

**PETRA VALTELLINA**

**DIGITAL  
RESEARCH  
JOURNAL**

# Research journal

16/02/2023

My original idea included collaboration in composition as the main topic, and I wanted to create a small ensemble and compose pieces in a shared process. As this was logistically complicated and time consuming, and I wanted to focus more on my instrument, I chose to narrow this collaboration to a collaborative composition between myself - an instrumentalist - and a composer.

**Since the collaboration itself was interesting, but perhaps did not guarantee enough research material, I thought it would be interesting to start from a compositional idea and to document the process of it being transformed and becoming a solo flute piece written by four hands.**

I have been thinking for a long time how I could merge music and humour, specifically word plays, in a solo flute piece. I felt this need because I love to play with language and to play music, therefore I was curious about finding similarities and possible interactions between the two fields.

I am aware that there is a wide discussion about music and language in general, people trying to describe music as a language and finding analogies in music structures and language elements. I do not want to enter that discussion, even though my research will follow a similar path, because my aim is not to prove that music acts like language, but to try to apply some language mechanisms to the composition of a single piece.

My objective is therefore to experiment a compositional process, sharing it with a composition student, more than finding out general “rules” to demonstrate that music acts as a language.

I have been reading about both humour in language and in music, and what I found out is that word plays are not studied a lot in their specific mechanisms. On the other hand, humour is widely studied, and some bibliography includes its relationship with music and examples of their interaction in past compositions.

What I would like to achieve in the first phase of my research is to understand how a personal coherent musical language can be defined, trying to apply some compositional “rules”, and to develop structures with the aim of breaking those “rules” in order to create an humorous feeling or, otherwise, structures that follow similar logical mechanisms as word plays in spoken language.

I am aware that this kind of research is something that composers have to do all the time in order to create their pieces in a structured way, but as a classical flute student I have never experienced this process. For this reason, I would like to include a composer in the second part of my research process, and to add to the bibliographical/compositional aspect of the research a more collaborative one, documenting how a composer and an interpreter can create a piece starting from a compositional idea.

**I am also very aware that, no matter how deep and complete the reading of the bibliography will be, the outcome of this research will stem from artistic choices that,**

**by definition, do not rely on any given fact. The creation of a musical language can indeed take very different paths depending on the wanted result or the underlying artistic idea, and any of those paths will be equally valid. I will anyway do my best to explain and clarify the reasons for my choices whenever it is possible, given that the process and the reflection about it themselves constitute the majority of this artistic research.**

27/04/2023

I abandoned the idea of the language related composition because I wanted to leave more freedom to the collaboration with each composer. It does not mean that language will not be included in the project, since for one of the composition Gaspar and I are taking inspiration from Toti Scialoja's poems, a language-related art form, but only that it will not be the main focus of my research. I am also discovering that the collaboration is dense and rich in data and information, therefore it will probably guarantee a healthy content, enough for a two years research project.

### **Collaboration with composer:**

10/03/2023

I tried to reach the composition students of the school by sending an email to a composition teacher, introducing myself and shortly explaining my intentions. I wrote to Martijn Padding first, because I know that he used to be the head of the department and he must know most of the students. I was hoping he could advise me to contact someone specifically, perhaps interested in the topic or in the flute, but he simply (and I understand his choice) forwarded my email to the Department.

13/03/2023

They told me that they could forward my request on the Composition Department channel on Teams, therefore I wrote a more concise message to raise the attention ("Call for composers").

17/03/2023

I am still waiting: I suppose I have failed in the catchiness of my message or the composers are really busy (I was offering a coffee if anyone was even just interested!).

I will wait a bit more, meanwhile I will think of other possibilities. A Traverso student told me he also composes and I could ask him if I was desperately needing a composer, this could be also interesting because he would know the instrument better.

29/03/2023

First meeting with Gaspar.

I discovered he is not only a traverso player but also a composer during a conversation where I mentioned I was looking for a composer to collaborate with but nobody had replied to my call for composers from the composition department. He sent me a recording of a

piece for flute and guitar he had composed a few years ago. I liked it, it included mostly extended techniques and through them the textures of the flute and the guitar were extremely blended.

I also sent him a recording of me playing some excerpts, just to give him an idea of my playing.

We met at the canteen, and I briefly explained what my idea was about. He seemed very interested, and without many questions we compared our agendas in order to find weekly moments to meet.

He was interested in my idea of composing with wordplay mechanisms, and I felt better hearing that, since everyone was suggesting that I change the research topic. **I told him that what I want to observe is the collaboration itself, but the content of the research will be free and we will be completely free to decide the artistic direction of our collaboration.**

I am very much looking forward to it!

03/04/2023

Planning the first session for the project, I have a doubt: **should I share everything with Gaspar?** Since I am aiming for a collaboration as **horizontal** as possible, I choose to do so. I will send him a message with my schedule, asking if he wants to add anything, ask anything about it or change the order of the topics.

12/04/2023

Thanks to Livia Malossi, a composer friend of mine, I discovered that the call for composers I had sent to the composition department has been posted on the channel only today. I am happy that the lack of responses was due to that, but on the other hand it is not very nice to know that now, since I have already started the collaboration with Gaspar and scheduled a meeting with a composer I was introduced to during a school project, and maybe he thinks that I am not satisfied with his interest.

18/04/2023

### **I have tried to compose for flute!**

The composition is based on a poem by Toti Scialoja:

Se busso  
la lepre  
che m'apre  
mi copre  
di baci  
la punta  
del naso  
mi dice:  
"Mi piaci  
per puro caso".

It was a lot of fun!

I have to prepare for tomorrow's session: I want to verify how the process is going, and get dynamic feedback in order to improve for the future.

Since I record the sessions it could also be a simple talk, but due to previous problems with the video recording, I prefer it to be written.

Feedback guideline form:

Evaluate from 1 to 10 (quality) and explain why

Logistics

- Content of the collaboration
- Atmosphere/mood in the collaboration
- Work outside the sessions
- Time / mental space
  - Quantity (weight of the amount of time requested)
  - Quality (enjoyment in devoting time to this project)

How is this project being compared to your expectations?

Mention one thing you really like about this project

Mention one thing you would change about this project

Check offers and expectation (see session 1)

20/04/2023

The feedback at the end of yesterday's session with Gaspar was great! We agreed on most of the problems of the collaboration until now (sometimes the **content** and **organisation of the sessions themselves** is not completely clear and left a bit to the moment; **technical problems with the recordings**) and he confirmed my feeling of the positive environment that we are creating. I am very happy about that!

//

Today I met Jasper, the other composer I would like to collaborate with.

The meeting was quick, since as soon as I explained in detail my idea, his response was immediately positive. We scheduled sessions until June, but, as it is with Gaspar, we will freely choose how long the collaboration will be.

After scheduling the sessions, we started talking. I should have recorded the conversation but I did not want him to feel uncomfortable during the first meeting, which was supposed to be only informative and had the unique aim to plan the sessions.

We talked about the orchestral project. He was very amazed by the program, in particular Nono's "No hay caminos, hay que caminar... Andrej Tarkovskij". I also showed him Martijn Padding's (his teacher) One Flute part, which I am currently studying.

Even though the conversation already felt like a first meeting for our collaboration and I should have recorded it, **I am very glad of how enthusiastic both the composers I met are, and I think this will help motivate me to spend time on this project.** I am very much looking forward to all of it.

21/04/2023

I will interview Gaspar on Monday the 24th. He asked me to send him the question in advance so that he knows what to say... I find it fair, I would like to use some material from

the interview for a short introductory video for this project (eventually for fundings). I will also interview Jasper and record myself explaining what we do with this project, hopefully I will get some nice material.

The questions I would like to ask are:

- Present yourself as an artist: background, activity, interests, influences, plans for the future if relevant (you can add everything you want)
- What is this project? What happens, goals...
- What's your role in this project?
- Does the collaboration influence your approach to composition? If yes, how? (In general and specifically during the sessions)
- Why are you taking part in this project?
- What do you think is special about this project?
- How is the collaboration going until now? Tell something about the experience, if you have already been part of something similar etc.

03/05/2023

I must say that the amount of work I want to do in these weeks is sometimes making me feel **overwhelmed**. I really enjoy spending time thinking about this project because it is something that personally interests me a lot and makes me feel energetic, but added to all the other deadlines is becoming quite heavy.

Tomorrow I will have a session (the second!) with Jasper and I have not even written the agenda yet (it's evening already). I will probably write something now, very quickly, but tomorrow will probably be **improvised**. The good thing is that he apparently enjoys talking and is not shy in front of the camera - perhaps even more willing to share his thoughts. I also noticed that I keep **procrastinating** the composition exercises we set with Gaspar and always end up composing something the day before our sessions. I really enjoy writing and experimenting with the sounds we come up with, but I still struggle to find some time everyday to dedicate to this activity.

Something to work on.

17/05/2023

In the past days I have been thinking quite a lot about the directions to give to the collaborations, especially after the second feedback session with Gaspar, where he wisely expressed that **it would be good to take a week of break in order to have time to reflect on what we are doing and shape the following meetings with more awareness**. I agree. Also due to personal matters from his side, on Monday we did not meet, but I met my Research Supervisor on Tuesday (yesterday) and we agreed that it can also be interesting to **let the collaboration follow the flow and later reflect upon how it developed**. I think I need to find a balance between the two: this, as an artistic research, should alternate **reflection and action in an integrative way, and every choice will possibly be explained in a later stage**. But it has to be a choice, and not only a "let's see how it goes". **Choosing to let the collaborations develop freely is an artistic choice, I do not want to spoil the "ecological validity" of the experiences** (Bastiaan told me about the balance between Ecological validity and Experimental validity, I need to better look it up).

For now I choose to allow freedom to both my collaborations because, as I will be the connecting point between them, it is interesting to see how differently they will develop starting from almost the same idea. I will focus then on the differences and their reasons (Gaspar is also a flute player, Jasper is not: this is the main starting difference between the collaborations and I am experiencing how it impacts the way the collaborations are developing until now).

Today I have a session with Jasper and I am curious to see how it will go. He has already written quite a lot of sketches, **I have not composed anything for this collaboration yet** (I have explained more about the flute repertoire and what are the technical challenges, especially in Sequenza I by Berio).

18/05/2023

The feedback from **Jasper** was very positive, and the comments could be summarised as follows: **he would like to know more about the flute technical possibilities, I would like to bring more content and be more part of the composition process**. Next time we will try to compose together, during the session.

24/05/2023

Session 6 with Gaspar was an important checkpoint for the research for many reasons. Firstly, it was a feedback session, during which Gaspar encouraged me to **take a step back and reflect on the direction I wanted to give the collaboration in the following sessions**. It was a very useful suggestion, and it came at the right time, because soon after that I met with my research supervisor and we talked about that. Another extremely useful suggestion that Gaspar gave me during the feedback session was about data analysis: he knows I am collecting a lot of material, and he suggested that I start analysing one session in order to get an idea of how much time I will have to spend on the recordings. A lot. I started transcribing a session and for 20 minutes I spent almost 2 hours. It will be a lot of work. Another reason why session 6 was important is because after that, Gaspar had to go back to Spain because of personal problems, and we had to cancel the session planned for Monday the 15th of May and meet online for the following one, which happened on the 22nd of May. My main concern right now is the wellbeing of Gaspar, and this is why **I was not sure on how to continue**. I did not want to disturb him back home, but he seemed okay with meeting online, so we did a planning session where we decided to slow down a bit, both for the present situation - he is not here - and because the amount of data I am collecting is very scary to analyse. In June we will meet once every two weeks, so we still have 3 sessions before the summer. He kindly confirmed his availability, if needed to finish the composition, in September. I think it would be good, so that maybe I will have already analysed most of the work and it will be easier to continue and conclude, having already analysed the previous part of the collaboration.

I felt a bit relieved because June will be quite busy for me due to my exam, and I really feel like **having more time between the sessions could make the work flow better and allow me to better organise the sessions' content**.

I think that this situation was not completely unforeseen: when I started the collaborations I was very much aware that **counting on other people means that the chances of anything happening are multiplied, and this is a known side effect of collaborating**. I do not mind having to adapt to different situations, even if it could look as a challenge for the

success of the project, if I take a step back and consider it again, I can easily see that **the collaboration process cannot be linear and the way we will adapt to the necessities from time to time will probably influence the collaboration.** The way we are dealing with it is already a sign of success! For now, I feel close to Gaspar because of the period he is living and I wish him the best, and this is already **a good sign that the collaboration is not only an artistic one or a “work” one, but has also connected us from a personal point of view, which is obviously a work in progress since we do not know each other so well yet, but for sure has a strong impact on how we experience the collaboration and will also probably have an impact on its outcome.** I am curious to see how it will continue.

19/06/2023

I have finished the collaborations a bit earlier than expected because of personal reasons: I needed to go back to Italy right after my exam, so my last meeting with Jasper was on the 15th of June, whereas with Gaspar I will have one more last online meeting on the 26th. The process has been very time consuming until now, and still I think I was not devoting enough time to practise the sketches and think more about the sessions' planning. May and June have been crazily busy, so I did what I could. Now I have a bit more time, hopefully.

I always forget to write it down, but I think it is quite important for how I am shaping this research: I am sticking to an **“Action Research” methodology** but I already knew how I wanted to shape this research because I used to be a member of an Italian scout association, C.N.G.E.I., and to work on planning the activities with a rigorous cyclical methodology of observation, identification of goals, planning, action, feedback and new observation. This way of improving **(each observation leads to different goals, hopefully growing in level)** seemed to me perfect for this kind of project, where the content of the collaboration is the object of interest, but also the way it is shaped and the way it evolves. This is why I chose to work with this methodology. I am aware it is not easy to stick to a rigorous structure, in particular if it is not the only focus (my flute studies at KC are my main focus, the research is something added which I enjoy doing but that cannot take too much time away from practice and projects). I am also aware that **a balance between planning and “improvising” in this kind of collaboration might be the best approach, even if this balance is not easy to find.**

Another thing I take from my scouting experience is the concept of **“learning by doing”**: I always feel like it is more important to me to experiment something in order to understand and remember it more than reading or hearing it. This is probably why I am studying music: every musical choice and every interpretative idea passes through action, and the way a musician studies, the “practice”, intrinsically implies an active approach, both mental and physical. I wanted to create this kind of interdependence also in my research, and an Action Research Model was what best fitted my intention.

20/06/2023

Checking the sessions right after their occurrence, listening back and transcribing them would have been definitely better for the research purposes, even though probably not



feasible with my actual schedules (again, this research is not my only duty). **A regular check of what was happening would have increased precision in the planning of the sessions, and my questions to the composers would have been more precisely addressed in order to better reply and respond to the difference I was noticing between the two collaborations (e.i. Gaspar and Jasper presented two very different ideas on transforming material, but I never deepened this topic).**

22/06/2023

Now I have more time to work on my research, and I started transcribing some of the sessions. Even though I used an AI program to transcribe the recordings, I still need to change many things, and it is revealing a very long process. In around 1h30 I transcribed 15 minutes only! It is a huge amount of work. I hope to manage to do it during the summer, because then I will have to write the research and analyse the data, which will also take quite a long time.

18/07/2023

I had to pause my research for some time, but meanwhile I had a meeting with Bastiaan and we agreed that the amount of time needed to transcribe all the material is excessive, and that I need to find another way of analysing data.

I will probably edit the videos keeping only the key moments for each session. In this way, the analysis will begin with the editing itself, instead of being a later step after the transcription itself.

I need therefore to identify a valid method for the selection process.

I am currently reading "**The craftsman**" by Richard Sennett, a book suggested by **Gaspar. It talks about cooperation as a better solution for good work than competition or morale.**

I think my research tries on a wide scale something very important for the classical music environment, **to connect people and take the best from each one's skills instead of individualising the artistic musical process where competition is the most important thing.**

**This approach makes a musician's life healthier.**

22/08/2023

After a summer break from the research, here I am again, thinking of how to work on the videos of the sessions without being at school and using the computers there (on mine DaVinci does not work...)

I have met many composers and musicians in the last months, and I feel full of ideas on music that I hope will serve my project.

I now have to:

- Practise Jasper's sketches
- Compose something for Gaspar's sessions
- Write at least the introduction

- Start the data analysis based on the videos

I think it would be interesting to make a **schematic timeline of my collaborations**, since in both of them I have **tried different approaches**, and to try and get insights from each approach.

I am aware that since **I chose two collaborations where the roles of the composers are different and my role also changes**, I will not reach a peer and equal collaboration, but **what might be interesting could be how it could work and what to keep in mind for future collaborations**.

I think my method is working ok until now, and the action research really fits my goals with this project.

13/09/2023

First meeting after the summer with Jasper.

It felt great! I had spent more time than usual practising his sketches, and I must say it **really was a good session from my side: we were both very engaged, I knew what I wanted to tell him about the compositions and he was very interested in both understanding the flutistic part and asking for some nuances to see if they were possible**.

I think the **success** of this session depends on many factors, among which for sure:

- My practice
- The summer break to refresh the mind and to low the stress levels
- The reflections I made in the last months upon our collaboration: **I am aware he is the composer and my idea of “equal” collaboration will not be possible on the composition level, but only in the sense that I bring my flutistic skills and he brings his composition ones. This is fair and works the best.**
- I was so much looking forward to it, and he was also curious to hear what his ideas sounded like.
- I felt “Psalm” was challenging because it included spoken text in German, so I had practised it a lot and really wanted to have feedback.

25/09/2023

Session 11 Gaspar

I feel a bit guilty because I am aware of how much unpaid time I am asking from Gaspar, especially since he's not a student anymore. I am trying to make the session quick and the process fast so that we will finish as soon as possible, but I really feel bad for not having asked for fundings or other ways to finance the project until now.

I think I might try and ask for funding for the process, but now is probably too late (?)

At least I would have video samples to send...

Sustainability on the long term is definitely something to keep into consideration

03/11/2023

Just finished the first collaboration. The feedback was a very intense moment for me, I was very immersed in the discussion and I think some very interesting considerations about the entire process emerged.

I need to elaborate a lot.

20/11/2023

Report from session 2:

Gaspar: "I'm interested in key clicks while you maintain a certain sound" -> we actually used a technique I suggested that consists in singing a note into the flute while changing fingerings.