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TranceCultural Music: Forging social resonance through asynchronous virtual musical interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

The physical distancing required by the COVID-19 pandemic has created devastating isolation, emotional islands unbridgeable even by the most advanced synchronous multimedia technologies. Building on the Edmonton Transcultural Orchestra (ETO), our experimental TranceCultural Orchestra (TCO) strives to ameliorate this situation through “Trans/trance-Cultural Music” (TCM): acephalous strategies of asynchronous, multivocal musical interaction, generating a new kind of resonant community – a “distrancing” of emotional and social connections woven across physical, temporal, and socio-cultural distances. In this multivocal article, we collectively document the aims, techniques, experiences, and implications of such strategies, simultaneously re-performing them in the interactive, experimental text that follows. Why? While everyone’s motivations are unique, there are two primary objectives overall. First, this composite piece constitutes a historical document capturing some of the many roles and meanings of music towards re-establishing socio-musical resonance under covid. Second, as an action-oriented manifesto, the piece sets forth and preserves a possible model for future musical life, even once COVID is behind us.

Collective artistic endeavors like TCO are complex and dialogic, their experiences multidimensional and intersubjective. They are dynamically multi-perspectival, entailing not merely heterogeneous perceptual directions, but in an interactive sense, by which different perceptions and expressions reflect one another through multivocality: an acoustical mirroring, an interactive polyphony. As cultural anthropologists have acknowledged for many decades now, true objectivity in cultural representation is impossible, a fortiori for the deliberately polysemous expressive forms labelled “art”, and most of all non-representational collective arts like music. Through the “multilog” that follows, therefore, we aim to document our interactive polyphony, in a parallel textual form. We have deliberately eschewed the conventional imposition of a single dominant, authoritative voice, narrating a seemingly inexorable, linear argument. We hope that by transposing our multivocal, flexible compositional processes into an equivalent written form, we will provide a richer representation of our musical response to COVID, as well as a musical and discursive path that others might choose to follow.

While bringing unspeakably tragic losses, the pandemic has also revealed new possibilities for intersubjective musical being, new modes of musical connection, unconstrained by the limitations of face-to-face interaction. We hope these possibilities will continue to be valuable even “Beyond Pandemic” (as our signature piece suggests).

1. Prologue

Founded in fall 2017, the ETO, an initiative of the Canadian Centre for Ethnomusicology (CCE; cce.ualberta.ca), stemmed from the humanistic ideals and participatory methods of Music for Global Human Development (m4ghd.org), aiming to negate the artificial “cultural” divides that separate people and musics from each other, and to uphold human connection, through socialized sound in live, collective musical performance, using Fernando Ortiz’s concept of transculturalism. Operating by consensus, its socio-musical structure emerged through synchronous, improvisatory interactions, based on varied musical frameworks proposed by its diverse membership. Thanks to flexibility and free participation, adaptive musical feedback realized in such interactions could “gel” in response to each performance environment, resulting in emotional intensification and “social resonance” (Frishkopf 2019, 306), musically energizing social links — an instance of Norbert Wiener’s “cybernetics” (1948).

When the COVID-19 crisis struck we were silenced by physical distancing, precluding live musicking. Meeting weekly online, we formulated a musical response, the TranceCultural Orchestra (TCO)¹, supporting members’ emotional health and wellbeing through a new asynchronous form of emergent, synergistic music, a collective trance/transcultural music (TCM), adapted from the musical principle of call and response, and exemplifying a different form of slow-motion, virtual adaptive musical feedback that is insensitive to distance (though some limitations are imposed by the necessity of Internet access). While the TCO began with ETO members based in Edmonton, news of its formation spread via email lists, and virtual communications enabled new members to join from around the world, including former students, friends, and friends of friends. Being open, membership grew. Our group presently connects people residing in locales across Canada, USA, Germany, Dubai, Iran, and Kenya (see Figure 3). The TCM process unfolds as follows: TCO members all have edit access to a track folder in the cloud. At any time, any TCO member can upload a “root” track to a subfolder, thereby seeding a new piece. Any other member may download this track, using it as a sonic thread around which to freely spin complementary strands, and upload new contributions to the same folder. Repeatedly, members download the folder’s contents, adding their own contributions, and uploading them in turn. Gradually, an unwoven bundle of tracks emerges, centered on the root. At any time, any TCO member may select any folder, download any subset of the folder’s tracks, creatively edit and process them, weave them together, and upload the mix. The result is an aural tapestry inspired by the original root, involving some subset of the TCO. Once approved by all its contributors, the mix is publicly released on our Bandcamp page (see Figure 1). Each root can thus give rise to multiple mixes, completely different from one another; the particular weave of each one both reflects and enhances the group’s social and emotional connectivity.

But music — construed broadly — also includes discourse (“talking music”); likewise, TCM is discursive as well as sonic - including the conversations that spontaneously unfold in our weekly Zoom meetings (every Monday at noon), in a virtual reality (VR) space (see Figure 2) enabling sonic exhibition and related discussion, and in this article (we have preserved some of its dialogic aspects in footnotes). Through these discursive interactions we discuss specific roots and mixes, as well as the TCM process more generally, linking it to our lives and careers, and to the broader social and cultural environment, under COVID-19, from multiple perspectives around the world. Throughout, technology plays a key role - both enabling and limiting. Technologies of virtuality enable TCO to function as a global musical organization under pandemic conditions restricting movement and physical meeting. Yet the emotion of musical communication demands near-infinite bandwidth, and near-zero delay...unlike informational speech. For these reasons, we cannot perform and react to one another simultaneously. Not everyone has access to the same equipment, and multiple recording spaces, and non-acoustic recordings (e.g. MIDI) must be balanced in the mix.²

Unlike the usual processes of online music production, the TCO process is highly unpredictable, flexible, bottom-up, and improvisatory, centering on adaptive feedback loops capable of producing what I have termed “social resonance”, spinning social threads that renew the social fabric even through lockdown. But unlike rapid F2F synchronous resonance, developed within narrow performative diameters of ETO’s live music interaction, TCO resonance develops slowly and asynchronously, enabling individual reflection and group dialog, and readily expanding to global proportions. The TCM process

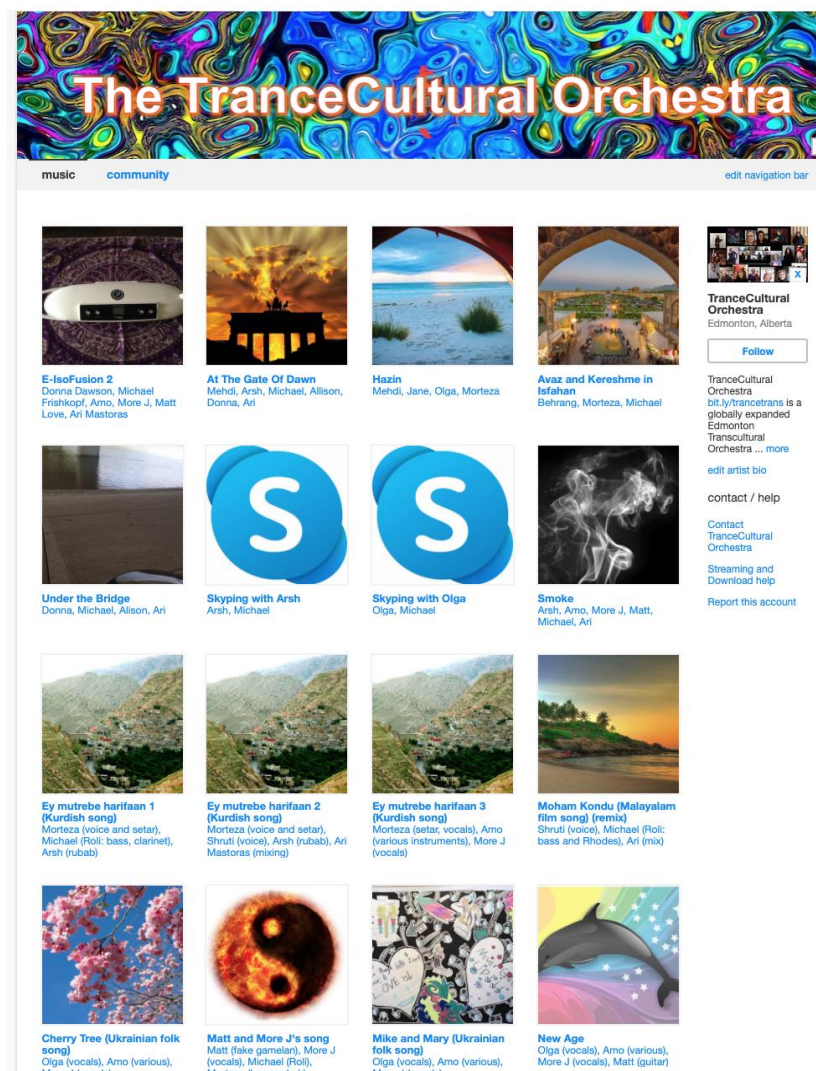
¹ Ari Mastoras proposed the new name.

² Morteza: Drawing on these two final points, we might claim that there is a new type of ‘musical space’ being practiced and experienced here: a space that is not pre-given during the recordings but, as Ari pointed out today, is constructed in the process of mixing and engineering. At least, the ‘little real’ spaces of each recording must be integrated into (or transform into) a ‘bigger’ shared space that is digitally constructed.

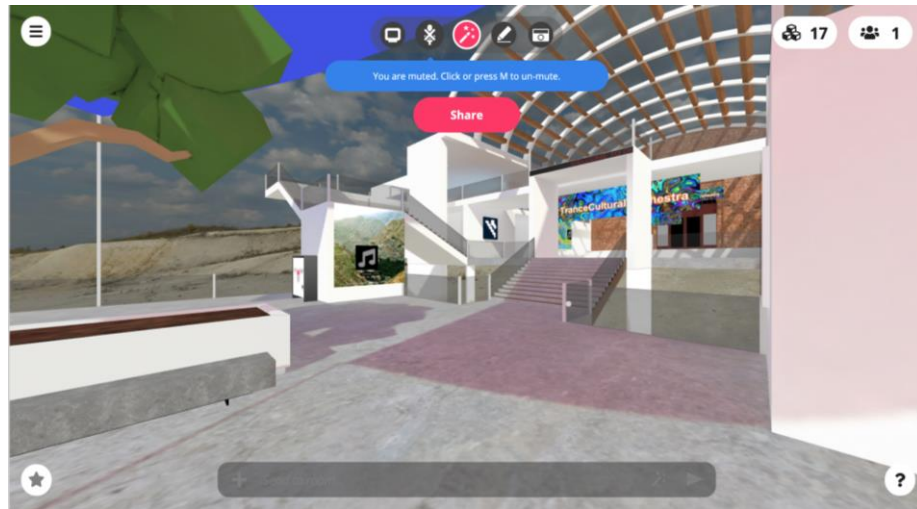
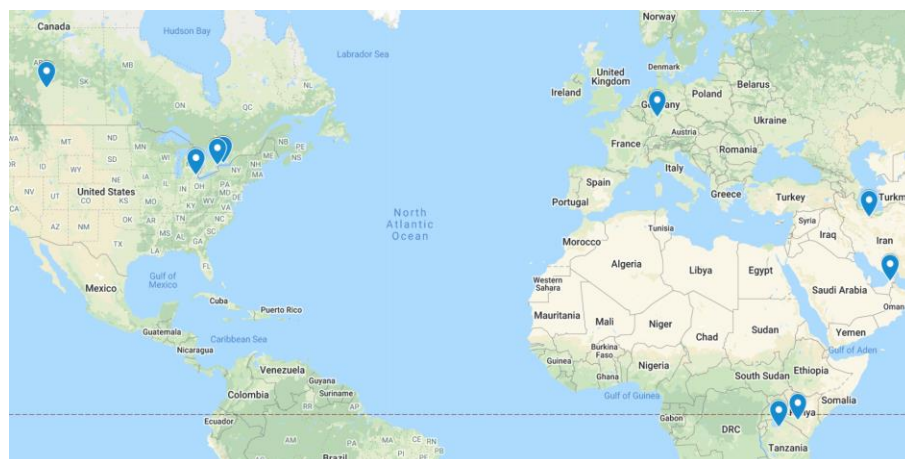
not only removes geographical constraints, but also enables musical interaction among those who might never interact in a F2F setting, due to disparities in musical engagement. Our first collective performance, “Beyond Pandemic” (released April 30, 2020) set the tone, and we’ve taken off from there.

This collectively authored paper further reflects on this process of acephalous asynchronous online musical connection from the multiple perspectives of its participants, speculating on its utility in a post-cultural virtual world, while simultaneously serving as a discursive instance of TCM itself. We conceived the heart of this article as what we are calling a “MULTILOGUE” (cf “monologue”), a multifaceted online asynchronous dialogue.³ The multilogue that follows this prologue developed iteratively, exactly like our track mixes, each author writing, then responding to what others have written, in their own piece, or in comments (now embedded as footnotes) on what others had written. The resulting complexity of discursive and sonic feedback loops constitute a cybernetic system (Weiner) rooted in communication, essential for real human connection, and thus for humane, civil society itself. Its collective maintenance, even during pandemic lockdown, is key to maintaining our collective humanity. TCM is a path forward. TCO are the people on that path. All are invited to join us on this journey (see <http://bit.ly/trancetrans>).

Figure 1. TCO bandcamp page



³ Morteza: Just like the musical collaborations we’ve had in the past few months, the process of writing this article has been conditioned by the new situation that is itself shaped by the pandemic. We have written fragments that are thematically joined but within a framework (online shared google doc) that is different from ‘regular’ collaborative writings, where people might actually sit down and edit together or read and revise in person.

Figure 2. TCO as virtual reality exhibition.**Figure 3.** Physical locations of current TCO members

2. Multilogue

2.1 Arsh Khaira

Multi-instrumentalist, composer, and PhD in Ethnomusicology, University of Alberta (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)

Elliot Smith began “Memory Lane” with what sounded like positive, albeit sceptical optimism:

Isolation pulled you past a tunnel to a bright
World where you can make a place to stay
But everybody’s scared of this place
They’re staying away
Your little house on memory lane...

It seemed that several months ago this quiet fishbowl of a bubble world amongst only those closest to me in kin did seem like a “bright world.” I quickly found myself in a rhythm of creation, composing and practicing in the evenings, after long mornings and early afternoons working from home, or from our office in South Edmonton where we manage our family construction business.

But isolation pushes you ‘til every muscle aches
Down the only road it ever takes...

The song carries on, and now yes, things, muscles and bones, they are starting to ache and it is hard to get myself moving. I spent a few days exercising only to fall back into the lull. But the music is still there, and the feeling of motivation and positivity in the creative pursuit. It was then that I started working on my songs again, in anticipation of an album I hope to release in the fall, or maybe winter, or maybe... next Spring? Some days the construction work is overwhelming and there is no *energy* at the end of the day to keep working on the songs.

Isolation pushes past self-hatred, guilt and shame

To a place where suffering's just a game...

I've made it to the third verse. Perhaps I feel some connection to the words, but I don't completely agree. When I was working on my PhD I mentioned to someone that I was pursuing my passion, only when he reiterated that "Passion" in its Latin root is synonymous for suffering – and this is why Matthew's 27th Chapter is referred to as such, the *Passion*, or suffering, condemnation and death by torture.

The music I have been working on in my own time is connected to the darkness that seems to permeate every vessel of our being when we are absorbed in *Passion*. I call the project *Hoshekh*, and it started almost ten years ago. This is the Hebrew name of the 9th plague that the Egyptians suffered during the bondage of Israel to slavery, and it means "darkness." But not just "darkness;" it was so overpowering that it could be "felt," it completely absorbed and annihilated the land. But the songs are about conquering the *Hoshekh* inside myself, and returning to the light (www.Hoshekh.com).

The Monday sessions that Dr. Michael Frishkopf blessed this group with have been a guiding beacon of light. Professor Frishkopf himself is a light, like Michael, that has guided me for the past 6 years. Though I graduated in May this year, I feel so lucky to have weekly meetings with him and the rest of the *TranceCultural Orchestra*, who are all incredibly gifted artists and scholars. As an artist I feel the essence and presence of *Hoshekh* within me, and its personification blesses me with songs and poetry that I would otherwise might never have known.

Being a part of a creative circle of collaborative artists is incredibly beneficial. Though as a songwriter I enjoy having control over every part of my own songs, being guided is a great boon to these processes, especially when you feel that respect is reciprocal and that you yourself are appreciated! This dynamic has led for example to the interesting TCO version of my song "Smoke". Quarantine has allowed me to focus on my music in a very real and direct way, as it began just as I was graduating.

The TranceCultural Orchestra has allowed me to engage multiple parts of myself.⁴ I am able to steep myself in my own Persophilia, having taken decades to reach such a level of obsession, fascination, and verifiable fluency! I have become incredibly close to my *Rubab*, using it to add to the cultural tapestry that is "our little group," enabling me to experience Orientalism very personally and intimately. Though the connections I have with other group members are not so personal, there "is" something very profound, and almost familial, about connecting over Zoom. The idea that somehow we are all unified through the veil of *Ethnomusicology*, is very pleasing aesthetically. It means our world, our understanding, and even the way I feel myself perceived, are "not" black and white, but coloured in the hues of silks, flowers, gardens and perfumes that represent all the ways we are culturally linked to each other.

2.2 Jillian Fulton-Melanson

PhD in Social Anthropology, York University (Canada)
(Cobourg, Ontario, Canada)

Improvisation has been described to me as a form of storytelling⁵; the storyteller selects melodic patterns from their mind's library and moves, dancing around the pitches, talking to their audience through their instrument, pausing, creating tension, and resolving at the end. The music we've made together in the TCO incorporates this improvisatory form of storytelling, sonically living our COVID-19 experiences, bridging various cities and crossing different genres and emotions. As mentioned by Olga and Shruti, the uncertain times have made a unique creative process that is more quiet and intimate,

⁴ I can add that I have built a new relationship with technology that from a variety of perspectives, goes beyond a supplementary or a luxury addition to life. It's essential to our social life and music-making. It's a necessary component of the "social resonance" Michael talks about. - Morteza

⁵ I love the idea of storytelling; this might be a bit far-fetched, but I think we might be able to connect this idea to our discussions about space. Storytelling creates its own particular humane space, which under COVID circumstances has turned into a "quiet and intimate" digital space. Jill writes "the music was always there" and I think this is an important point; maybe music-making in this quiet, remote, intimate space created by the internet and related technologies is more omnipresent than in real space. - Morteza

acephalous in the way it moves continuously between the musicians in the group, zooming in and out from part to whole without specific direction.

Like many of the authors on this collaborative article, I was nearly completing another term of PhD studies when I received notice that campus would be closing its doors for an undetermined amount of time. We managed to make music together one last time, lingering on campus after performing for an empty room, playing the year's most inspiring repertoire for each other in various classrooms and stairwells. I left Toronto the next afternoon for a small town where my isolation would be more spacious and relaxed. After a ninety-minute train ride, the soundscape of Toronto's anxious sea of panicked shoppers and clashing conversations turned into small waves and quiet footsteps along a beachside boardwalk with nobody in sight. Scrambling for a sense of connection, I joined as many video-conference meetings as I possibly could. As Arsh and Allison write, I too rode the wave of exhaustion – starving for human contact, but not receiving the affectual 'recharge' that one gets when they converse in-person. The wave I was riding included not only highs and lows of energy but also of motivation and anxiety. My imagination was running wild, but my motivation for channelling it into music felt blocked. Although I felt at a pause in my own practice, the music was always there, and with its presence in the TCO, I have been able to watch the evolution of the tracks through our weekly meetings, bringing me a sense of community.

2.3 *Tuğrul Özer*

*Composer/Performer, Olympic/National athlete, and graduate student in ethnomusicology,
University of Alberta
(Toronto, Ontario, Canada)*

Despite being a biological catastrophe, the COVID crisis left our species alone with its greatest fear, "loneliness," and enabled us to enter a process of psychological and spiritual completion. During this process, I realized how silence is an indispensable and complementary part of life. As a composer, researcher, teacher and Olympic athlete, the life-rhythm was quite fast for me. I believe that fast rhythm means loudness. It means running without questions. When the process began, the humming of the deep personal interrogation that I had been unwittingly trying to evade for a long time through various engagements such as movies, virtual games, and social media painted me into a corner. Many call it an 'existential crisis'...

Then I looked at myself and what I did in this life. In a word, I just stopped. I was convinced that our reality, which we have been feeding with our art since the very beginning of civilization, is made up of just "noise". I just stopped and listened to the silence. "Being in silence for a while" affected almost everything in my life positively. It balanced my emotions, thoughts, relationships, and even my narrative ability. After all these strong influences on my personality, I realized I had some stories and feelings in my mind that I wanted to tell. I just wanted to make "noise" in space this time. So I started to write them again coherently using sounds and "silence." It was the most important achievement in my life.

As a result of the "precious" silence and internal questioning I experienced with the COVID-19 phenomenon, the desire to tell stories sparked inside me again, as a narrative composer. However, because the physical communication problem negatively affected interaction with other musicians as expected, I was on a quest for the right platform for music-making. Even if technology has developed enough to work together remotely for most industries, the lack of possibilities to make remote synchronic music is a big challenge for musicians stuck at home. So what was the right way to make music then? Where should I find the right platform? While these uncertainties occupied my mind, Dr. Frishkopf offered me involvement in TCO and allowed me to enter its great atmosphere.

TCO provides an excellent opportunity for musicians to communicate and share their projects to contribute to each other. A multicultural group of musicians from many different geographies, mastering different classical and ethnic instruments, and actively interacting with each other to make music attracts most composers' attention. The improvisations and recordings I made due to the excitement of being included in a new interaction environment have been a source of inspiration for an enjoyable project (Rast Taksim). In a short time, an original piece of music emerged with the interactions from other musicians.

TCO meetings, held once a week without skipping a beat, "resonate" excitedly in the society by catching the rhythmic flow of life. Musicians coming from far and wide involve the "tune" by breaking out of COVID impossibility. I firmly believe this beautiful organization will raise its close harmonies throughout the dark atmosphere of catastrophes, and continue to make noise in space.

2.4 *Olga Zaitseva-Herz*

Doctoral student in ethnomusicology, University of Alberta, professional singer and violinist (Frankfurt am Main, Germany)

The pandemic started suddenly, overwhelming humanity, across countries and continents, with unexpected challenges of various kinds. Many things that would have seemed impossible some weeks ago turned into reality, all at once. The situation became especially challenging since there was hardly an organization, merely a person who would not have been affected by the stress in its various forms. Not only the fact of sudden changes but also the lack of routine became a real mental difficulty for many. This led to chaos in multiple spheres, making the search for hold especially challenging. Routine plays a significant role in our wellbeing, and the reflection of the pandemic in our mental health will probably last a while.

With ETO, we used to meet every Monday at the university. When the lockdown happened, many of us needed to fly back home or drive across the country back to their families. This was when we switched to the online format, and suddenly, ETO meetings became the only regular appointment in the academic life of many of us. Unexpectedly, we became better connected than we ever were. Earlier, when a member was travelling, he or she missed the meeting, but now, many of us are located around the world, and we communicate and collaborate better and more intensely than ever.

Our collaborative music project became a source of creative reflections. We arranged folk songs from different countries, created new pieces. Unexpectedly, our forced separation increased our productivity as a group immensely. The situation inspired us to keep in regular contact and to conduct meetings on a weekly basis. When we moved to the online format during the pandemic, it enabled the members to attend the meeting, regardless of their physical location. I felt that being a part of such a vibrant and inspiring group where each member is a creative artist in his right and just an inspiring human being is a blessing.

It is an amazing experience to collaborate with people who bring their intercultural flavor into the music. For example, the piece “Mike and Mary” is a Ukrainian Canadian vernacular folk song, which is hybrid since it contains elements from both cultures and both Ukrainian and English languages. I was really excited to suddenly hear some African sounds in it when one of our members who joined the group during the social distanced phase, a professional music producer More J, created a really creative version of the song.

His touch gave the piece a totally new type of signature, so multicultural, creative and borderless at the same time. This experience gives us a special art of freedom that enters our lives through music, collaborative experience and enables us to reveal the creativity. It is such an amazing experience that this special kind of creative freedom entered our art space during the lockdown.

The context of lockdown demonstrated how much we could achieve even being physically distanced; it has also shown that despite the lack of time and all the chaos in the different spheres of our lives, we still managed to attend our meetings regularly. This experience has proven that physical distance can impact the creative processes and provide innovative solutions. Also, it has shown that many boundaries we are used to are more imaginary than we usually think.

Mixes: Cherry Tree, Mike and Mary, New Age

2.5 *Mehdi Rezanian*

Santur player, composer and doctoral student in ethnomusicology, University of Alberta (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)

The “isolation” resulting from COVID-19 has created negative consequences for many. It has been reported that more Canadians have been thinking about suicide during the pandemic and the total number of suicides has been increasing, not only as a consequence of isolation but also due to job loss and stress of an unclear future. Although I have been a full-time PhD student in ethnomusicology for the past four years, I have also been regularly performing and composing, having a master’s degree in composition and over two decades of stage performance. My last public performance was on March 9th, for the Edmonton Arts Council Gala.

For one of my composition courses, I wrote a piece for string quartet and santur. It was to be performed in the middle of April and then was commissioned to be performed for the C’Mon Festival in Edmonton in collaboration with another composer and a writer. We had been working on this project for several months and had had a few meetings already. I never knew that the piece would not get a chance to be performed. This composition, called *Shahed*, is based on a classical poem by the 13th century

Persian poet Sa'di Shirazi, and includes performer movement on the stage ; without that movement the concept cannot be completely presented.

Later when some musicians released collaborative performances by recording and mixing their parts, I realized I cannot perform my piece in that fashion either, because the piece was composed so that one musician would use the instrument of another musician in some sections. Besides this limitation on live performance, the pandemic also provided ample time for me to focus on other works.

When the director of CCE proposed that we collaborate with each other to make music online, I was a little reluctant at the beginning. Collaboration in music making always meant professionally planning to compose/perform a program on stage or recording in studio with professional musicians. When the project started, some of the members uploaded tracks and others started adding layers of music and sound. I was in the middle of the project so I could observe, and whenever I wished I could join. It was similar to the soiree nights at York University in which a group of musicians and dancers joined every last Friday of the month and could improvise 5-10 minutes together without any pre-planned agenda. In the TCO project a track that was uploaded could have one or many accompaniments. The project also encouraged me to further advance my knowledge of mixing and digital technology of sound making.

Conventionally, in the Persian music sphere, collaboration is based on a single vision: a composer has a program either original or old and seeks performers to help execute it. Then the performers are usually asked to share their ideas: add a solo section, replace a section, or improvise in a section. This time the collaboration was different for me, as each member came from a different musical background and we were encouraged to add layers of music to the original work. It broadened my perspective on collaborative works. But the fact remains that not every music creation could be performed online.

Roots: At the Gate of Dawn, Hazin

2.6 **Ari Mastoras**

*Mixing engineer and record producer
(Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)*

It is a privilege to be connected to and make music with the TranceCultural Orchestra. I am a mixing engineer, songwriter, and producer. When the pandemic started recording studios shut down, so I could either paint the fence or continue to make music. The TCO created a space where we could all do that. Thankfully, I knew how to work on music remotely with friends before the pandemic, so it was just a matter of finding a new workflow and file management system with such a big group, guided by Michael in our weekly meetings. What's really inspiring to see (and hear) is the shift in the quality of recordings. At the beginning, some people were just learning how to record themselves using a DAW—maybe even for the first time. Now, they are pros! It is really exciting to hear this change and see people learning this technology. In my own work, working with the TCO opens my ears because there are so many amazing musicians involved in this project from all over the world. With this ensemble, there are no walls and no rules. It is a great reminder that music has limitless possibilities and that we can explore some of them through our collaboration.

2.7 **Vahid Macvandi**

*Electronics and Broadcast Engineer and music enthusiast
(Dubai, U.A.E.)*

My introduction to the CCE group was through my friend Mr. Mehdi Rezaia. The Director of CCE and other members have been more than kind to accept me in their weekly meetings and even though I'm not a musician, the experience has been an absolute joy. As my introduction to CCE coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, I thought of sharing some of my thoughts on the challenges of remote collaboration.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent isolation and distancing regulations have forced many industries to re-invent themselves or at least find new ways of collaboration when contributing members have to work remotely. This could be, and has been, a challenge in many aspects.

Collaboration requires a great deal of communication between group members, and also needs the right platforms where members can contribute and share their works and projects.

It is imperative for any industry to have the right tools for its different requirements. With the ever-improving recording technologies for video and audio—which usually results in bigger file sizes—file-sharing platforms should be easy to use and have the right bandwidth and capacity to ensure users can upload and share their works with their peers seamlessly. Audio and video compression technologies are improving, which will allow us to record higher quality and *richer* images and sounds with less required space. However, there are limitations as to what level the audio or video files can be downsized without sacrificing the quality and audience experience.

Another important requirement for these sharing platforms is platform security. Security is an everyday challenge for IT infrastructures and is even more important if the content that is being shared is an intellectual property.

Conformity could be another challenge when different musicians work apart from each other. It is important that the musicians contribute their work in such a way (format) that the whole project is put together in a seamless way.

Making sure of the recording quality is another factor to bear in mind. Details like choosing the right microphone and the right position for it, the right recording device and right bit-depth (16, 24 or 32 bits for example), controlling the ambient noise, and many other parameters are controlled by a sound engineer when recording in a studio. However, almost all these become the musician's own responsibility when the recording is done at home. It will be really helpful if musicians increase their knowledge on how some aspects of the recording technology work.

2.8 *Matt Love*

Musician

(Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA)

I am not an academic or a serious musician. I met students and faculty in the Ethnomusicology Department at the University of Alberta over a decade ago when my wife was teaching in the School of Nursing there, and I was looking for volunteer opportunities. I didn't have much they could use, but it was an honor and a pleasure just to be able to hang out with people with such deep knowledge and skills in multiple musical traditions.

I'm an amateur pop musician who has been playing for close to 50 years and doing it full time since my retirement. Before the pandemic, I was active in the University of Michigan Gamelan Ensemble, Jazz Ensemble at Washtenaw Community College, entertaining at nursing homes, taking lessons from a Brazilian percussionist, and playing in a couple of folk rock groups that performed a couple of times a month in a local pub. I was working hard to overcome a lifetime of indolence and bad musical habits, and it was very challenging. I physically ached and felt under psychological assault with a reminder nearly every day of the week how little I knew musically, how kinetically challenged I was. Everything stopped within a period of a couple of weeks, and it wasn't entirely unwelcome. I retreated into my comfort zone. I had remained on the Ethnomusicology discussion list, and when Dr. Frishkopf started the distance collaboration project, it seemed a wonderful way to fill up my calendar again. By temperament and circumstances I have practiced social distancing many times in my life, and I have actively tried to collaborate distantly with other musicians for nearly 20 years. It's a level of connection and disconnection I feel comfortable with. I had found that I might have one successful collaboration for every 20 contacts I made, and people rarely wanted to try it again. I don't know if it was that they found the process unrewarding, or my skills or ideas lacking. Perhaps people that prefer working with others already have real life collaborators, and people who post solo work on the Internet tend to be lone wolves. Now in a period of time when everybody is forced to be distant, it might be easier to find suitable collaboration partners.

I didn't bring any of my experiences before the TCO group, as I was interested in seeing how people would self-organize. The arc was similar to my personal arc, though it happened much faster. It seems that when you start the sense of freedom that comes with no rules, no dogma (and no grid, key or click track) is appealing, but these lack of constraints soon prove frustrating, and processes were put into place that allowed everyone who wished to variously play leadership and side person roles, on tracks with defined keys and tempos, and structures.

I still felt constrained by my lack of technical skills, and contributed minimally, but I did bring a skill to the table that I do feel good about - my ability to network. I invited in two of my regular collaborators (among the few distant collaborations that have had some staying power), singer More J and producer and instrumentalist Amo. I have been amazed and impressed with how the two of them, particularly More J because of his lack of any formal training, have fit into a variety of world traditions in a way that sounded sophisticated and appropriate to me. Challenges I was more comfortable to avoid.

I have found the way this group has worked to be very comfortable, free of ego contests and unpleasant aesthetic conflicts that have characterized many of my collaborations. I credit the training and mindset of the ethnomusicology community, and the skilled facilitation of Dr. Frishkopf.

I hope the project continues for some time, even after the pandemic ends. I will continue to try to find a way to locate myself in the processes in a comfortable way, and invite other interesting collaborators.

Root: Matt and More J's Song

2.9 *More J*

Singer, composer, and produce
Nairobi, Kenya

My name is Maroa James, aka More J. I'm 29 years old now. My tribe's name is Kuria; it has a population of 500,000 people. My home city is called Kehancha. It has grown a lot since I was a child, but there is still a tradition of communal music making, such as *iritungu*. We have other music played in a modern way too.

I started singing when I was very young. I used to perform back in primary school, singing songs and acting in dramas. At school they gave me big parts, as I was very sharp in understanding songs and scripts quickly. But it brought me problems with my family.

I was 15 when I met a producer called Collins who realized my potential. He heard me when I went with a friend to his studio. He was there to record his first song that he had written. He paid the producer to record him just like other normal clients. It was my desire to see how a studio looks. I didn't expect to sing

He was stuck on putting more backups on his song, so the producer requested me to try singing. Wow! I never knew I could sing, though I loved music *so much*. He realized I can do it, and I got encouraged. I sang a few harmony parts, but I was really directed how to do it by Collins. I participated in more sessions for choirs and solo artists. I was not paid even a coin for these sessions, but I'm happy I gained experience.

I was with Collins for two years before I quit. I lost hope with music. Life was a burden to me and music wasn't paying. Realizing that my family needed my help, I had to concentrate on farming, charcoal burning, and school. It took a while, like another three years, before a friend of mine came again demanding for me to help him write a song that did well locally.

At 20 I went by myself to Nairobi to cater for the needs of my family. As I was stuck thinking on what to do, I went to the car wash with the intention of begging them to give me a little job, for some coins to feed me and for transportation back home. It wasn't a modern car wash, just a group of street boys who were washing buses that arrived from the rural areas. I secured the job of fetching water from a nearby tank.

I slept outside for a very long time in Uhuru park, in an empty field. Others went to steal at night but I went there to find a place to sleep. I didn't want any trouble in my life.

One day, on November 14, 2012, I got lucky. I posted a song on my Facebook. A lady called Trizah B⁶ heard my song and inboxed me. She was a production manager at Kenya broadcast and decided to give me an interview on their show. After the interview, I was really encouraged. She felt pity for me because of the very miserable life I was living and accommodated me in her house. How lucky was I to sleep in the house? I can't explain what they saw in me - it's a miracle.

She got several calls from other stations where I was invited because my story was very touching and inspiring. So that's where I started seeing a green light. I realized I can make it no matter how tough the situation is. I rebuilt my broken spirit to positivity that made me move again.

After the interview, one presenter, Lolani Kalu,⁷ was inspired and put me in a newspaper that went viral. As a result, I got a recording deal with Grandpa Records⁸ who signed me for three years. They took good care of a few things like housing and food stuffs, and also organized events for me to perform. My life came back again to my dream.

I got an advertising deal with the Nivea company, but my manager took all the money and forced me to do it for free. When I talked about my share he threatened me, and diverted that advert to Kenrazy,⁹

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/trizahbofficial/>

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/lolani>

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/naimetokagrandpa/>

⁹ <https://www.kenyans.co.ke/kenrazy>

another Kenyan musician. When the boss realized what my manager did, he cancelled the contract because he wanted me to do it, not anyone else.

I got a new recording deal with Pacho Records¹⁰, but their terms were worse than at Grandpa. I completely lost hope in music again, and decided to go back home to study accounting. That never went successfully; because of my humble background I was not able to raise money for school fees.

On the way I realized that dealing with some music producers is hard. So I decided to study music production, not in college but through experience. I learned by myself, how to program music and how to do some vocal mixing,

In 2013 I met Matt Love through a mutual friend, a Nigerian singer, on Facebook. It took a while for us to get started on a project, but we began writing songs together and recording at a distance, sending music files back and forth. Matt first had the idea to collaborate. I had not really done anything like that before—long distance collaboration on the internet—but I was willing to try. Since then we have collaborated dozens of times, and I have collaborated with others, a Nigerian artist Victor C. Jacobs I met on WhatsApp, and a south African guy called G Bass.

This year Matt invited me to join the TCO project. It has been an interesting process to work in different musical languages, Ukrainian folk songs for example.¹¹ Very new and interesting indeed. I can just blend in. I do voice acting so I'm very keen on pronunciation though I may not understand what they are saying. It's about being musical and passionate. I don't try to think of some kind of music you have heard before; it's a new experience that I enjoy most.

I worked on these songs with Amos Nyongesa (Amo) a Tanzanian producer who lives in Nairobi, Kenya, and Paul Haruna (Hpol), a Tanzanian producer who lives in Mwanza, Tanzania. It is very difficult to record in Africa, so working with a producer is essential. Producers need to be prepared to work in any popular western musical style - rock, jazz, country, etc., and also different African styles. Every tribe, clan or community has different tastes in music.

It was interesting to be exposed to styles that were new to me. Olga's Ukrainian songs sound like music from here. The TCO pieces I did with Arshdeep and Donna were also easier. I had trouble relating to Morteza's Kurdish piece. It sounded Arabic and yet not really Arabic. I related it with a kind of Indian and American fusion and coastal music... different genres in one. Once I hear any piece of music, I create a certain environment that fits the music at that specific season or period, or even try to build a futuristic music. Also I approach it by looking at the target audience.

The others were not harder, but it was a little bit technical. Some were more like folk songs of different traditions; others were like ambient or electronic music. I had to scratch my head to find the right approaches.

Working at a distance (as opposed to locally) one gains musical growth and experience, though it's a challenge: all ideas can't be fully exploited, unlike when you meet locally and exhaust all the ideas. The virus hasn't really changed my musical activities. I wasn't active in live performances before it hit, though I was putting a group together. Because there is no gathering anymore, that project has been suspended. I'm now happy to include long distance collaborations in the mix of my musical activity. I'm now pursuing music with the right team. That has been my prayer.

Root: Matt and More J's Song

2.10 *Behrang Nikaeen*

Doctoral student in ethnomusicology, University of Alberta, and performer on the Persian Tar (Karaj, Iran)

As Merriam said, "of all the functions of music, the communication function is perhaps least known and understood" (1964: 223). For me, this function was always an ambiguous one. However, this is the first time that I can explicitly feel it. For me, thousands of miles from other members around the world, online music-making through Zoom meetings can be discussed from different aspects. As a very new member of the *TranceCultural Orchestra* not only did I start to learn to work with devices and software for recording, editing and mixing music, but also thinking about and choosing and recording a "proper" piece of music from Persian classical music's repertoire raised certain questions in my mind, in regard to music systems, instruments and vocal and instrumental techniques that aimed to be combined with each other.

¹⁰ <https://nrg.radio/tag/pacho-records/>

¹¹ *Cherry Tree* ; *Mike and Mary*

As the output of the orchestra is fusion (in its broader meaning) musical pieces made by different musical instruments, from different musical systems, I would like to write about my previous experience with Iranian and Turkish musicians. Playing and performing Iranian and Turkish music, my friends and I always were concerned about “what should be combined”, “what can be combined” and “the right and musically meaningful combinations”.

For example, should we include a guitar in an Iranian ensemble? In the “global” context, orchestral musics from different cultures and contexts are facing each other closely, are meeting each other — musics that have formerly been considered incompatible and “forbidden” to be combined, at least among certain musicians (specifically, traditionalist ones) in my society. However, it should be noted that here, remote music-making, contrary to live or simultaneous music-making, lets musicians and contributors choose if they intend to play on a piece of recorded music or not. And this process may reveal how different cultures musically, and consequently emotionally, respond to each other.¹² I, myself, regardless of what traditionalist musicians may believe, think about the ways I can get closer, through my music, to others’ feelings, as reflected in their music.

Root: Avaz and Kereshme in Isfahan

2.11 Jane Zaiiane

*Amateur musician and school librarian with Edmonton Public Schools
(Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)*

Music is a communication which transcends linguistic and cultural barriers, and participating in the creation or presentation of live music with others produces a unique instance of collaboration at a moment in time. Yet, when collaborators cannot meet due to the pandemic, then subsequently start or shift to asynchronous collaboration, there are varied obvious challenges as well as unintended positive outcomes.

Having migrated from a weekly (in-person, pre-COVID) ensemble focusing on music from the Baroque era, to zooming in to a weekly on-line meeting to discuss music, technology, perspectives, and much more, I foundered in the ‘expectation’ to create music on my own, to contribute to ever-developing, collaborative group efforts, despite the opportunity, and the open, encouraging space to experiment and contribute. Where once I relied on cues, eye contact, and the collective tingly atmosphere in creating and performing live music, I adapted to a platform solely of technology, from the meetings, to the individual recordings, and finally the mixes, and my individual contribution to group efforts occurring alone in my home office.¹³ Aside from the immediate fundamentally different manner of collaboration, the process gave me both a new glimpse into building music, as well as the time to contemplate the most thoughtful and musically meaningful way to contribute to pieces. The Zoom meeting space, the small faces tiled across my screen, drew me weekly into another world, a more normal and predictable space than my daily reality. Participation in the TranceCultural Orchestra has filled an essential gap during COVID-19, where my usual family and work life has all been imbalanced, by permitting a safe and stimulating space to engage and explore in so many ways with music and musicians.

*Thig crìoch air an t-saoghal ach mairidh gaol is ceòl.*¹⁴

¹² I think this idea of “emotional response” could be connected to Michael’s remark (mentioned above) that some kind of “call and response” but maybe practiced in a slower version is going on here. Actually, the fact that there is no pressure on the musicians to respond to one another makes the “call and response” much freer and democratic than some live examples of improvisatory call and responses on a stage where the musicians are ‘expected’ to respond to their peers’ calls. - Morteza

¹³ I think this is a wonderful point. The comparison between live music performance and the way we make music in the TCO could be one of the main themes of this article. I remember we had some discussion about the meaning and new significance of listening to other people’s music in this new platform. Due to the physical absence of the musicians to whom (whose music) we’re listening, we are probably using our imaginations more than before. The “cues and eye contact” of live performance must be sought in the music itself, and the way sounds themselves invite us to respond or be silent. - Morteza

¹⁴ “The world may come to an end, but love and music will endure.” (Gaelic proverb)

2.12 *Morteza Abedinifard*

*PhD in Musicology, University of Alberta
(Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)*

What I personally find interesting with regard to the role music is playing during these pandemic times—particularly in the context of our Zoom-based meetings and distanced music-making—is the ways in which music offers some new functions (and therefore new significances). In my personal experience, making music during these crazy times helps to feel the presence of others even when they are physically absent. (I think I’m just repeating Michael’s notion of “social resonance.”) Listening to other musicians’ recordings and trying to respond musically to those recordings is quite similar to other ways of communication that we’re still using: letter and email correspondence, texting, etc. Although in the case of TCO, this mode of communication is musical, the basic idea of feeling the presence of other human beings through their cultural products (texts, planned artistic sounds, emojis, etc.) is very similar. This whole topic reminds me of Jean-Jaques Rousseau’s interesting idea about music, especially vocal music. He suggests that music announces the presence of other people. In the context of a comparison he makes between music and painting, he writes, “Painting is closer to nature and . . . music depends more on human art. Painting is often dead and inanimate; it can transport you to the depths of a desert; but as soon as vocal signs strike your ear, they proclaim a being similar to yourself; they are, so to speak, the organs of the soul, and if they also depict solitude for you, they tell you that you are not alone there. Birds whistle, man alone sings, and one cannot hear either a song or an instrumental piece without immediately saying to oneself: another sensitive being is present.” (Rousseau 1998, 326)

Drawing on Rousseau, one could argue that uniquely different from (and beyond) the ‘regular’ circumstances, the current pandemic situation has made the experience of sonorous presence notwithstanding the physical absence a unique feature of our music-making. It is through the musical or rather sonic communications that we listen to other ‘sensitive beings,’ and experience other souls.¹⁵

Roots: Ey mutrebe harifaan 1, 2, 3

2.13 *Allison Sokil*

*PhD candidate of ethnomusicology at the University of Toronto.
(Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)*

As Sara Ahmed avers, “A collective is what does not stand still but creates and is created by movement” (2017, 3). As a music collective, the TranceCultural Orchestra (TCO) facilitates movement at a time of forced stillness and silence (Donna), of geotemporal fixity (Behrang), of unprecedented isolation, overwhelm, and exhaustion (Arsh; Mehdi), as we continue to live with and through the cross-cultural phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic. As I contend with these new restrictions and their affective weight in my own life, remotely writing my PhD dissertation for the University of Toronto in Edmonton, Alberta, the TCO offers alternate, potentially transformative, forms of movement and connection through asynchronous processes of collective-building and music-making (Morteza). Through this routine of gathering weekly and composing ourselves and our sounds together while apart (Olga), the TCO creates potentiality (Nasim), an otherwise defined by Crawley as, “the ongoingness of possibility of things existing other than what is given, what is known, what is grasped” (2017, 24). It is a relief, however temporary, to imagine and construct otherwise worlds, sounds, and sites of collectivity that extend the liminality of musical performance into new forms and forums well beyond the pandemic.

2.14 *Donna Dawson*

*Multi-instrumentalist and MA in Ethnomusicology, University of Alberta
(Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)*

The “lockdown” which resulted from the COVID-19 Pandemic began for me on March 16, 2020 with the cancellation of University of Alberta classes. I had been to the campus on March 15, 2020 for a presentation and unbeknownst to me, this would be my last time on campus. I then scurried to complete

¹⁵ This could apply to Zoom meetings and the necessity of sound in the communications. Although video chats are more effective, it is quite common to close cams and communicate verbally only through voice/sounds.

a Master of Arts, Music, Ethnomusicology, via remote classes. I was thankful that my fieldwork regarding Community Music Making had been completed before lockdown caused the cancellation of the groups I was studying. Final class projects needed to be presented virtually. Complexities of Zoom resulted in my final presentations being void of music, which seemed ironic.

Once completed and virtual graduation occurred, I was suddenly struck by the silence. My university contacts, my research and communications assistant role and my community music-making friends all seemed on the verge of disappearing. The reality of the importance of these connections and to the music itself became very evident. When some of the community groups began meeting virtually, via Zoom¹⁶, I jumped at the opportunity to participate and support the groups, although we were not able to actually play together.

I was very excited to join the TranceCultural Orchestra to keep connected with scholars and friends. I was not sure what to expect, but have enjoyed the way the mandate of the group has evolved over the weeks as we adapt to the opportunities and challenges of virtual music making. Offering recorded musical contributions has taken some courage, as I am not a professional musician in the sense that most members of the group are. Like Behrang, I have learned a great deal about recording and am very excited to be learning about desktop audio workstation editing. There has been a lot of sharing about platforms and even an excellent tutorial provided by Ari. Not having previous experience with collaborative music production, I have been very much taken by the sonic synergy of the resultant tracks, when diverse instrumentation, both acoustic and electronic and vocals have been combined. Dr. Frishkopf and all members of the group have been very supportive, creating, as Jane states, “a safe and stimulating space.” I look forward to our virtual meetings each week. For me, the TranceCultural Orchestra has encouraged me to continue learning and to be creative. In the words of Charles Seeger “to make music is the essential thing - to listen is only accessory...The main question should be not ‘is it good music’ but ‘what is the music good for.’” (Yung and Rees 1999, 80).

Roots: E-Isufusion 1 and 2 ; Under the Bridge 1, and 2.

2.15 *Shruti Nair*

Indian classical vocalist, and doctoral student in ethnomusicology, University of Alberta (Edmonton, Alberta)

COVID-19 has created some unprecedented challenges for the music industry, primarily because musicians and artists have been significantly relying on physical social spaces for collaboration. On the contrary, the situation has triggered innovative and unconventional ways of music making and performances in recent times. A substantial increase in the number of remote music collaborations and live social media performances is being witnessed. Personally, being a performing Indian classical vocalist, my situation was no different and I also started exploring ways to remotely collaborate with other musicians.

Pivoting ETO's in-person meetings to virtual format was an excellent step to stay connected amid these isolation times. The Zoom meetings not only helped to continue the momentum but we, as a group, were also able to bring forward interesting ways for musical collaboration. I felt these sessions have been an encouragement for us to work on various musical pieces and thus, though remote, continued to be an avenue to learn about each other's cultural and creative perspectives.

As Sandra E. Trehub, Judith Becker, and Iain Morley have noted: “*Music making is or implies a social performance even when performed or listened to alone*” (2015, 1). Such virtual musical collaborations create a sense of social performance even during these isolation times. While collaborative music sessions confined to a physical social space facilitate mutual learning, as contributors, our creative thought process may be hindered by live interactions. The idea of contributing to a piece while working offline may sound like an unconventional jamming session; however, I felt this provided an individual space for each one of us to enhance creativity. Personally, for me it was indeed interesting to listen to a well-familiarized musical composition through other cultural and creative perspectives. For instance, I

¹⁶ I think within the new context, Zoom or any other similar video chat technology is definitely an essential part of this happening; without “seeing” each other, the entire experience would have been different. What is fascinating here—and I think I’m repeating my point in the response to Arsh—is that we’re not using Zoom or other technologies in addition to regular in-person meetings, but we’re using them as ‘the regular’ meeting platform. - Morteza

never imagined that a Malayalam (South Indian language) film song which I chose to sing (Moham Kondu) could get such a blended jazz/bluesy touch.

An interesting reflection for me about TCO meetings is how we emphasize the “process” of collaboration, and not specific “targets”. Our conversations have not been only about music making, but also exchanging thoughts, ideas, interests, which is certainly inspiring in unique ways.

The pandemic has also stagnated most of our professional routines. Cancellations of my planned live concerts and vocal teaching sessions was disheartening. However, TCO virtual sessions provided me an opportunity to stay connected with like-minded individuals and keep up-to-date with my profession. As Arsh mentioned, we may not be personally connected to each member, but as a group, we share a special camaraderie.

2.16 *Nasim Ahmadian*

*PhD candidate in ethnomusicology and Santur player,, University of Alberta
(Edmonton, Alberta, Canada)*

A Musical Déjà Vu in Times of Pandemic: Experiencing the Mosaic-formed Musical Creation and Spaces of Mobility by the TranceCultural Orchestra (TCO) during the Social Immobility of COVID-19

Pandemic limitations have ironically defined new forms of interaction and musical collective experience which probably would not have come into focus otherwise. Among these experiences is the quality and ‘the path’ of the music-creation process which I found unique in the virtual collaborative setting—that is in Dr. Michael Frishkopf’s concept of the “social resonance” of the TranceCultural Orchestra during the Pandemic.

Listening to many versions of the music tracks which had been prepared, arranged, mixed, and shared in our culturally diverse group, I find a new virtual space of musical creation which highlights a multiplicity of musical and mixing possibilities, an indefinite definition of a final cut, and the contributors’ unpredictability of the musical fruit coming out of the primary track or piece. For TCO members, this virtual space of musical creation opens the gate to the new “imagined and constructed worlds” (Allison) through the “different manner of collaboration” (as Jane described). The urge for music-making—or rather—“musicking” in Christopher Small’s words (1998), to overcome ‘the silence’ (Donna) through the “cultural linkage and passions” as Arsh reflects, gives an extra space to the artists to listen, to self-discover, to create, to rediscover and to finalize.

As an Iranian musician and ethnomusicologist, my observation of this multilayered and multistage musical creation intertwines with my visual memory of Persian mosaics and tiling artistry, which acts in the perception of this sonic phenomenon: each solo piece/model is open to the listener’s interpretation while it stands as a single piece of mosaic on a larger canvas wall. The ‘listener’ is then in the role of another ‘performer and creator’ who sees that same mosaic in a different ‘imagined picture’ and creates a related but individualized mosaic layer to complete the picture.

This relationship can be of various types, e.g., contrasting, ornamenting, elaborative, complementary, or even spontaneous sonic touches in various arranged and exported tracks—from the original root track—which are internally and simultaneously affecting each other and the perception of the original model. The experience may partly resemble a collective improvisation. However, the unique experiential process in a broader view, which is the result of multiple, albeit non pre-designed, arrangements and recorded lines lies under the ‘recurring space of a central theme’ or the original root, which becomes the leading role or ‘the key mosaic-design’ within the designs of multiple shifting mosaic-spaces (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The tilework design of Iwan (Eivān) in The Shah Mosque (17th Century Safavid Era), Isfahan, Iran. Photo by A.Davey entitled as “Geometric Tiles at the Eivan's Apex: Masjed-e Shah Mosque, Esfahan, Iran” shared on flickr, permitted for sharing/adapting by the approval of creative Commons license, minor edits by the author for the purpose of demonstration in this article.

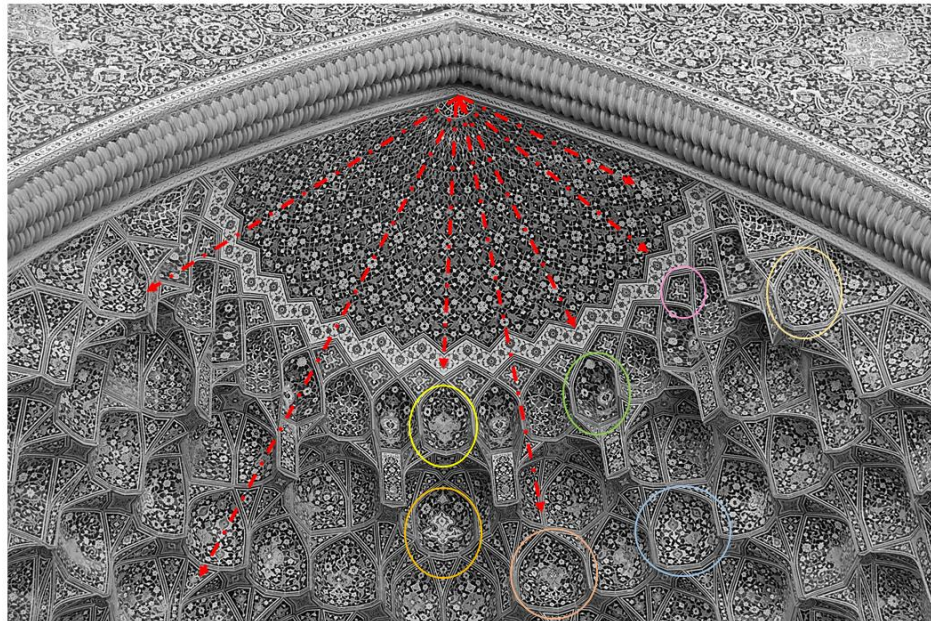


In this variable self-generative space, each exported track images a new scene which adds to the musical adventure while ‘revisiting’ of the main theme or model is still recognized to be a *déjà vu* as a unifying element (Figure 5). Therefore, many rolling mosaic spaces start circulating around the same center while all of them are unpredictable for the original creator and other contributors until being finalized and exported (Figure 6). Accordingly, every listener is also the performer, creator, and sometimes the arranger of the piece, and at the same time a new storyteller who experiences a mobile setting of various musical roles and interpretive spaces; an “improvisatory form of storytelling” (in Jill’s words).

Figure 5. The emergence and re-emergence of the central model/track



Figure 6. Revisiting the main theme, the multiple rolling mosaic spaces circulate around the same centre



In my exploration of the TCO project, there are three types of interpretive views shaping the mosaic form of interactive musical creation:

1. The view of the creator
2. The view of the contributor
3. The view of the arranger

Yet, the perspective of each view is variable or overlapping with the other(s) through the experience and re-experience of listening based on the fluid setting by other contributors. There is a regenerating cycle of musical mobility (the flexible texture) around the core of a unified sample (the root track) which symbolically represents the social interaction of music making around the core of a unified immobility as a result of the pandemic. In this way, the musical collaboration enacts a variable experience of creativity and interaction which builds a new artistic and human space in circulation regardless of the social and geographical distance, personal challenges, ‘ideological isolation’ (Behrang’s reflection) and technological gaps.

In his chapter on culture and musical creativity, Jason Toynbee critiques the romantic, structuralist, and post-structuralist notions on creativity and concludes that “creativity in music needs to be reconceived as a cultural process rather than a heroic act [i.e. the romantic ideology on creativity]”. He emphasizes that new music is made by ‘social authors’ who work in networks, collaborating with critics, audiences and other active voices. Social authorship thus “implies a social semiotics in that creation is a matter of selecting from a pool of coded voices that are shared within a musical community” (Toynbee 2003, 110). In the case of TCO in the time of pandemic, the virtual space of collaboration, the centrality of the pandemic situation, the multicultural scope of the project, the engagement of other musicians as the colleagues and initial audience as well as the final (albeit virtual) audience form the pool of semiotics in which the musicians decide—although quickly or spontaneously at times—upon choosing their own line of mosaic design and coded voices, which circulate in connection with other mosaics in the experience of a thematic déjà vu.

3. Epilogue

We close with a few final thoughts and questions from our members:

Morteza: During these hard times imposed on us due to the pandemic, and in the absence of basic conditions under which conventional communications or rehearsals are possible, TCO musicians have not only tried to overcome these limitations and found ways in which music-making could become possible, they have also expanded their horizons about what music means to them, why it matters, and how it can provide them with new sonic capacities to shape a novel form of social life. The use of technology and the necessity of skills that under regular circumstances seemed to be a luxury are important aspects of this new experience for musicians that are now communicating discursively and musically despite the social distancing.

Donna: As we move forward, I hope the group can continue to meet remotely to be a forum to check in and with each other and to foster the extraordinary musical collaborations which have begun to develop. And I am curious about how the group will evolve in new directions in order to respond to community needs.

Jill: Our music and stories change pace and genre in the same asynchronous rhythmic journey that the pandemic has taken us. We've found new ways to connect, and I hope that we continue to explore these avenues in the future as our uncertainty turns to a sense of security and stability once again.

Nasim: How is the new collaborative virtual space of music creation forming our social, musical, and cultural 'metamorphosis'? When we stand to look back after the pandemic, how will we find ourselves as 'transformed' in the experience of listening, performing, creating, collaborating, interpreting, and self-defining?

Jane: The extraordinary online method of development (especially for those in TCO before it went online) and unusual and unpredictable outcomes of our musical collaboration reaffirms the certainty that the creation of music is still a single instance and event that can never be recreated. It remains a unique instance, despite being recorded and mixed. Being part of that single event of artistic creation keeps us connected, beyond the zooms, tracks, mixes, and Google Drive.

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Appendix: Synchronous typographical resonance

The following synchronous conversation unfolded during preparation of this article, thanks to Google Docs' simultaneous editing feature. We preserve it as an instance of a physically distanced discursive resonance dynamic, frozen in time:

Allison: Every Monday at noon, like clockwork, I open the Zoom link and am met with faces that have become increasingly familiar over the past six months. We laugh at Olga's cat eating a cucumber, Arsh sips tea from a tiny fluted glass, and Regula quietly enjoys her sandwich, while we work through music-making, technology, and sociality in an intensely virtual world. These connections, however tenuous and distorted and glitchy, are a comfort; a community. My hope is that we continue to hold space for these intimate moments of connection, of music-making and learning together while apart, once the constant movement and motion of contemporary life resumes.

Olga: i see you, Allison ;)hahaha my cat is so excited you are bringing her into the academic journal! We are so progressive, man! I guess it must be the most innovative and the most academic way to chat at all) it is 12:04 am in Frankfurt am Main, hahaha) i can't stop laughing. Maybe we should write about this new experience?! I miss the smileys)) shall we live it here?! Or, it will make the article to be rejected)Yeah, me too) Thank you, Allison. This is what we should do then ;) I wish you a fantastic evening! It was very nice to informally chat with you in this paper ;) you too!

Allison: Hi Olga! Lol. ME TOO!!! His onscreen time is always appreciated ;) Right? What time is it there right now? It is 4:14 pm in Edmonton. I feel like we should leave this convo for everyone to see—this is part of the wonders of what we are doing! Yes, this will be the test. LOL. I feel the same. It is a bit haunting, writing and seeing you writing as I am writing. New definition of collaborative article, I think. This is very novel. I, too, wish we had emojis! I think it might bring up some interesting things we haven't even thought about yet. And Michael might enjoy reading it! I am an optimist. It will be an opening for further/future dialogue. Now, *that* is a dream. The process would be a lot less isolating, that's for sure. I agree. Absolutely, in real time. I like it! I think this is an excellent idea. Yes! I am going to go make dinner, but it was lovely meeting you in our co-authored-article Google doc! Thank you, sleep well and take care, friend. Goodbye!

Olga: I believe that the lockdown gave us a chance to reconstruct, transform and adapt our collaborative approach to the current situation in a way that enabled us to strengthen our project even more for the future. Paradoxically, it feels that despite the distance and isolation, we became even closer to each other since zoom helped us to connect while physically staying distanced in our own private spaces. As Allison picturesquely described above, this type of connection enabled us to kind of virtually enter the remote areas of the group members' homes and to witness some elements of the context from their daily lives. These processes, although inspired by a virtual action, are genuine and make us mentally closer to others in real life.