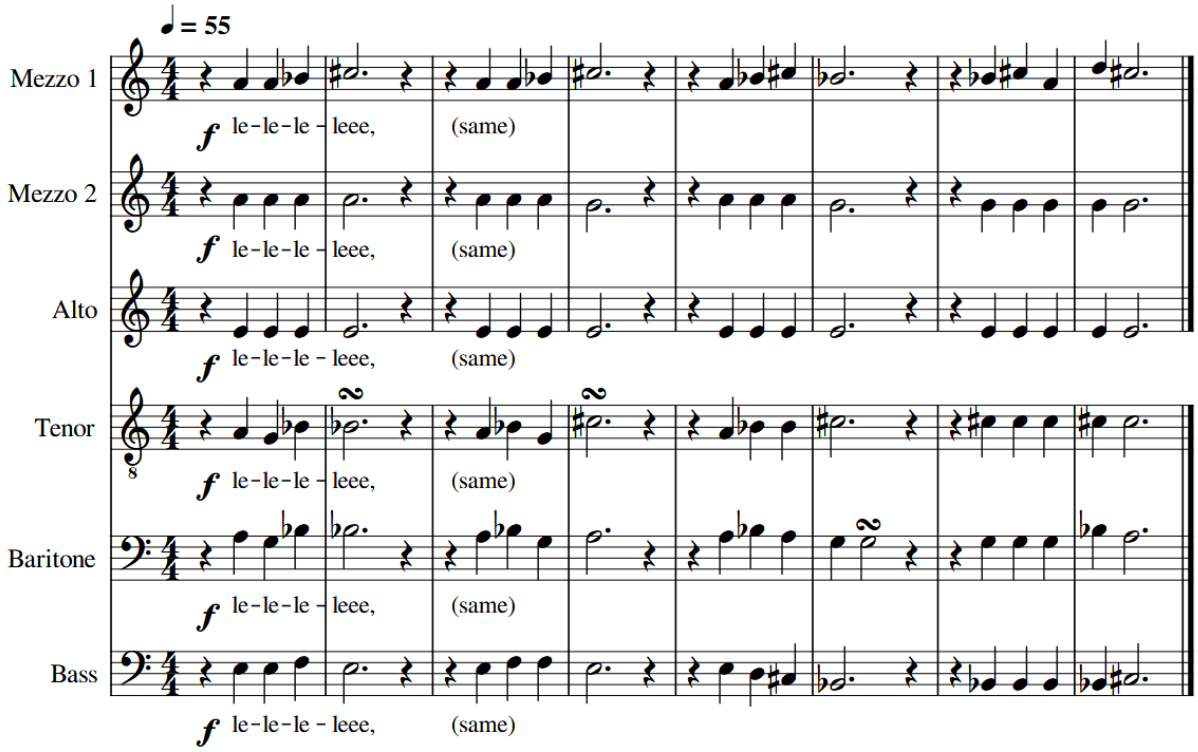

Figure 2 - Score extract of the opening

In this opening, I used a series of four slow and long chords, arranged in four phrases, which repeat as a long loop, adding up a voice layer at each round, with a heavy use of narrow intervals. The two higher voices start together, then adding the Alto voice, then the Tenor and Baritone, ending with the Bass. It is similar to the opening of *La Grande Folie* with the tempo, the type of voice, the long notes, and the staggered entrance of each vocal part, and the presence of narrow intervals. I also use a simple syllable "lé" instead of actual words. This way I use voice here as an instrument, rather than for its ability to articulate words.

In this section, the two highest voices operate together, with a melody on the Mezzo-Soprano 1 accompanied by a second voice on the Mezzo-Soprano 2 which oscillates between Ist and VIIth degrees, while the Alto sings a pure drone, on the tonic first, and on the dominant later. Similarly, the Tenor and Baritone parts operate together, forming an internal duo, while the Bass sings an accompanying line, although with more movement than the Alto part.

The role of this section is, from the start, to impress the audience with strong voices, lots of dissonances (at least in the western classical view: major and minor seconds, as well as tritones) and to bring up a feeling that something terrible is about to happen. The storyteller has talked first, exposing the situation, so the audience has a bit of context already: Pierrot, the main protagonist, lived happily with his family when rumours of a war with the neighbouring country came in the news. He lives close to the border, and as a pacifist he really does not want a war to brake with his neighbours, with whom he really sees no reason to quarrel.

This part is also a recurrent theme throughout the suite. It comes again in different versions, with different voicings, arrangements, and dynamics, always to remind us of the brutality of war.

2. *Plaidoyer pour la Paix (The Plea for Peace)*

In the second section, the tenor part has a solo melody while the five other singers provide a background accompaniment. The percussion part is relatively light and consists basically in one rhythmic groove in 12/8 distributed over the set of players and their instruments. The entrance of each instrument is staggered in order to fill up the space gradually.

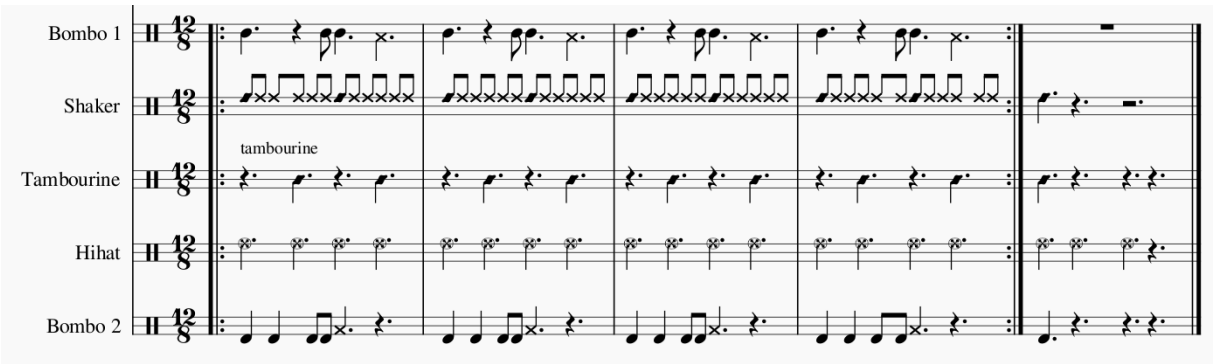

Figure 3 - Score extract of the second part - percussions

The vocal accompaniment is soft, with mostly simultaneous voice parts arranged in whole note chords. As the music progresses, it slowly turns into ostinatos with more movement in heterophony, where the different vocal parts answer each other with a

rhythmic movement in different parts of the loop.

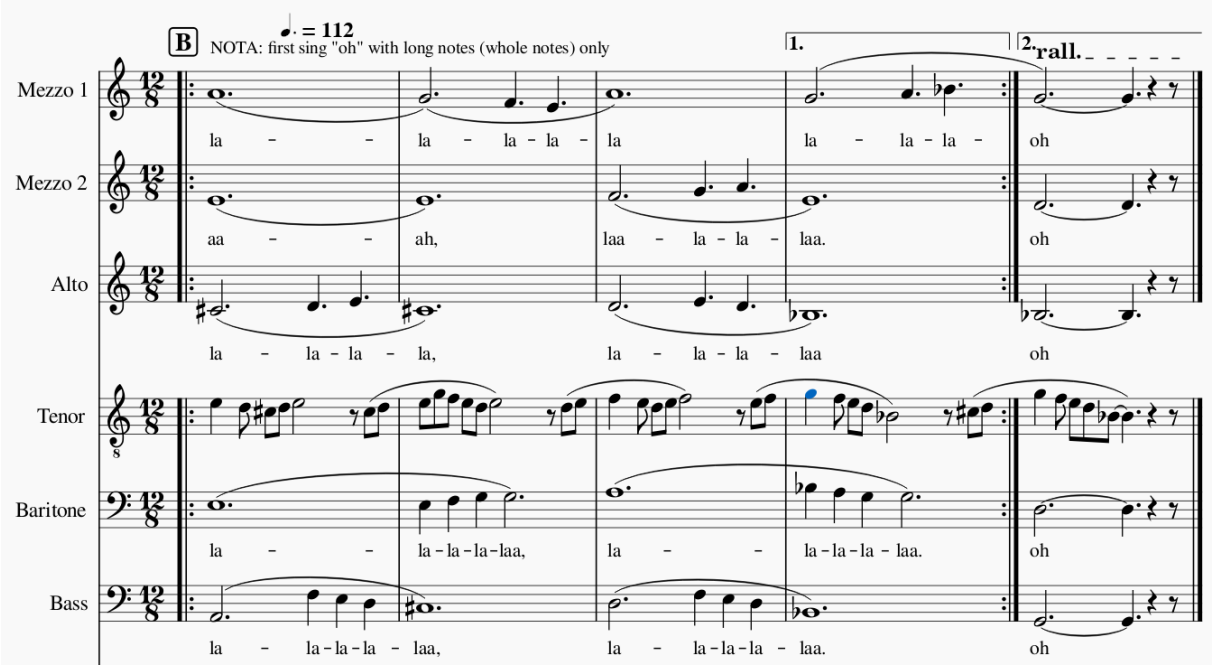

Figure 4 - Score extract of the second part - voices

3. *La déclaration de Guerre (The declaration of War)*

The third section starts in a very similar way, but the rhythm is in 4/4, decidedly binary. The solo melody of the tenor emphasizes this binary nature of the rhythm. The vocal accompaniment leaves a lot of empty spaces, at first, but after a few repeats the voices are getting more insisting and eventually come to a quarter-note rhythm with a more threatening sound, while the solo voice ends up an octave higher and sounds very

anxious: the war has been declared and the protagonist, Pierrot, is called to be drafted in the army, which induces anxiety, reaching panic at the end of the section.

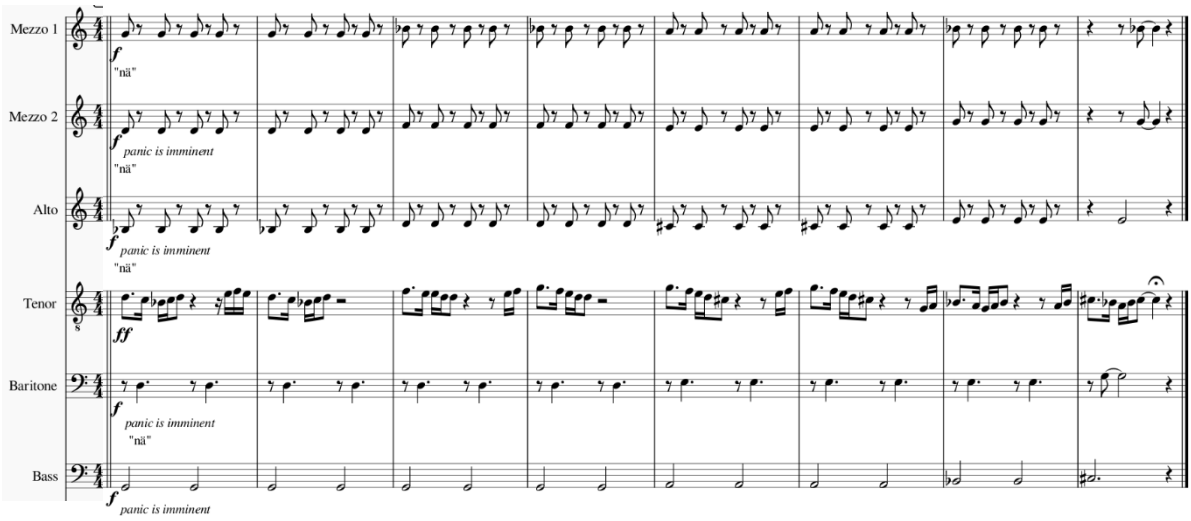

Figure 5 - Score extract from the third part - voices

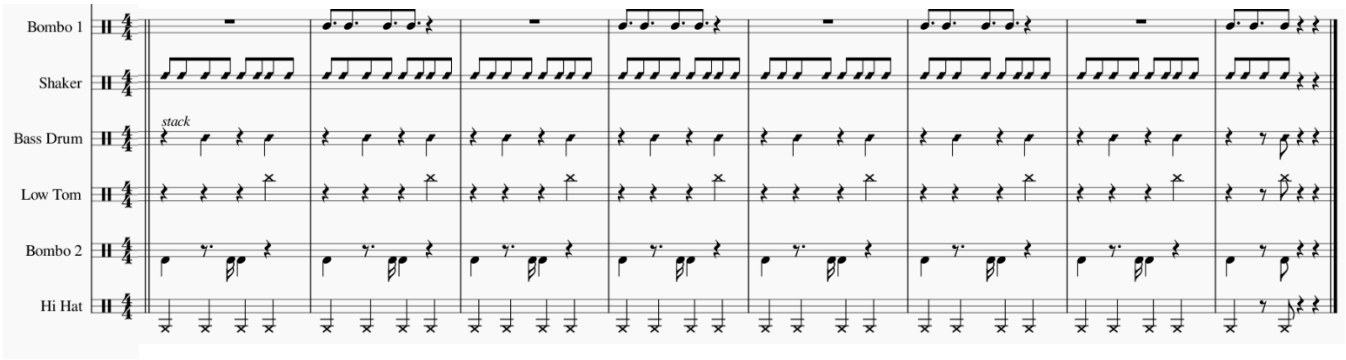

Figure 6 - Score extract from the third part - percussions

Both sections are similar in construction to some parts of *La Grande Folie*, but consists of original content.

4. *Aux armes! (Call to arms)*

The fourth section is a rework of the opening, the recurrent theme. It is a bit shorter, and starts with the three higher voices at once, but the “main melody” that was on the highest voice in the opening transposed down for the Alto. The lower voices are unchanged.

Giving the main melody to the Alto gives an overall lower center of gravity for that part. It “sounds lower” and it can be sung a bit louder too. Also, interestingly, the Alto part ends

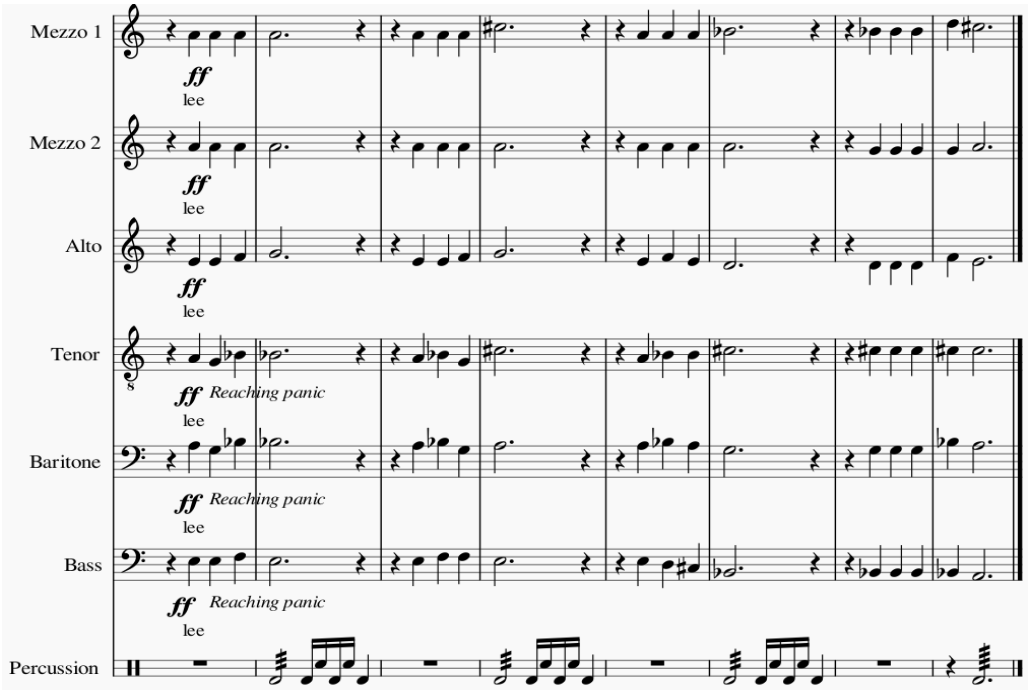

Figure 7 - Score extract of the fourth part

up really close to the Tenor, bringing friction in a different range than in the opening, and for a longer time, reinforcing the idea of panic because of the imminence of getting enrolled in the army and sent to the frontline.

5. *Adiu la bèra Margoton (Farewell, beautiful Margot)*

The fifth section of the suite is a rearrangement of the traditional song Adiu La Bèra Margoton (*Adiu La Bère Margoton*, n.d.), which is part of the repertoire of *chant béarnais*, an Occitan dialect of the region around Pau in the Pyrénées gasconnes, in the South West of France.

In this ballad-like song, the narrator bids farewell to his loved one, because he is called to serve in the army, for the king of France. My arrangement is inspired from various versions I have heard. Especially that of Las Que Cantan (Las Que Cantan, 2024), in which some voices sing drone parts.

As I arranged it, the song is entirely a cappella, without percussion. Although I listened to various modern versions that included percussions, as I was tempted to add some myself, I was never convinced or inspired by those attempts. The *rubato* nature of the song does not combine well with a rhythm that has a pulse, in my opinion.

The “normal” voice (one can think of a *cantus firmus*) is here sung by the Tenor as a solo part, while the other voices accompany with drones, each on one note of a ninth chord. Starting with the Bass only (tonic), the Baritone (fifth) enters in the second verse, and then higher voices (Vth, VIIth and IXth degrees) come in one by one in the third and fourth verses.

In the third verse, the highest voice has a slow movement (between Ist and VIIth degree), and in the fourth verse, the Alto takes on a counterpoint above the main voice, but at a much slower pace, in a sort of faux-bourdon style. Finally, in the last verse, the five singers act as a choir singing fully developed chords on the pivotal points of the melody, following the rhythm imposed by the solo melody of the Tenor.

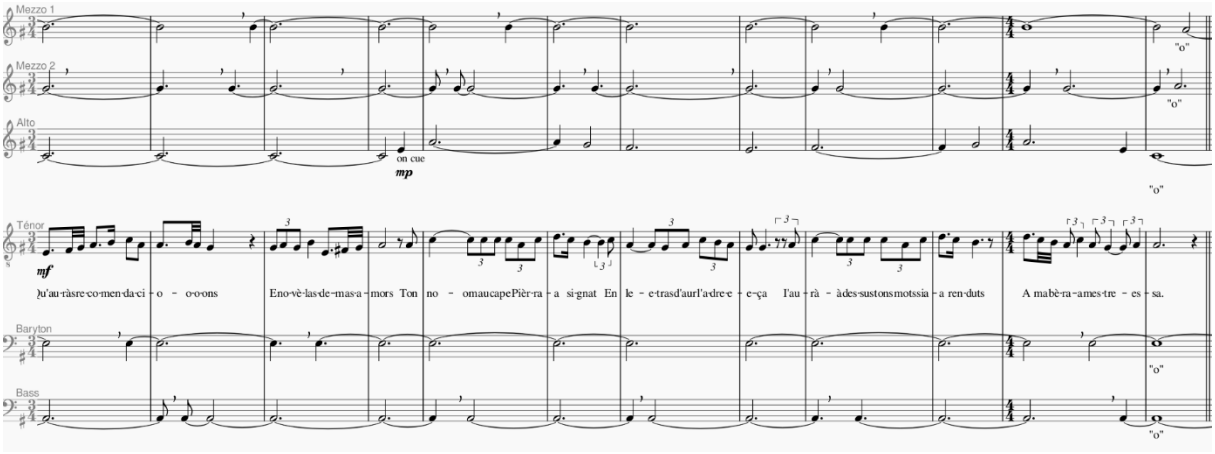

Figure 8 - Score extract of the fifth part

At the very end, the Tenor and Alto take again the first verse as a duo, the other voices keeping quiet. The main melody, sung by the Alto, is transposed a fourth up and the Tenor sings the second voice that I originally learned for this song, honoring here the vocal tradition of Pyrénées Gascogne.

Note that in a subsequent version, the very first accompanying chord was simplified, and the drones were sung by two voices in unison, in order to use choir breathing and have a more continuous flow of energy in the background. To reinforce even more the feeling of a continuous flow, we added a shruti box[3] as a support on the tonic and the dominant. It also helped keep a stable pitch along this long section (about 6 minutes).

[3] A compact, hand activated harmonium originating from the Indian subcontinent that allows one to play drones.

6. *Le refus (The refusal)*

The sixth section starts immediately after and is divided into two halves. In the first one, the text reads “Maudita sia la guèrra” which means “Damned be the war”. This sentence in Occitan is found in the first verse of *Adiu la bèra Margoton* and it can be thought of as a leitmotiv of the whole suite so far, as it is the only line of text that is sung by all the voice parts. This section possesses the highest intensity, in both voices and percussion, since the beginning of the suite, and brings a sort of climatic moment.

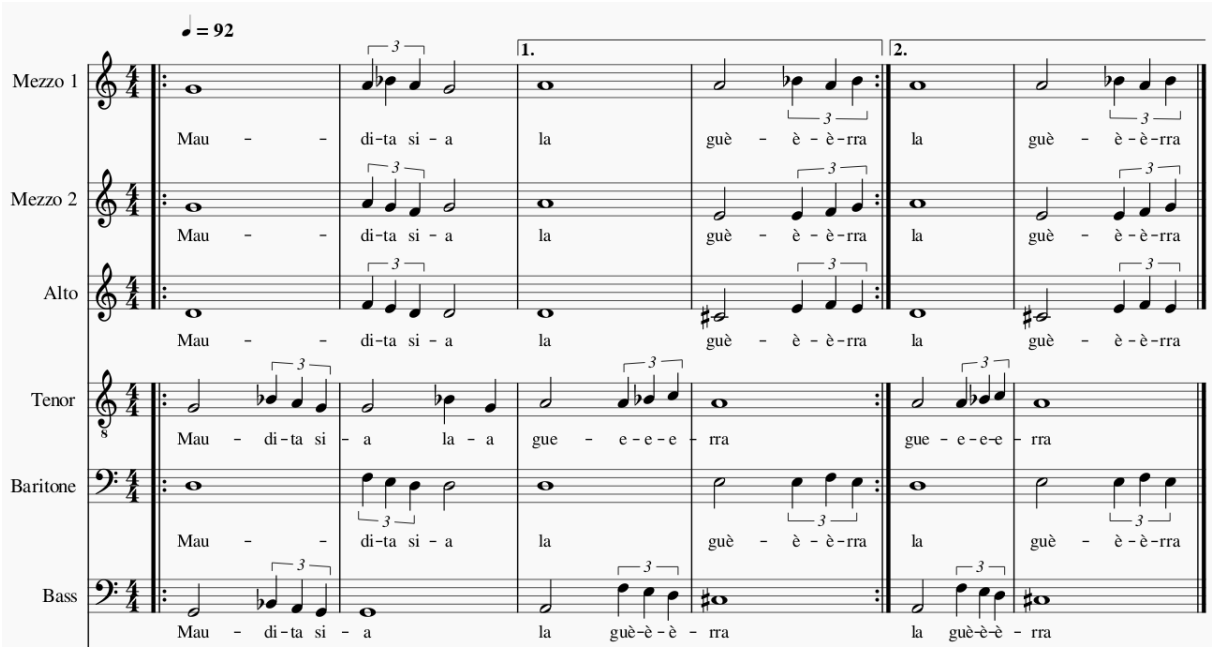

Figure 9 - Score extract of the sixth part - voices on the first half

It is sung in heterophony with two main rhythmic movements calling and answering each other (higher voices and Baritone on one side, Tenor and Bass on the other), while playing different patterns on the percussion that interlock into a complex tapestry of binary and ternary rhythms, resulting in multiple 2:3 and 3:4 polyrhythms. Built up piece by piece, this first half culminates with a percussion buildup ending with a magistral drop that leads straight into the second half.

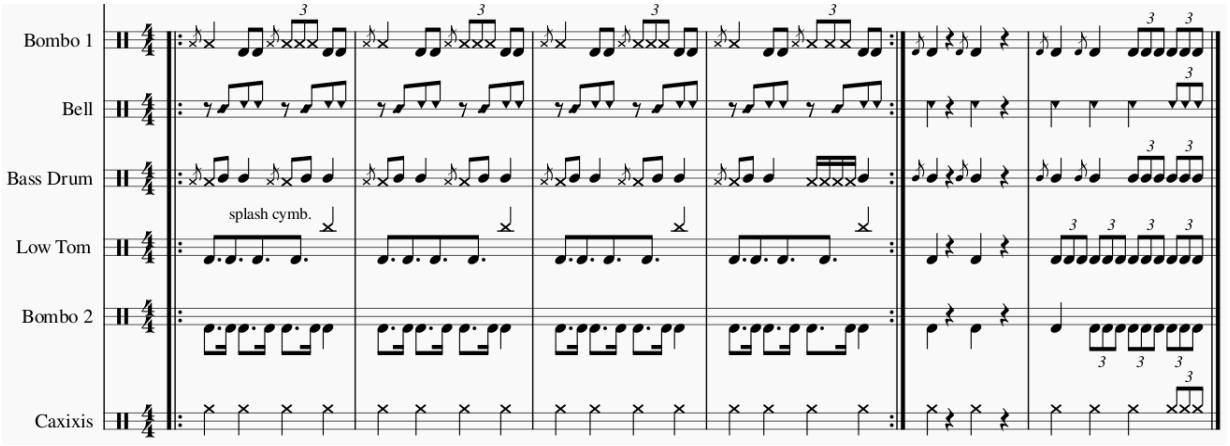

Figure 10 - Score extract of the sixth part - percussions

The Mezzo-Soprano 1 starts the second half alone on this one-note ostinato, marking every beat. After one cycle (the lyrics later bring a cycle of 16 beats) the Mezzo-Soprano 2 joins in and answers on every off-beat with its own one-note ostinato. Hence, the new groove is composed of interlocked quarter-notes on- and off-beat between the two highest voices.

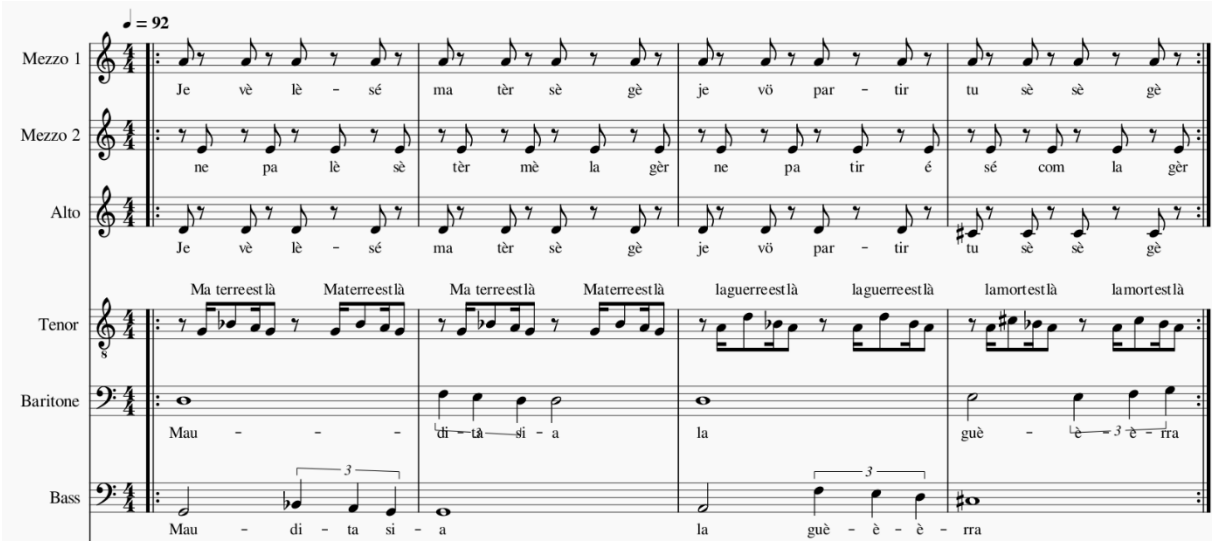

Figure 11 - Score extract of the sixth part - voices on the second half

This duo sounds like an alarm beeping, an idea that came admittedly from *La Grande Folie*. However, the interplay between the two voices has an additional dimension here, as it is also within the text: the first voice, alone at the beginning, seems to sing “Je vais laisser ma terre, c’est gai. Je veux partir, tu sais c’est gai” (“I will leave my land, it’s jolly. I want to leave, you know, it’s jolly”), but when the second voice adds syllables in between, the meaning turns out totally different “Je ne vais pas les laisser, c’est ma terre (terre), mais c’est la gue-guerre. Je ne veux pas partir, tirer, tuer, c’est comme c’est, la

gue-guerre" ("I will not let them, it's my land (land), but there is a wa-war. I do not want to leave, shoot, kill, but it is what it is, wa-war")

Then the Alto comes in, harmonizing the first voice and uncovering a harmonic movement although the first two voices never change pitch. The two lower voices accompany with the same ostinato they had in the first half, bringing a more elaborate harmony, while the tenor brings in a new, fast, syncopated pattern (at the 16th-note level), adding to the general agitation of all the rhythmic ostinatos.

This part ends a cappella with the Tenor in a leading role singing insistingly and threateningly "La guerre est là, la mort est là" ("War is here, death is here").

After this section comes a short storytelling part, explaining that Pierrot, in a panic moment, suddenly decides to run away from the army when they come to take him.

7. *La fuite (The escape)*

The next section figures this run-away and Pierrot being chased by the army. It is an instrumental part, featuring percussion instruments only. I wanted to put forward the percussionist side of the band at some point in the suite, and it made sense for the story: this escape, running and chasing is adequate to a percussion moment.

For that section, far from any Occitan tradition, I took influence from other parts of the world and borrowed a few foreign elements: a bell pattern from the Afrobeat style (modern East-African genre), the *Maracatu* rhythm (from the North-East Afro-Brazilian eponym tradition), and the *afro-clave* in 12/8 that is present in or has influenced many African and Afro-Latin traditions.

The section starts with a slow, binary bass drum beat call to which an off-beat syncopated tom answers, both accompanied by a regular afrobeat bell. Then the groove slowly turns into the *Maracatu* rhythm.

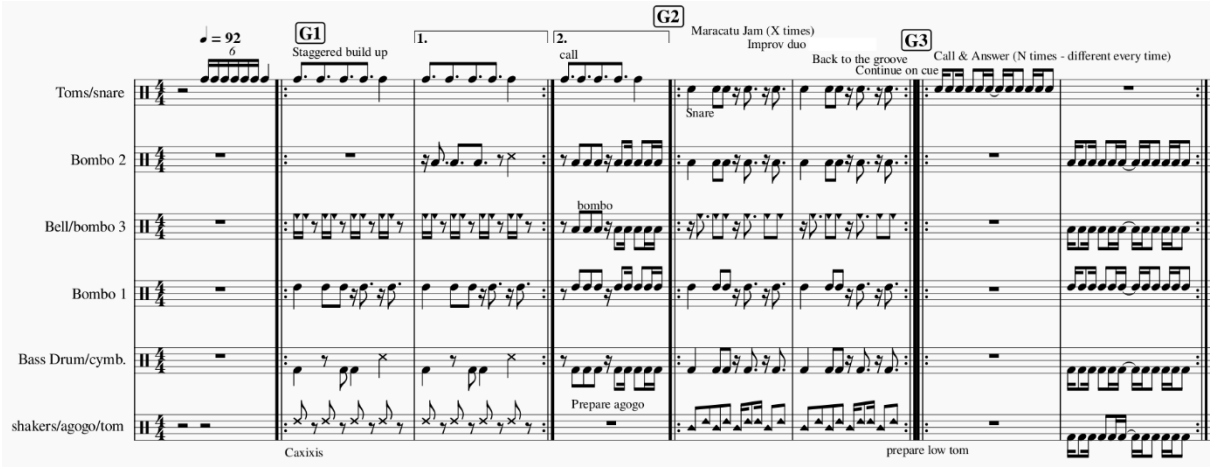

Figure 12 - Score extract of the seventh part - beginning

Maracatu is a rhythm that I find powerful, both for the ones who play it and the ones who listen to it. I wanted this power to be felt by the musicians, and by the audience. It is also a way to quote this rhythm that I particularly like.

Here, the intention is not to evoke the imagery from the Maracatu culture, the orixas (deities, religious figures) and spirituality associated with it, nor the carnivalesque idea commonly associated with this rhythm that is similar to samba. There is a risk, however, that the audience get the wrong picture and associate it with carnival and party. But I counted on the story to keep the audience focused and let them interpret the rhythm accordingly.

The pounding of the low drums is here to reflect the fast and strong heartbeat of Pierrot who is running and escaping from the army, while it also figures a battalion marching in a military style, stomping on the floor in time, getting closer and closer. At the same time, the snare drum gives a hint of military drum that fits the scene perfectly.

The *Maracatu* moment features a duo improvisation between a bombo and the snare drum, figuring the chasing between Pierrot and the army. The snare drum can then sometime sound like gunshots, as if Pierrot was being shot at during his escape. Eventually, the *Martello* variation of this rhythm is played, and the pace is accelerating, going back to the image of Pierrot's heart beating faster and faster.

Then comes a sudden change of time-feel into a ternary 12/8-time part starting with the *afroclave* alone on the bell, in stark contrast to the previous rhythms (*Maracatu* and

Martello) which are clearly binary, and which suggests a change of scenery, a new landscape.

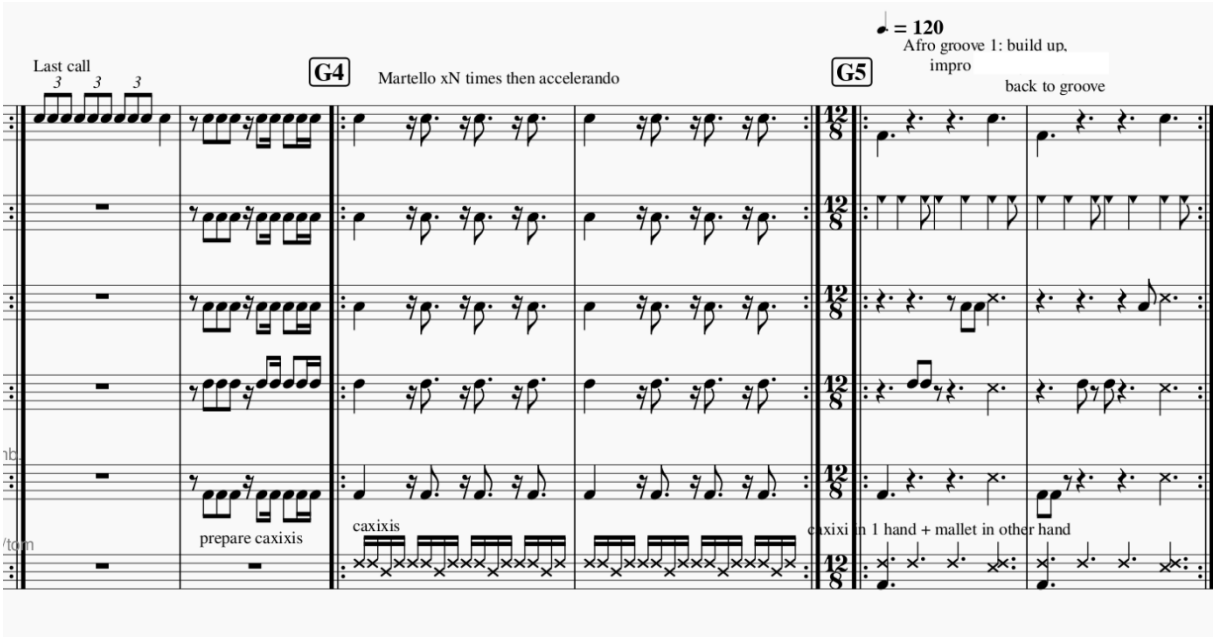

Figure 13 - Score extract of the seventh part - middle

I particularly like this bell pattern that is found in many places. I tend to use it very often, intuitively, as soon as the rhythm is ternary and seems compatible: it is deeply ingrained in my musicianship. Because it is in 12/8, it also naturally opens the door to various polyrhythms, such as 3:2 and 4:3. In fact, one can count it in 3 groups of 4 subdivisions (binary) or in 4 groups of 3 subdivisions (ternary), giving two versions with a very different feel. Here I used it in its ternary feel.

The groove I composed on top of the *afroclave* is, as far as I know, original. It would be hard to map out the influences that might be at play here, it is part of the dense mix that is contained in my musicianship, and that is constantly evolving, including new rhythms as I learn and practice them.

This 12/8-time part also features an improvisation moment between two bombos, which again reflects the interplay between Pierrot and his pursuers.

Last, the third part of this instrumental section figures the running away. It's the final *accelerando*, the final sprint, after which Pierrot will end up free from his pursuers. The time-feel again changed back to binary, but this time much faster. And the pulse keeps

accelerating, until the ultimate buildup: Pierrot finally manages to escape and ends up in a safe place where the police or the army cannot get to him, in the mountains.

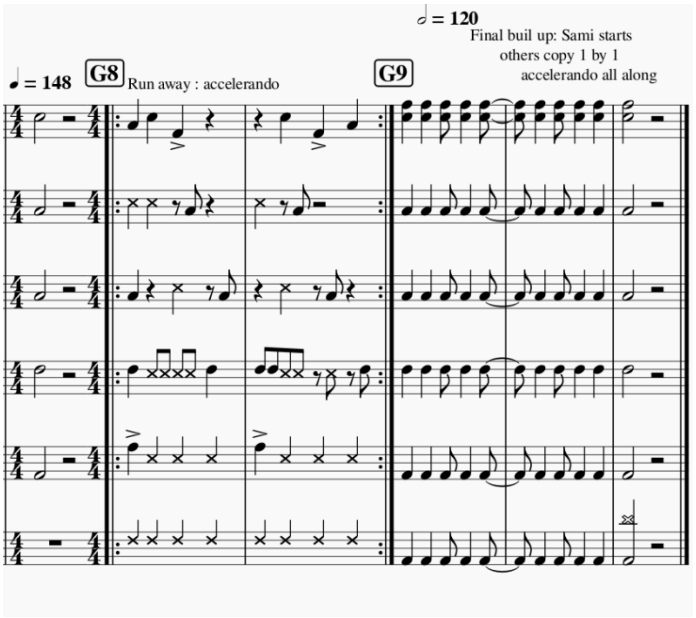

Figure 14 - Score extract of the seventh part - ending

8. *Le retour (The return)*

This section comes after a longer storytelling part. Time has passed, the frontline is not anymore at Pierrot's doorstep, but his land is now occupied. He decides to go back home to his family, and discover both how the war has destroyed his hometown, and how his people are mistreated by the occupying power.

In this section, the music is a cry of despair. It thus felt natural to call back the opening theme, which already contains the seeds of this feeling. I slightly rearranged it by exchanging parts between the lower voices with the higher voices, transposing one octave down or up as needed. In this case, the range is even more compact and the Tenor and Alto voices even cross towards the end.

It is like an "inverted" version of the opening, which echoes its feelings. With more intensity, louder dynamics, as well as with the main center of harmony and dissonance in the Tenor range, it brings even more tension to show the shock and the despair of Pierrot discovering his devastated land and the condition in which his people are kept under occupation.

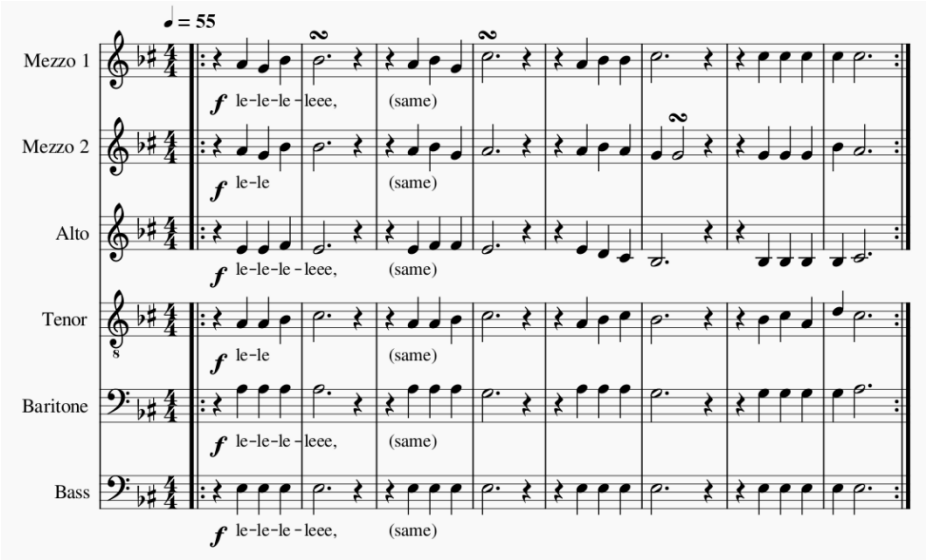

Figure 15 - Score extract of the eighth part

The last two sections of the suite are the most recent additions to this work. In terms of the time of composing, they are quite distant from the other parts, which could explain, partly, why they are different. Although they follow a similar type of structure as most of the previous sections, the groove is totally different, and the singing style also is. I wanted a more resolute and decisive approach in this last part because in the story, that's when Pierrot turns his despair and indignation into a resolute energy, a search for a solution, he protests against the injustice of the occupation, and eventually starts a resistance movement with his community.

9. *Il faut faire quelque-chose (Someone has to do something)*

In this penultimate section, the meter goes back to a ternary 4 beats, but I used a heavy drumbeat, that could be heard in some hard-rock, metal, or even hip-hop context, although it is maybe less common in ternary. The basis of the rhythm is held here by the bass drum, snare drum and hi-hat. Other percussion elements are here to reinforce the ternary feeling, adding some layers of interlocking patterns to bring more intensity as the section progresses.

In this part of the story, Pierrot turns his sadness and desperation into anger, and into a search for a solution. Things cannot continue as they are. He is resolute. The *marcato-tenuto* way of singing, as well as the heavy rhythmic basis echo this resolution and decisiveness. The texture of the voices is homophonic, with a lot of parallel movement, giving this feeling of block chords, much like a brass section.

The lyrics are “Je ne vais pas rester les bras croisés. Je ne vais pas rester sans rien faire” (“I am not going to stand by and do nothing.”)

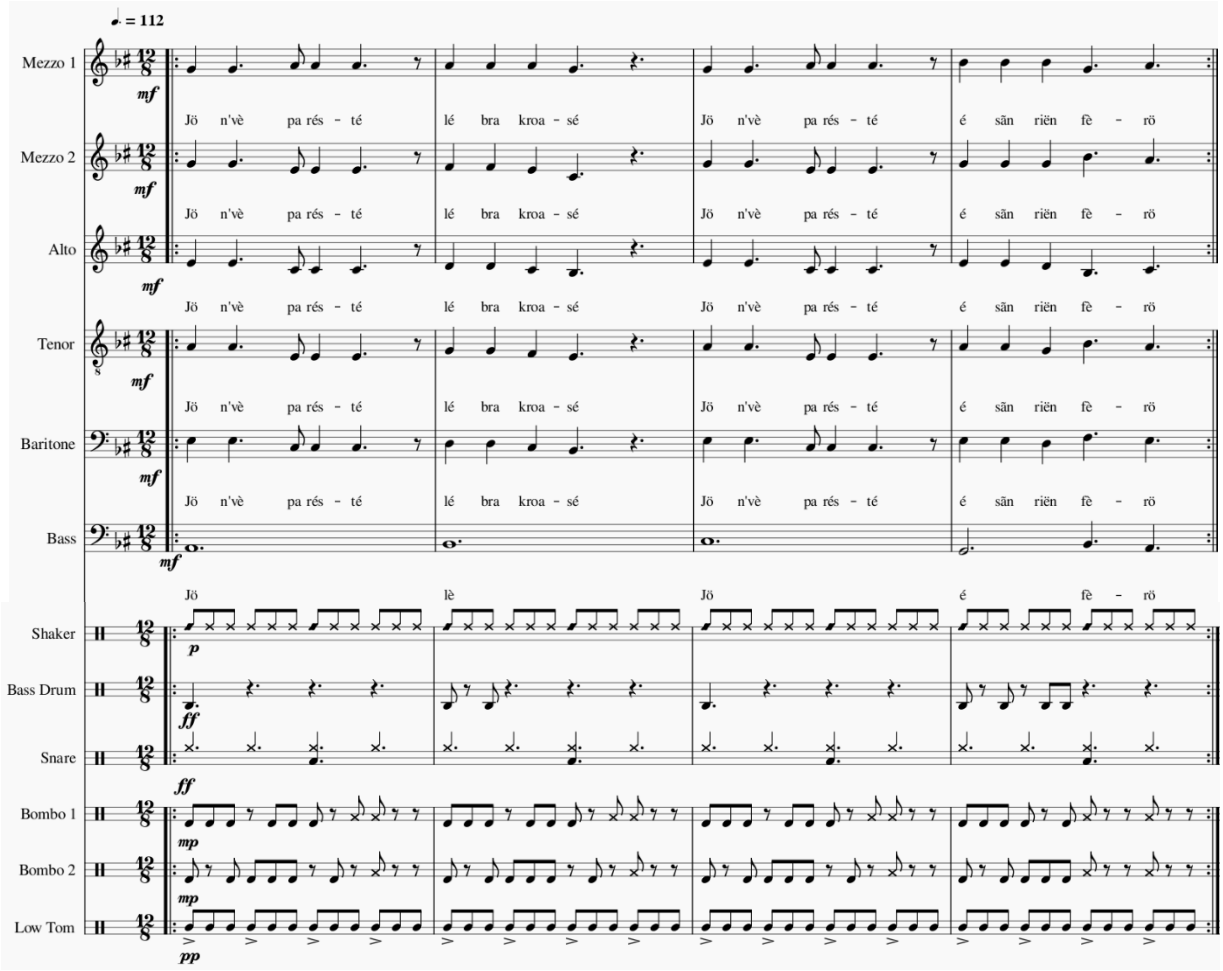

Figure 16 - Score extract of the ninth part

The section also features one improvised vocal solo part for the Alto, and another improvised duo part, in the form of a challenge between two of the percussionists. It ends with a sort of choral, with a rubato solo on the Tenor: “Il faut bien que quelqu’un fasse quelque-chose” (“Someone has to do something”).

10. *Resistance !*

The final movement starts with a similar construction as the previous section, but the rhythm starts with a mixed binary/ternary heavy groove, leaning more on the side of hip-hop style. This last section is however more complex than the previous one as it features several variations on the main voice groove, some metric modulations, and lots of breaks.

In the first variation, after a sudden break, the Tenor takes a solo voice on a fast binary rhythm (in 1/16th notes) while the Bass and Baritone sing a call and answer in duo, reminiscent of what the higher voices sung in the second half of the sixth part (Le refus). The higher voices lay down long notes like a choir background. Half of the percussion accompany this part, in unison with the drumbeat from the beginning.

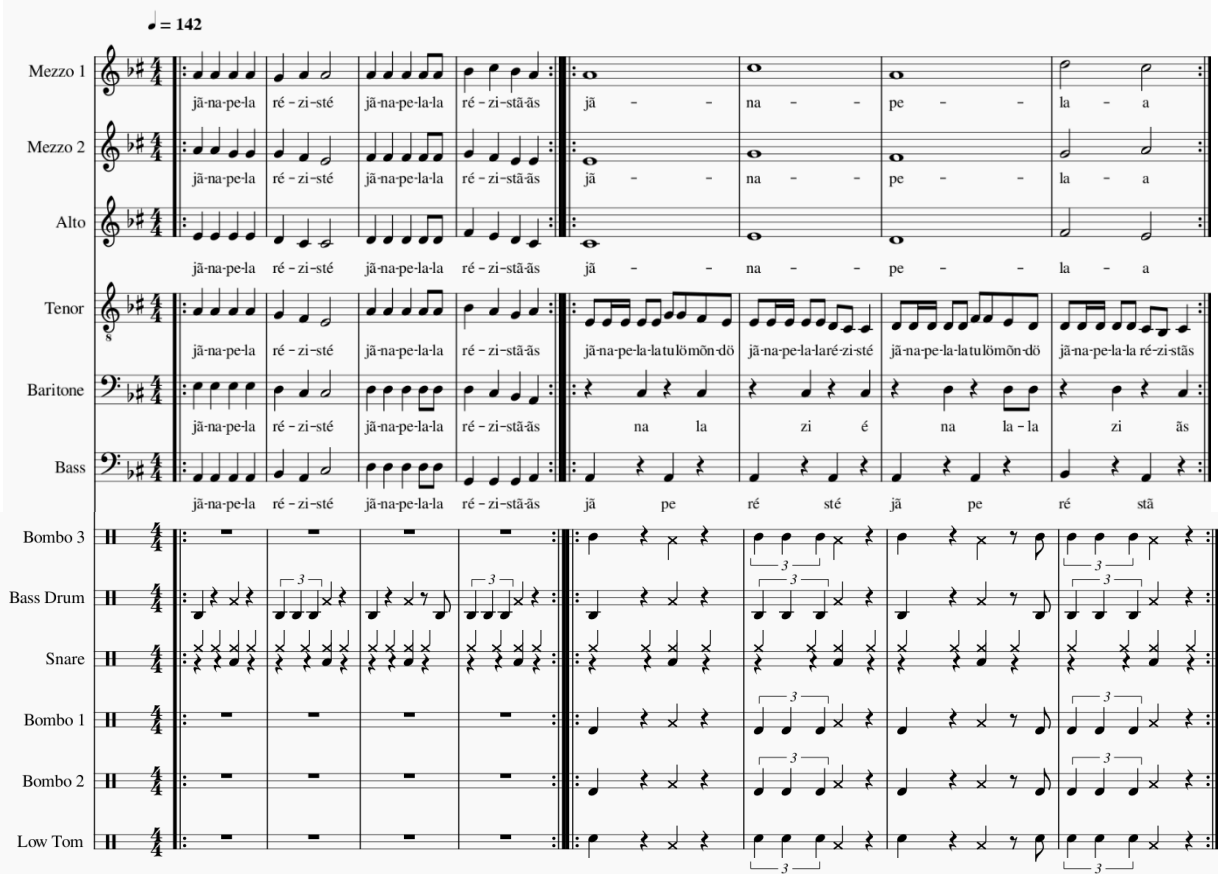

Figure 17 - Score extract from the tenth part - beginning

Then the two Mezzo-Sopranos take over and sing in unison the main melody (which was on the Tenor part at the very beginning). The percussion gradually fades out.

Another hit breaks the flow again and a sudden speed up comes in when the Tenor takes the lead again with a new solo, accompanied with unison hits from the whole percussion section. Here starts a series of breaks that will punctuate the end of each cycle until the end.

After a second round, the percussions come in with a fast ternary rhythm and the Tenor voice adapts its line to this new time-feel. The two lower voices come in to harmonize

the lead voice, as well as the Alto voice, while the two Mezzo-Soprano eventually add the main theme on top: “J’en appelle à résister. J’en appelle à la résistance” (“I call to resist. I call for resistance.”)

The pulse of this last part is faster, and the groove slowly turns into a rhythm close to ragga or reggae-dancehall. The rhythm of the singing is also flowing like ragamuffin, which fits with the call for action and social justice.

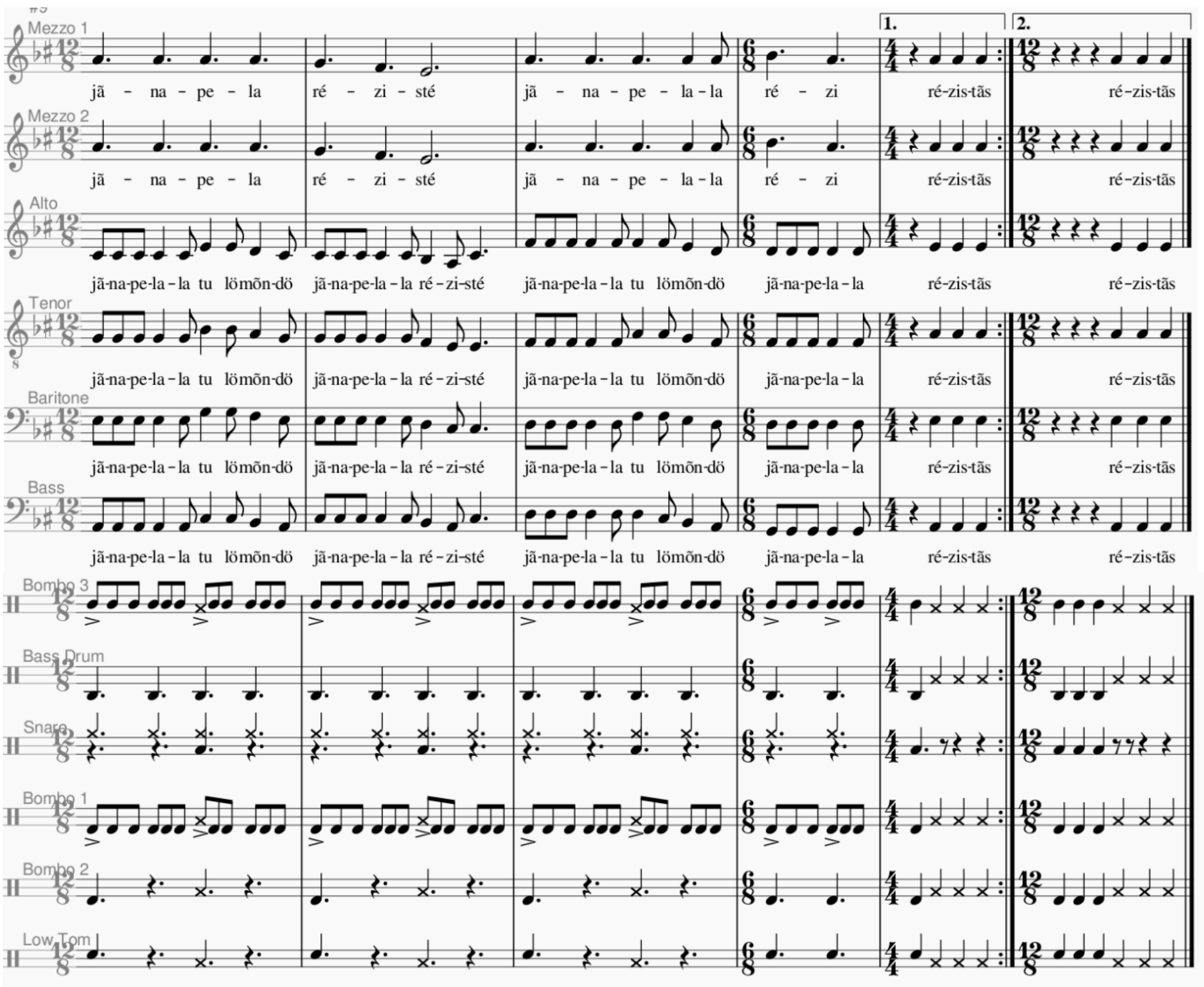

Figure 18 - Score extract from the tenth part - end

Eventually, the whole band performs a series of breaks in unison, built on a metric modulation between 6/8 and 3/4 times, featuring calls and answers between percussion and voices shouting “Resistance!”. The breaks also contain added beats, first breaking the flow, eventually coming together as a 6/4 reading of the 12/8 metric.

The ending is shouted while the percussions give a unisono final build up and ending break.

Discussion

The autoethnography and analysis show that I have used a lot of extraneous influences when composing this work. With the research questions in mind, I now discuss these influences and the possible issues that it could raise in terms of ethical use and cultural appropriation.

Reflecting on both the process of composing and the final product, I see three main possible issues, questions that I asked myself and seemed important to address. The first one is the inclusion of a traditional rhythm from the Afro-Brazilian maracatu tradition, which I am an outsider to. In this specific context, I appear more as a white person appropriating elements of a tradition belonging to Afro-descendants. This is what I will examine under the lens of "North-South cultural appropriation". Second, there is the influence I have taken from Occitan traditional music and especially the polyphonic singing tradition of Pyrénées gasconnes. It remains to "qualify" (rather than quantify) how much I have borrowed to that style and if this "North-North cultural appropriation" is problematic or not. Last, there is the issue of creating by imitation: I have openly taken influence in the style and form from San Salvador's *La Grande Folie* epic piece, and a closer look is welcome to examine how much this qualifies as "being inspired by" or "copying" another artist.

North-South cultural appropriation

One important element in the definition of cultural appropriation, or rather misappropriation, is the power imbalance between a dominant culture (of the persons who borrow) and a minority culture (whose elements are being borrowed) (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2001; Kendall, 2025; Rogers, 2006). For a good reason: the concept emerged from works on Western colonialism. Hence it is particularly relevant to discuss cultural appropriation from White or Western people of cultural elements from Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color (BIPOC) cultures. Particularly for regions that have been colonised. Maracatu is, in this sense, a "good candidate", and an important element to examine.

Coming from the region of Pernambuco, in the North-East of Brazil, where the Afro-Brazilian population is a majority, Maracatu is closely linked to the Candomblé religious tradition, and is thus historically linked with the slave trade since it retains

element of traditions from Congo and Angola (Ogle, 2024). Moreover, Afro-Brazilians, not unlike Afro-Americans, have been particularly oppressed in Brazil for decades, as slaves first but also after the abolition of slavery, and especially during the military dictatorship. In this context, Maracatu and samba have been used as a cultural element in the social struggle of the Black people in Brazil. The samba, and samba-reggae genres, have in turn been used extensively in activist contexts: *blocos-afros* in the North-East of Brazil in the 1970's, and more recently Rhythms of Resistance drumming groups in many countries (*Rhythms of Resistance*, n.d.) named after the book of Peter Fryer (2000). It seems that it has already been appropriated in a social struggle context, which might justify a bit better its use out of the original religious context, but in a "performance" dedicated to resistance.

What is maybe more problematic is the use of the "original"[4] rhythm (notated "Maracatu" in the score, and its variation "Martello") entirely disconnected from its context, and performed by a 90% white band. While my intention was to avoid misrepresentation, I have been questioning myself (and the band) about using this rhythm at all. Most of the band members did not express any reservation about it, even when the topic was explicitly discussed. The comments from some audience members after the concert led me to think that people who do know maracatu have identified it and did somehow get a picture of carnivalesque ambiance from it, which does not fit the story in that part of the piece. There is thus an additional question of who the audience is and how they will interpret this part. But it does not answer to the ethical question of quoting a maracatu rhythm, for which I now need to turn to experts of this tradition, and people belonging to its Afro-Brazilian community.

Ethnomusicologist Lizzie Ogle, who presents herself as a "white Scottish woman" (2024, p. 99) has done the fieldwork of her doctoral studies on the maracatu practice of the Nação Leão Coroado, one of the oldest maracatu group in the Pernambuco state in North-East Brazil. She has been spending a substantial amount of time living within their

[4] The use of quotation marks around "original" is here to underline the lack of specificity of the term. It has been transmitted orally to me, and probably orally to me teacher and to his teacher before that. I have no certificate of originality or of authenticity for this rhythm. Besides, we have been warned against the very concepts of originality and authenticity as seen in the literature review (Rogers, 2006; Bhabha as cited in Rutherford, 1990).

community. During that time, Ogle wrote a blog post about “cultivating gratitude”, mentioning that she talked with Dona Neta, filha de Oxum, mãe de santo and Juremeira (ie. an elder and religious authority of the Jurema community) about her experiences within jurema, candomblé and maracatu. She asked Dona Neta what she thought about a white European like her singing one of their songs, that she learned and sung with them, with her band back in London. Dona Neta replied that since Juremeiros have been discriminated against for their religion, she thinks it’s a good thing if an outsider valorises her people, religion, and culture. Further on, Ogle comments:

> If I create music inspired by these rhythms, I must acknowledge the debt owed to those who have fought and actually died in the process of sustaining them, who have struggled to keep those specific notes in that particular order alive. I must cultivate gratitude for their work, and wherever I can, I must take steps not only to name that debt but to repay it. If possible, financially. The work of acknowledgment, of giving thanks, of exposing and engaging with the ongoing struggle of afro-descendent, candomblé and jurema communities to simply exist, is essential, and probably not enough. (Ogle, 2017)

The author also writes about “the careful use of language, ideas and objects, paying particular attention to the harm that misusing sacred concepts and items can cause” (ibid.)

In my case, I do not think that I am using sacred concepts, language, ideas or objects. Although one could argue that rhythm is also a language (or at least, can be), the rhythms of maracatu I use are quite generic and not linked to a particular divinity or religious ritual, as far as I know.

But the question of crediting and acknowledgement is an important one and still open: as much as I am acknowledging the origin of these rhythms in this thesis, the performance itself, because of its context, was not accompanied by a concert leaflet of any kind, and the story telling staging did not leave space for verbally crediting the various sources that have influenced this work. So, how can I credit correctly the source traditions and people? I am left with analysing and crediting by writing this thesis, and with explaining it to anyone who gets interested in my music in the future. The piece is

not registered anywhere, so I am not planning to earn money with it, hence the exploitative nature of appropriation is avoided so far. Should this piece generate any income in the future, through performance or royalties for instance, I shall think of how much of it should be repaid to the Afro-Brazilian communities that practice maracatu, and find the best way possible to give them a financial contribution.

While I do not have a direct access to present-day maracatu traditional practitioners, as Ogle did, I decided to open the topic with my percussion teacher, Adriano Adewale, whom I learned this rhythm from, and presents himself as an Afro-Brazilian percussionist, born and raised in Brazil. Since he taught me this rhythm, it is only natural to discuss with him about how I can use, borrow or quote it, within my own composition. I proposed to have an interview with him, explaining the context of the study, and he agreed to the interview and it being recorded.

While I am not sure how close my percussion teacher is to the maracatu and candomblé communities of Pernambuco, he is the closest link I can reach out to, at least for now, and his belonging to the wider Afro-Brazilian community makes him a relevant person with whom to discuss those matters. At least that is the best option that my department offers me right now.

I found our conversation interesting and informative about the origins of maracatu and the history of some music styles in Brazil, especially styles that became popular and mainstream or commercial. It did not, however, shed a clear light on what was acceptable or not to do with this rhythm, within the context I was proposing to examine. To my disappointment, I did not get the “insider” point of view, to get to know whether it is appropriate for me to use that rhythm from that side.

I retain however two interesting elements that came out of this conversation. First element, my composition is only quoting this rhythm, in the sense that it is only a small fraction of the work, as opposed to the example brought forward by Feld (2000), where a whole piece was built upon a “stolen” melody. Second element, another way to proceed could have been for me to compose my own rhythm inspired from maracatu and try to have the same effect in my composition with a creation of my own.

These two elements seem to point in opposite directions: the first one could suggest a use of the maracatu rhythm that is seen as appropriate, as long as I only quote it. The second element could, on the other hand, be pointing towards a use that is deemed inappropriate: listening back to our recorded conversation, this second point could be interpreted as a simple proposal, a way to offer various alternatives, or a discrete hint to suggest that it would be more appropriate to use something I entirely composed, rather than using the "original" rhythm.

My teacher also repeatedly insisted on asking me how *I* feel and what do *I* think about it, when I was asking for his point of view, which could be interpreted in various ways. Would that be because he does not feel entitled, he is not in a position with authority to give me a permission of use? Or is it an attempt to have me "decide by myself" that it is appropriate or not, without the teacher actually taking a personal stance? Or, thirdly, is it pointing at the fundamental role of the composer and how *they* position themselves, *their* intention?

In the latter case, I do not think it is sufficient for the composer to examine their own conscience, as they could miss the point that a "native" of the culture they are borrowing from would make, and that would be a valid objection.

In the end we agreed that the discussion is still open, that there are no clear guidelines to follow, but the best we can do is to "consult, reflect, engage in dialogue [...] including with the people who belong to the culture whose tradition is being discussed, without whose viewpoint and contribution, this discussion is still not addressing its core issues." Exchanging again on this topic later on, and looking back at our conversation, he concluded that:

> [C]omposers, researchers, musicians and arrangers have to make an effort to read and be informed about issues that happened in the past, so they do not make similar mistakes. As this is still on the early days discussions of this topic, I think we all need to individually be aware and openly discuss related matters on a case-by-case basis. This will hopefully shed a light on the discussion and bring more clarity to the grey areas, eventually culminating of a set of strongly conceived guidelines. (A. Adewale, personal communication, 14 July 2025)

My own conclusion is to be surprised that we are still “on the early days” of the discussion on this topic, in our department. Cultural appropriation has been in discussion in literature for several decades now, yet the Global Music department at Sibelius Academy, despite its strongly decolonial enterprise, does not seem to be at the forefront of that discussion. I observe that the topic is indeed open, but more conversations need to be had, between students, between teachers, and between students and teachers.

Momentarily concluding on this topic, I can only say that a lot of questions remain open. I reached out to Ogle to maybe get her point of view or get in touch with some current day practitioner of Maracatu de nação, but I did not get any answer yet.

North-North cultural appropriation

While the discussion on cultural appropriation generally refers to North-South examples, there are multiple examples of North-North issues as well. Firstly, with indigenous people like the Sámi in the North of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia. Another example, maybe less known, is that of Occitan culture. Zingesser documents the gallicization, that is the cultural appropriation of songs and lyrics from Occitan culture into the Capetian French (dominant) culture during medieval times, as shown in the short literature review in introduction (see: Internal colonialism).

In the 1970’s, the musical current Nova Cançon emerged side by side with the regionalist movement. The musical current was a revival and renewal of Occitan traditions (Drott, 2011), and the regionalist movement also touched language and literature (Rouquette, 1962). Approximately at the same time, the term “internal colonialism” (Alcouffe, 2009; Lagarde, 2012) appeared, comparing the treatment of peripheral regions by the central power of the same country (France in this case) to that of colonies.

In this regard, and given my position as a Paris-born and -raised, native French-speaking person, it is legitimate to question the use of Occitan elements, be it a traditional song, a melody, or a singing style, such as that of the Pyrénées gasconnes tradition. Having learned several songs from this area in the last few years, and being very fond of this style, the question comes up as of whether I am

borrowing a lot of elements from this tradition, and thereby may be appropriating from this culture. And if so, whether I am misappropriating, exploiting, or mostly appreciating.

Castéret proposes a detailed analysis of the singing tradition of the Pyrénées gasconnes, in which he analyses both the community aspects of this tradition, with its mostly non-performative character, as well as the implicit harmonisation system that is used for forming a second voice, and sometimes a third one (Castéret, 2012). According to his thorough study, this polyphonic singing tradition favors two-parts harmony, while three-parts is more rare, and usually involves a bourdon on the bass (ibid., p.65). Castéret also notes that sevenths and seconds are very rare, and only used as a passing note or anticipation of a consonance (ibid., p.67). Finally, the same study finds that homophony and parallelism are the most widely used devices (ibid. p.52), meaning that all voices progress with the same rhythm, simultaneously pronouncing the same syllables.

Referring to the analysis carried in the previous section, we can see that in general, my composition departs quite substantially from this Occitan tradition, in terms of harmony and way of constructing the polyphony. While I have used homophony in some parts, like the first one, I have mostly used heterophony in other parts. Besides, the harmony of that first part insists a lot on seconds, tritones, and sevenths, which is not usual in the Pyrénées gasconnes. The use of percussion in most parts also marks a strong difference with that style. Finally, the use of lyrics is limited to one or two sentences only, repeated many times, which is again in stark contrast with the repertoire of the Pyrénées gasconnes. I have mixed French and Occitan lyrics, borrowing one sentence from a traditional song.

Last, I have used one traditional song from the Pyrénées gasconnes area (vallée d'Ossau, more precisely). While I propose my own arrangement of it, mostly consisting of a choir of drones behind the main voice, it ends with a duo featuring the two actual voices that I learned for this song. With this last verse sung in a more traditional style, I hope to give a tribute to the origins of the song and its culture, and to have given a sense of how that song usually sounds. It is a form of quoting the original, a salutation to the tradition.

Hence, although I have admittedly received (rather than taken) influence from this specific tradition of the polyphonic singing in the Pyrénes gasconnes, after careful examination of the actual source it seems that, first, the songs I happen to know from this tradition are far from being the most common and representative in style, and second, I have in the end borrowed very little elements from this tradition, and I believe it would be exaggerated to talk about cultural appropriation here. If anything, I believe I have cultivated appreciation and gratitude for this culture: I always explain where is this tradition from, how fond of it I am, how much respect I have for it, as well as how my own music might draw a bit on it but is far from being the same (and does not claim to be).

Creation, imitation, and hybridity

To some extent, hybridity is already present in San Salvador's work: according to various reviews, their music is a fusion between the tradition of their own region (Corrèze, where mostly monodic singing is found), other Occitan regions, and a multitude of other traditions such as certain Bulgarian singing styles, as well as Steve Reich, post-rock and punk musics (Gailh, 2021), or even afrobeat (Miklos, 2021). This is perhaps also what speaks to me in their music, the fact that it uses so many elements from such different styles or regions that it is not exactly locatable, in the sense of Bhabha (Rutherford, 1990). It does not belong anywhere in particular, yet it assembles elements from various locations and blends them in a beautiful way, ie. in a way that is in very much aligned with my aesthetics preferences.

San Salvador insist in their interviews that, as much as they can represent a "tradition", they do not see this term as something static, fixed, but rather as "a moving concept", which "has always supported society in its changes" (Gabriel Durif, as cited in *The 2010s*, n.d.). Hence, if critiques sometimes give them the title of traditional bearers of Nóva Cançon Occitana, it is a wide and vague term. What is clear is that they renew and reinvent tradition, by using elements of their (and other) traditions and remixing them in a modern way, or at least, in some way it has not been used before.

During the composition process, I have often asked myself whether I am copying too much their music, writing something too similar to theirs, whether I am original

enough, or if I am plagiarising. I think this question is very delicate as the answers are, here again, very subjective, not unlike questions about cultural appropriation. I will thus look at different parts in my composition and how much they do or do not follow San Salvador's music so closely.

In the opening part, the similarity with *La Grande Folie* is the most striking: narrow intervals, a slow loop repeated many times with each voice adding up its layer to the ensemble, starting with higher voices then joined by lower ones, etc. However, the opening of *La Grande Folie* does not bear the overarching rhythm that exists in the opening of *Pierrot et la guerre*, which uses phrases of identical length. I would also argue that, although I was inspired by their opening and did compose something similar, the use of narrow intervals is not something entirely new to me, that I would have borrowed from San Salvador alone. I practice Bulgarian traditional singing in some of my other projects, so this part is not only influenced by San Salvador but also by that tradition, as well as different narrow interval singing traditions I encountered before like in Istria, Croatia. For me, this part closely resembles San Salvador's opening, mostly because of the order in which voices enter. If I had to write it again, I would use a different order, as I did in when this part comes back in a different form later on (see part 8 - Le retour (The return)), I not only changed the voicing, but also changed the order in which the voices come in.

For the other parts, I think the main elements I have used are: groove-based loops, progressive arrangements, strong breaks or hits to break the monotony, polyrhythm, rhythmical modulations, and interplay between two voices to create one part. Taking a closer look, none of these elements are specific to San Salvador, as they are used by many other bands. But they do use those a lot. I would thus tend to think that *Pierrot et la Guerre* rather constitute a sort of stylistic appropriation.

Besides, it is not clear to me whether San Salvador have invented a whole new style that would belong to them only: other bands make use of percussions and together with polyphony, in an Occitan or Occitan-inspired context, and progressive arrangements are very common in modern renderings of traditional music. Maybe they just made a very successful version of this new, hybrid form, that inspired me more than the others.

Looking at the last two parts, I have here taken influence from a different cultural area from South-Eastern Occitania, namely Provence. As already mentioned, one of the main bands that comes to my mind in this style is *Massilia Sound System* (*Massilia Sound System*, n.d.), who created modern music in the 1990s inspired from the traditional music from Provence, the region of Marseille, fused with the *ragga* genre and the "sound system" culture from the UK. Since I have lived in Marseille for several years, and return there for visiting regularly, their music has been very present around me and that necessarily influenced my musicianship. They, too, use music as a form of activism at times, although theirs is a more joyful one, where making it a party is the priority. Maybe a source of inspiration in the form, for the future. Other bands like Lo Còr de la Plana hybridise traditional Occitan music from Provence and Languedoc with percussions from various sides of the Mediterranean area, claiming influences from Andalusia as well as South Italy ('LO CÒR DE LA PLANA - THE LAMPARO COMPANY', n.d.; *Lo Còr de la Plana, du quartier à New York*, 2012), showing again how "tradition" is a fluid concept and hybridity is rather the norm than the exception in the contemporary landscape of modern Occitan music.

As a temporary conclusion to this part, it is still not clear to me whether my composition is still "too similar", in some respect, to San Salvador's work. What I do see is a tendency, over the whole duration of the composition process, to create more original and also more hybrid parts, compared to the beginning of the process. As if I had started to internalise the style and could create freely my own material in that style, without imitating too closely a specific part, a specific song, or a specific artist, slowly introducing more varied influences into my work.

In general, looking at it under the lens of appropriation, I also do not see a power imbalance that would lead me to be cautious about imitating the style of this band. They are well-established, commercially successful artists in a place where few bands are this successful with traditional-oriented music. I believe I am not taking anything from them (opportunities, commercial or artistic) or misrepresenting any specific tradition by composing music in a similar style with my own twist. I am merely hybridising something that has already been hybridised, therefore following the same path, and maybe slowly making my own in a slightly new direction.

Conclusion

In this research-creation process, I have questioned the process of composing hybrid, transcultural music through the lens of the ethics. In investigating three research questions around cultural appropriation and plagiarism in the context of transcultural composition, three main ethical questions came up from examining my own composition *Pierrot et le Guerre* in detail. First, the question of cultural appropriation, in the case of using, or rather "quoting", two rhythmic cells originating from the Afro-Brazilian *maracatu* musical tradition. Second, the question of cultural appropriation in an "internal colonialism" context, whereby I question whether I may have appropriated the singing tradition of Pyrénées gasconnes, in South-West Occitania, France. Last, I have opened the (subjective) debate around imitating the style of another band or an existing piece, and how the result can be seen as a "bland copy" of an "original", or a well inspired original piece.

The main conclusion I draw from this study is that, as a composer, I constantly need to question myself and my process. There are no clear borders, guidelines, or rules to follow yet, and there might never be, if those borders are as fluid as cultures are.

A few reflections come to mind that I now want to share in this conclusion. First, I think that, as composers, we need to question our sources of inspirations, and in case those belong to other musical traditions, to learn about the origins of that culture to better understand what is it that one has used. This part may be obvious to some, but it seems useful to state, nonetheless.

Second, we need to read and get better informed and educated around the notion of cultural appropriation vs. cultural appreciation. There is a large body of academic literature on the topic, to the point that it is hard to find one's way through it, and I have felt very underequipped to deal with this subject, despite it being so central in our department. If I am to deal with transcultural composition on a daily basis, I feel the need to be at the forefront of the discussion and know what we are talking about.

Third, we need to be well aware of our positionality, in terms of the global social power dynamics that exist around us, but also in the world in general. And to question our own privileges with respect to the cultures we enter in contact with,

physically or virtually, be it related to class, gender, ethnicity, or any other mean that has been used for domination and discrimination. Even if I, individually, value another culture as “my equal”, it does not mean that I am on equal footing with people who belong to that culture, in the place where I evolve (live, work, perform, etc), and in the world in general. Being better aware of my position, in that sense, can help guide the discussion around cultural appropriation.

Fourth, we need to question and discuss (more) with each other: colleagues, peers, students, teachers, and whenever possible, people who belong to the traditions that have been used, borrowed or quoted. While commercial exploitation is usually easy to debunk, the notion of misappropriation or misrepresentation is somehow trickier and accessing more viewpoints than the single composer’s one is essential to uncover the possible complexities of certain situations.

Last, we need to acknowledge, credit, and cultivate this gratitude that Ogle writes about the cultures that we have received wisdom from. If we are to turn appropriation into appreciation, we need to know about their stories, their history, their meanings, their context, and their purposes.

In this conclusion I also want to open a bit about another question around hybridity, transculturality, and third space. While I think that most music I compose lately is, at least, intercultural almost “by nature”, due to my own identity unbound to any single identifiable culture or musical tradition, the question is whether I can talk about transculturality and third space, in the hybridisation process. At the start of the project, I wanted to include a collaborative dimension to the composing and arranging process, but the various time constraints and the general availability of band members did not make it possible in practice. Hence there is a lack, in my taste, of co-construction, of musical negotiation, of reciprocity in the process.

I am sometimes under the impression that, in this frenetic world, most people are either too busy or not interested enough, to devote time to create together. It takes time to sit, discuss, try, negotiate, re-try, re-negotiate. Most often, my fellow musicians prefer to be told what to do very precisely, so that they can spend a

minimal amount of time learning how to perform their part (to a sufficient degree of accuracy).

To push the investigations further, a next-level version of this project could take the form of a weekly ensemble, integrated into the studies. The peripheral aspect of my Bachelor project, with respect to the everyday work for most band members, has led to the composition process being very monodic, whereas I think it would be more interesting to create together, thereby navigating hybridity in a different manner, and bringing more reciprocity into the equation.

Also, by lack of time and direct connection, I have not been able to discuss directly with cultural bearers of the traditions I have evoked in this thesis, or with the band San Salvador. These could be future directions to follow, to examine better the questions I have raised and maybe get a deeper insight into the appropriation issues, and how they are seen on the “appropriated” side.

Finally, through this study, I have proposed my contribution to answering the initial research questions around ethical issues of transcultural composing. The auto-ethnography and subsequent analysis reflects the questions that a composer may have to ask themselves, and proposes a process through which they could navigate ethical issues such as cultural appropriation. Pending further works and discussions on the subject, it lays a first stone for building further robust processes and guidelines for the students of the Global Music department.

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Appendices

Appendix I - Pierrot et la Guerre – Story text
This text has been co-written by Sami Karkar and Kata Vuoristo

Intro
Olipa kerran, Un còp èra (ero), Il était une fois, Once upon a time (pause)...

Or... maybe it was just yesterday? In a not-so-far-away land, a place very much like yours, or mine. Well, in any case, once upon a time, there was someone. No one particularly special, just a person. And in this story, the person happens to identify as "he" and he goes by the name Pierrot. But it could have been Pierre, or Pierra, Peter, Petri, Petar, Piotr, or Pietra, or even Petros, Boutros, Badri... feel free to think of someone else instead of Pierrot - maybe he, she or they, with any name, in any place of your imagination.

But back to our Pierrot. He was living in a beautiful home with his family. Truly a family house with a little garden, where a neat row of fruit trees stretched their branches towards the sun. In the summer, the air would grow heavy with the scent of ripe fruit, and the sounds of children racing beneath the branches, their hands sticky with sweet juice, filled the air. Inside, the house pulsed with life. Pierrot liked to share good meals with his family and friends. These gatherings often lead to dancing, and it never took long before someone found their way to an instrument. Soon, old and new tunes would fill the room, and everyone from kids to the elderly joined in singing and dancing, as best they could.

One day, dark news arrived in the village. It was all over the radio, the TV, and the newspapers: there had been incidents at the border with a neighbouring country, they said. Relations between the two countries had always had ups and downs, but lately the tension had been mounting. And now, due to the latest incidents, the tension had

suddenly escalated.

This news saddened Pierrot. He lived not far from the border and had always had friendly relationships with the neighbours who crossed into his country. To Pierrot, they did not seem much different from his own people — there was no reason, he thought, for hostility or fear. Yet, the news sprouted a new uncertainty, and worry began to settle on Pierro's chest like a heavy stone.

The band plays: parts 1 and 2

2. The war approaches
The band loops (quietly) the first 8 bars of part 3 under the storytelling

The news grew more serious day by day. The media reports spoke of the army possibly calling in all the able-bodied civilians to serve the country. Maybe even within days. Suddenly, the war seemed imminent, and Pierrot really didn't know what to do. He wanted to stay - to stand beside his family, to protect the land where generations had lived. *(Music stops, PAUSE)*

But what if the war came here, to their very doorstep? What if Pierrot was taken, drafted into a war he wants no part of? What would happen to his family without him? What would happen to him if he left? The questions circled, offering no answers.

The band plays parts 3 and 4

The war brakes / farewell to the loved one
The day had arrived. The word spread around that the neighbouring country had launched an attack. The president declared war, and all able-bodied men were ordered to take up arms "for their country".

"Is it really the only solution, to kill each other?" Pierrot wondered. But the government, backed by a roaring pro-war media, left no room for doubt. Any

hesitation, any questioning, was now seen as treason.

Pierrot still wanted no part in the war. He didn't want to take a life—not the life of a stranger, not someone who might remind him of a neighbour, let alone a friend. To him, behind every uniform, there was a story, a valuable life, and he could not bring himself to end one.

However, the official letter arrived, summoning Pierrot to serve. And so, with a heavy heart, Pierrot prepared to say goodbye to his loved ones.

The band plays part 5 "Adiu la Bèra Margoton"

The band plays part 6 "Maudita Sia la Guèrra"

The escape
(speaking hastily, a bit out of breath)

You could hear it now—shouts, engines grinding through the dust. The soldiers were here. They moved fast, door to door, dragging out any man who could hold a rifle.

Pierrot didn't think - he reacted. He couldn't let them take him, he couldn't fight their war. He slipped out the back door, heart hammering against his ribs, and ran.

And he ran, fled as fast as he could, towards the mountains.

The band plays the percussion part 7

Hopes of peace
Weeks have passed since Pierrot left his house and family in a moment of panic and haste. In the mountains, he met others like him, who refused to serve. Sheltered by the mountain, they formed a small community, organising themselves just enough to survive, "for the time being," they said. No one believed it would last long.

Occasionally, they would get their hands on a newspaper. The situation worsened; the enemy had inflicted severe losses on Pierrot's country. A ceasefire had been

signed. But the region where Pierrot lived was now behind the line. His land, his family home, didn't belong to his country anymore. It was a new reality, and a very strange one to think about.

But at least there's peace now, Pierrot told himself. That had to count for something. He wanted to see his home again. The house, the fields, whatever's left. So he set out, step by step, on the long road back.

And finally, he arrives.

The band plays part 8.

The occupation

Nothing looks like it used to. Half of the houses are destroyed, pieces of rubble are everywhere. The trees in Pierrot's garden have been either chopped down or burned to black stumps. The streets are mostly empty now; few dare to walk them with the occupier's military administering the region.

Pierrot hides in his house, and from his family, he hears about the abuses: arbitrary detentions, torture, people being beaten up for no reason, and the military raiding houses randomly at night. Even children getting struck on their way home from school, just because they were there.

Pierrot is devastated. He is afraid and desperate. But beneath it all, anger is starting to take root. The situation is unbearable, and it cannot go on like this. But what could he do?

The band plays part 9.

The birth of the resistance

(the band plays a light beat in the background)

"Someone has to do something", thinks Pierrot. So, in the cover of the night, he

decided to meet with a few trusted neighbours. They speak for hours, sharing what they've seen—raids, beatings, disappearances. And slowly, the same realisation settles over them all: they can't stay passive, not anymore.

Some talk about taking up arms against the occupier. But Pierrot, a pacifist at heart, pleads for another plan, at least to begin with. He proposes that they first try and do what they can without guns and violence.

And so, in secret, a movement is born—a civilian resistance, rooted in solidarity and quiet defiance. They hide those in danger, share truths buried by propaganda, and begin pushing back and fighting—without guns, for now.

But for how long?

Will the civilian resistance be enough to stop the occupier's abuses? Will the pressure of the international community put an end to this situation? Will the international community even react?

Pierrot doesn't know what scares him more—the brutality surrounding him by the occupier, or what he might become while trying to stop it. Will it all continue until he finally abandons his principles and turns to armed struggle? Will he eventually have to kill?

The band plays part 10.

Postface
(Sami speaking)

Thank you. Peace and justice for all.

- Duration : approximately 45min.
- Nota: in the context of the festival where this piece was performed, it was immediately followed by the demonstration led by Rhythms of Resistance, without interruption, so the postface was skipped.

Appendix II – Lyrics of the traditional song: Adiu la bèra Margoton

Adiu la bèra Margoton !
Tu vas pèrder ton servitor!
Jo vau partir per lo Rei servir.
Maudita sia la guèrra !
Dens sas amors, d'autan malurós,
Non vadó sus la tèrra.

Dens mon estat, viví content
Non mancavi d'aur ni d'argent.
De bèths chivaus, de riches cabaus,
Segur de ta tendressa.
Tot qu'èi pergut, lo sòrt m'ei cadut.
Mon Diu, quina tristessa !

Jo be t'aimi, be t'aimarèi,
Margoton tant qui viurèi.
Si't devi quitar, bethlèu vau tornar
E pendent la campanha,
Se i a papèr, jo t'escriverèi
Deu hons de l'Alemanha.

Qu'auràs recomendacions
E novèlas de mas amors.
Ton nom au cap e Pièrra signat
En letras d'aur l'adreça.
I aurà dessus, tons mots sian renduts
A ma bèra mestressa.

Si'm mori, bèra Margoton,
Aquò sera deu mau d'amor ;
Jo'n soi content e per testament,
Voi estar botat en tèrra,
E sus lo clòt que legen : "Margòt,
Ci-git mon amic Pièrra !"

Translation to French (aussau.org)

Adieu la belle Margoton
Tu vas perdre ton serviteur.
Je vais partir pour servir le Roi,
Maudite soit la guerre.
Dans ses amours à ce point
malheureux,
Nul ne le devint sur la terre.

Dans ma condition je vivais content ;
Je ne manquais ni d'or ni d'argent,
De beaux chevaux, fortune faite,
Sûr de ta tendresse.
Tout est perdu, le sort est tombé,
Mon Dieu quelle tristesse.
Je t'aime, je t'aimerai,
Margoton tant que je vivrai.
Si je dois te quitter, bientôt je reviendrai,
Et pendant la campagne,
S'il y a du papier je t'écrirai
Du fin fond de l'Allemagne.

Tu auras des recommandations,
Et des nouvelles de mes amours.
Ton nom en haut et de Pierre signé,
En lettres d'or l'adresse
Il y aura dessus, tes mots seront rendus
A ma belle maîtresse.

Si je meurs belle Margoton,
Ce sera du mal d'amour.
J'en suis content et par testament
Je veux être mis en terre,
Et sur le tombeau qu'on lise, Margot
Ci-gît mon ami Pierre.

Translation to English (automatic translation)

Farewell, beautiful Margoton.
You are going to lose your servant.
I am leaving to serve the King.
Cursed be war.
In his loves so unhappy,
No one became so on earth.

In my condition, I lived contentedly;
I lacked neither gold nor silver,
Fine horses, my fortune made,
Sure of your tenderness.
All is lost, the lot has fallen,
My God, what sadness.

I love you, I will love you,
Margoton, as long as I live.
If I must leave you, soon I will return,
And during the campaign,
If there is paper, I will write to you
From the depths of Germany.

You will have recommendations,
And news of my loves.
Your name at the top and signed by
Pierre,
In gold letters the address
It will be on it, your words will be
returned
To my beautiful mistress.

If I die, beautiful Margoton,
It will be from lovesickness.
I am happy about it and by will
I want to be buried,
And on the tomb it will be read, Margot
Here lies my friend Pierre.