AEC European Platform for Artistic Research in Music (EPARM) 2024
Academy of Music, University of Ljubljana (Ljubljana, Slovenia)

Not-the-L8Nite Performance

"Oscillations":
An ekphrastic take on Schubert-Müller's Winterreise

Related to the thematic axis: **Our relationships with repertoires old and new explored through Artistic Research**

This proposal discusses the artistic research process behind "Oscillations / Winterreise," an ekphrastic re-imagination of the classic song cycle "Winterreise," originally composed by Franz Schubert with poetry by Wilhelm Müller. The project consists of two parts: a sound installation and a multimedia concert piece involving a male baritone or mezzosoprano, piano, an electroacoustic soundtrack, visual elements, and dynamic lighting and projection design. These two works are complementary but function as two independent works of art. For the Not-the-L8Nite performance, **I propose the concert piece "Oscillations (i)".**

The themes of "Winterreise," such as isolation, loneliness, existential questioning, and the search for meaning amidst desolation, mirror contemporary societal issues, such as ephemeral and transient human connections, mental health concerns, and the alienation stemming from our fast-paced digital era. The project reimagines these emotional landscapes from the cycle through a contemporary lens, reflecting on the relevance of these themes in our current society. At the same time, with its methodology rooted in artificial intelligence and deep learning models as tools for art creation, "Oscillations / Winterreise" aspires to put the focus on inquiries related to the intersection of human cognition and the digital replication of humanistic traits, in the times where powerful AI models are emerging and are becoming more and more integrated into our daily life. The composition seeks to interrogate foundational aspects of emotional construction, such as *what* are the building blocks of emotions, *what* imbues a voice with the capacity to convey feeling, *what* makes a poem as inherently human and ultimately, *whether* our pattern of associative thinking and our subconscious mental flow differ essentially from the vector spaces represented in a deep learning model.

The main compositional methodology employs machine learning methods such as Markov chains and neural networks trained on the original poetry and melodies, to generate new but related melodic and poetic material based on *predictions*. My compositional process investigates possibilities to balance human control with computational generation by combining machine learning with rule-based methods, with the goal of enabling a more refined control of the generative processes, that might lead, for example, to a *reversal* in the process of prediction, for example by converting random melodic sequences back into

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recognizable melodies, or constructing semantic trajectories that go from *meaningful* to *meaningless* and viceversa, or exploring *gray* zones in between.

The sound installation heightens this experience by creating a digitized soundscape reflective of the wanderer's internal turmoil, with deconstructing sound elements transitioning into more abstract forms. In addition, the installation incorporates the generation of new poetry using verses from "Winterreise" as prompts for OpenAI's ChatGPT. The resulting text is vocalized by AI-generated emotional voices from platforms like AWS Polly and Microsoft Azure, with interactions facilitated through API calls in real time.

Juan Sebastian Vassallo
University of Bergen (Bergen, Norway)
Juan.Vassallo@UiB.no

Juan Sebastián Vassallo is an Argentinian composer based in Bergen, Norway. He holds a master's degree in music perception and cognition and is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Artistic Research at the University of Bergen. His current artistic research aims to explore possibilities for human-computer interaction in art creation, encompassing points of intersection between computer-assisted composition, artificial intelligence, algorithmic poetry, generative visuals, and live electronics. In the last few years, some of his compositions have been awarded in national and international competitions in France, China, and Argentina. Some of his past artistic projects have received support from the UNESCO and Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI).

Recording of the piece "Oscillations (i)" for female voice, piano, electronics and visuals: https://youtu.be/OWPVtIxfByM