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Unwanted Musical Residues

Composing music is creating an intervention in reality through an organized sound event with a specific time frame. Although the majority of my works are still often intended to be experienced within the context of a traditional concert, where interventions take place in concert halls with the help of music instruments and trained musicians, it is important to me that I am not always limited to these tools. Thus, some of my pieces can be performed outside the stage and in the middle of the city, using different objects, such as cars and bicycles (*the Q and A piece*¹), smartphones (*Still Life With Clock*, *\com.app.data*, *Menuet4phoneS*, *Upgrade*, *Vessels (160935km)*), ear muffs (*((mno.go))*), kitchen items and noisy toys (*Zabuna na sceni.01*, *Zabuna na sceni.02*), dental floss and metal hook (*pneumothorax* (,nju:məv 'θɔ:ræks)), without educated musicians, (*Menuet4phoneS*), with the audience as performers (*the Q and A piece*, *Menuet4phoneS*, *Zabuna na sceni.01* and *02*), combined with multimedia elements, such as video projection (*((mno.go))*, *Vessels (160935km)*, *\com.app.data*, *Upgrade*, *Zabuna na sceni.01*), theater (*the Q and A piece*, *Upgrade*, *Zabuna na sceni.01* and *02*), or further away from the traditional context of its presentation – in the form of three videos, opened in three tabs on the YouTube platform (*Stay there.*).

No matter how it is performed, presented, or whatever means it uses, I believe that every musical design has the intention to add and change something in our reality during the small time of our life, which we lend to it. Therefore, it always serves us with a new experience, whether it does so subtle, intense or aggressively, depends on many factors. In this age of infinite pluralities, we have the opportunity to encounter the most diverse forms of organized temporal affairs that use sound as their primary substance. Each of these time-measured-sound-sculptures is formed out of a music matter that moves inside of its own specific frame, which we discover during our exposure.

In those instances, while short segments of a lifetime are sacrificed for the experience of a new composition, present moment receives a filter with which it changes, but does not get suspended. Immediate reality continues to exist in collaboration

¹ See the List of mentioned works in the end of text for more details.

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with the creation and in a dialogue with its discrete gaps. These unplanned, unscripted events occur in the form of secondary sounds that accompany a performance, and they can be: squeaking of strings while changing finger positions, pressing a pedal, noise in the room, noise outside of the room, whispers in the audience, notification bings, a mistake of the artist, a problem with speakers, moving of the headphone cable, etc. These intrusive audible distractions shape the ever-present layer of a composition that allows the unplanned, live realm to enter into its building blocks. Proofs of current existence that are not planned in the work, but are caused during its execution can be defined as the musical left-over material or the musical negative. All noisy slips that are not a part of the planned and desired score of a piece, but happen, and are created because of its contours, I label as *unwanted musical residues*. My experiments are often initiated by enlarging the frame on a tiny sound gestures that live in music's residues, and empowering them with the status of the main character in the reality filters that I offer, that is, during the performances of my makings.

In one of my recent works, *Best of fibers* (2022),² the soft noises that the instruments make during the process of obtaining their tones become largely amplified. In this way, spectrums of different delicate textures and obscure combinations of mixed, barely audible hisses become magnified in front of us, and develop the whole piece. At the same time, the idea of a successfully produced tone represents a forbidden territory, and the tone eventually becomes an occasional, accidental, unplanned occurrence, during the process of playing different types of pre-tone-making-sounds. The achieved tone, is unwanted, and can only be an accidental error, a residue material during this specific intervention in reality of mine.

This kind of reversal of roles in the traditional status of sound matters is also found in the composition *((mno.go))* (2021).³ Contrary to the previously described work, here I intervene in the experience of reality through extremely-loud and distorted tones, which are not desirable to hear, because they potentially lead to hearing damage. It is performed at a volume of 120 decibels, and both - the ensemble and the audience wear ear muffling headphones that protect against industrial noise. The piece is consummated through semi-suspended hearing while its flow brings different shifts of slowly forming sound-clouds and loud hits, that are felt as physical vibrations in bodies and objects in space. Because of the ear protectors, professional and refined ears of musicians, necessary for their talented, creative performance, are prevented from working in their full capacity, which further changes their approach and contact with the instrument.

² *Best of fibres* (2022) for flute, oboe, clarinet, violin, viola and cello (commissioned by the Riot ensemble, premiered at Tzlil Meudcan Festival in Tel Aviv, July 7, 2022).

³ *((mno.go))* (2021) for amplified ensemble, video, electronics and ear-protectors (commissioned by the Black Page Orchestra with the support of the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung, Musikprotokoll festival and the Austrian Ministry of Culture, premiered at Musikprotokoll festival in Graz, October 8, 2021).



Figure 1: The Black Page Orchestra performance of *((mno.go))* at Musikverein in Vienna, photo by Igor Ripak (March 17, 2022)

In addition to developing works from the residue material of the score ingredients in stage performance, with great enthusiasm and on several occasions, I experimented with the use of substances that are in general undesirable in the entire classical music discourse (*the Q and A piece*, *Zabuna na sceni.01* and *02*). More precisely, the everyday world outside the concert hall: city noise, pass-byers, and vehicles. In *the Q and A piece* (2021)⁴ six professional musicians play three saxophones, three accordions, two cars, one bicycle, joined with random pass-byers, in the middle of the city. Notated material is extracted from the textures of the city bustle, hums, mechanics, sirens, voices, and murmurs, as well as occasional, not quite defined, uncertain, and hazy melodic lines. Pass-byers, who want to get involved, watch a YouTube video with instructions on how to make certain sounds, and answer the questions the video asks them, inscribing their existence into this specific performance. The dramaturgy of this intervention has a solid formal construction that the ensemble follows on its synchronized video scores and packs into a some kind of street theater. Theatric element follows through three changes of the scene, starting from a spontaneous appearance of the group, playing around two cars, to the moment when all the musicians play inside the closed cars, only to leave and walk away in unknown directions. Thus, the composition resolves through a dialogue with everyday life, even without the necessary active participation of the audience. It is amplifying and reshaping city life, in front of it – the city, live in real time. This work presents a contemporary music theater built from all the elements that are normally thrown out of concert halls and from which they are protected by sound isolation.

⁴ *the Q and A piece* (2021) for a bicycle, two cars, ensemble and pass-byers on YouTube in a public location (premiered by the participants of Darmstädter Ferienkurse in Darmstadt, 10.08.2021).



Figure 2: Performance of *the Q and A piece* at Darmstädter Ferienkurse, photo by Kristof Lemp

The most common rule at concert performances is that great expressiveness, deep presence, and live energy are expected from music artists, which helps to convey the subjective experience of the score to the audience. However, expressiveness does not necessarily have to be related to physical movement and facial expressions, nor is energy tension and intense dramaturgical charge created only by piling up events in the scene. Another search for intervention in reality, with material that is not officially a desirable part of stage performance, led me to test an experiment in which the musicians are barely moving. The work *Still Life With Clock* (2021)⁵ is a happening, reminiscent of a live sound installation in space, paying homage to the art of live statues. Two performers on saxophone and snare drum, sit mostly motionless and expressionless while hiding the movements that are making sounds on the instruments. The noises they are secretly making are cooperating with vibrations and alarms coming from a phone on a plastic suitcase between them. The same title of the piece, also belongs to a large number of paintings in the world, giving a hint that it could be a static visual. The musicians are dressed in the characteristic suits of Gilbert and George, to remind and pay homage to these contemporary artists, who work in domains of visual art and live performance.

⁵ *Still Life With Clock* (2021) for saxophone, snare drum, smartphone and a suitcase (commissioned by the Duo Dubois, supported by SOKOJ, to be premiered at Spazio Musica festival in Cagliari, October 2022).



Figure 3: Duo Dubois with the setup for the work *Still Life With Clock*, photo collage by Maja Bosnić

With the intention of presenting contemporary everyday humanity in the place of artists on stage, I created an experiment in which I challenge the role and realistic representation of musicians in general. In the composition *Upgrade* (2017),⁶ performers play instruments with only one hand, while looking at the smartphones they are holding in the other. Hence, the work grows into a small scale opera for one-handed musicians, with illuminated faces from looking at their phones, and surprisingly vast and peculiar soundscape of impaired instrument playing.

⁶ *Upgrade* (2017) for voice and chamber orchestra with smartphones (premiered by the participants of Darmstädter Ferienkurse in Darmstadt, July 26, 2018).



Figure 4: Association Zabuna perform *Upgrade* at the Belgrade Philharmonic Hall (July 27, 2019), photo by Milica Nikolić

If it is natural that musicians, just like most modern people, are in touch with smartphones, then why should smartphones not become another instrument that they master just as skillfully? The fact that phones are seen as a potential interruption during concerts qualifies them as another discarded, avoided residue material of the music world, that I keep on adopting. In the experiment *\com.app.data* (2018)⁷ artists on stage use their instruments as much as their smartphones, which during this composition use applications to produce sounds, conduct musicians, record parts of the immediate performance, and play it back live via bluetooth speakers. The piece develops through a mix of acoustic and artificial sounds, that at times unify and oppose, synchronize and sparse, layer up and switch off.

⁷ *\com.app.data* (2018) ever-changing piece for two groups of musicians with phone apps (first version premiered by Saša Mirković and Vladimir Blagojević at Timsonia festival in Timisoara, November 19, 2018; current version premiered by Klangforum Wien at Grypario Cultural Center in Mykonos, June 15, 2019).



Figure 5: Pages in the score of *\com.app.data* (June, 2019), photo by Milica Nikolić

From this brief review of a few compositions, I hope it becomes clear why I am naturally interested in concepts and phenomena that have some degree of inadequacy in them. Finding off roads where I could go astray, triggers obsessive motivation that helps me devote myself to the process of initiating and developing a new piece of music. By constantly questioning, examining and reversing the accustomed roles of the established procedures in the domains of sound creation and performance, I keep on discovering insufficiently explored worlds of the unwanted musical residues. These audible discards are something unique and special to me, and I am happy to give them the leading roles.

List of mentioned works

((mno.go)) (2021) for amplified ensemble, video, electronics and ear-protectors (commissioned by the Black Page Orchestra with the support of the Ernst von Siemens Musikstiftung, Musikprotokoll festival and the Austrian Ministry of Culture, premiered at Musikprotokoll festival in Graz, October 8, 2021).

\com.app.data (2018) ever-changing piece for two groups of musicians with phone apps (first version premiered by Saša Mirković and Vladimir Blagojević at Timsonia festival in Timisoara, November 19, 2018; current version premiered by Klangforum Wien at Grypario Cultural Center in Mykonos, June 15, 2019)

Best of fibres (2022) for flute, oboe, clarinet, violin, viola and cello (commissioned by the Riot ensemble, premiered at Tzllil Meudcan Festival in Tel Aviv, July 7, 2022).

Menuet4phoneS (2019) interactive performance for audience with smartphones composed in collaboration with Justyna Stasiowska, Juan Olaya, Hasan Mashni and Tomy Herseta (premiered at the CTM 2019: Adaptation Hacklab Finale at HAU2 in Berlin, February 3, 2019)

pneumothorax (*,nju:məv'θɔ:ræks*) (2020) for soprano saxophone and piano (commissioned by Belgrade SAXperience, premiered by Duo Alloy at Yamaha Center in Vienna, September 30, 2020)

Still Life With Clock (2021) for saxophone, snare drum, smartphone and a suitcase (commissioned by the Duo Dubois, supported by SOKOJ, to be premiered at Spazio Musica festival in Cagliari, October 2022).

the Q and A piece (2021) for a bicycle, two cars, ensemble and pass-byers on YouTube in a public location (premiered by the participants of Darmstädter Ferienkurse in Darmstadt, October 10, 2021).

unity.projections [001=>2] (2020) for accordion and cello (commissioned by Branko Džinović and premiered by Branko Džinović and Aleksandar Iatković at the Belgrade Philharmonic Concert Hall in Belgrade, March 10, 2020)

Upgrade (2017) for voice and chamber orchestra with smartphones (premiered by the participants of Darmstädter Ferienkurse in Darmstadt, July 26, 2018)

Vessels (160935km) (2020) for amplified harp, smartphone and video (commissioned by Stef Van Vynckt, premiered at De Graaf kunstentplek in Ghent, December 12, 2021)

Zabuna na sceni.01/Donesi svoju buku! (2010) for soundtrack, video, amplified ensemble, noisemakers and audience participation (premiered by Zabuna Association at the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, September 28, 2010)

Zabuna na sceni.02/Kako ti kažeš! (2012) for soundtrack, video, amplified ensemble, noisemakers and audience participation (premiered by Zabuna Association at the Student Cultural Centre in Belgrade, January 18, 2012)