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(Re-)processing Research: musical practice as both source and target domain for artistic research in music.

Phra Abhai Mani: A Musical Adaptation of a Thai Epic for Clarinet Ensemble.

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Abstract:

This paper describes the process leading to a musical adaptation of the iconic Thai Epic: 'Phra Abhai Mani' for clarinet ensemble. The project is conducted by Yos Vaneesorn, a clarinet performer and composer assisted by Jean-David Caillouët, a composer and sound artist. Joining their respective skill, they created a new musical composition based on the Thai Literature classic and inspired by the study of the northern folk oboe, the "*pī nae*," an instrument drawn from Dr. Yos Vaneesorn's birthplace, Chiang Mai in the north of Thailand.

Introduction & Project Outline:

Two poles of focus dictate the process leading to the creation of this research based composition:





At one end is the study of the *pī nae*. This provides the classically trained clarinetist Yos Vaneesorn with a new set of challenges regarding performance techniques on his own specialist woodwind instrument. Although there are many similarities between the two woodwind instruments, it is the dissimilarities both in sound production and playing style that create real opportunities to re-assess the clarinet performance techniques.



At the other end is the epic novel 'Phra Abhai Mani' by the famous Thai writer

Sunthorn Phu. The text provides a narrative framework from which emotional, lyrical and aspectual content can be extracted to form the basis of a new musical composition. This literary work is extremely popular in Thailand and uses the "pī" (Thai Oboe) at the centre of its story line.

The story line of the epic novel parallels the outline of the project discussed here; Yos Vaneesorn like Phra Abhai Mani himself embarks on a journey to expand and enrich his musical vocabulary and reconnect with the musical culture of his native land.

It was decided from the outset to involve instruments from the entire clarinet family. Choosing to work solely with clarinets would challenge the performers to develop a sound palette with enough sonic and musical variety to encompass the full scale of the narrative. This focus allowed us to look deep inside the possibilities of the instrument.

Considering the aesthetic parameters of the piece, it was decided to create music that would balance classical structures with more 'organic' musical gestures informed by the Lanna (Northern Thai) musical stylings. Electronic processing is also used to expand the acoustic palette of the ensemble and broaden the scope of the music and also acts as a musical metaphor for the fantasy element inherent to the epic poem.

Do I integrate findings of my artistic research in my own artistic practice – including teaching practice - , and if so, how?

The resulting performances of the piece involving clarinet students of Yos Vanesorn clearly demonstrates direct applications of performance techniques and musical stylings directly inspired and derived from this research.

Who are the peers I am relating to in my own artistic research project, and how do I relate to them? And what is the impact of this relationship with peers?

This musical research questions the very essence of western classical musical aesthetic in the context of Thai music. It proposes new avenues for a meaningful musical reconciliation of two musical worlds. It has already inspired other Thai music practitioners to reconsider the ways in which they approach their local cultures.

Can I provide convincing examples of artistic research where it is very obvious that the artistic material itself makes the argument?

The performance of this research project included a mix of documentation of the process itself interwoven with musical statements clearly describing how the contours and stylings of the music were directly informed by the findings of the research. Through this engaged performance format, the audience becomes an active musical witness of the evolution of the musical vocabulary developed throughout the project.

The video links attached here should help demonstrate those ideas:

<https://vimeo.com/121358835>

<https://vimeo.com/105755043>

<https://vimeo.com/104946810>

These versions are in Thai only but a more complete documentary piece including recent performances of the final piece will be released shortly.

Can I provide any evidence from my own experience that music, and our general understanding of it, can be transformed by the outputs of artistic research? And if so, are the effects of such transformation the same as, or different from, those of a purely artistic performance?

This project was a real transformation process for Yos Vanesorn as a researcher, performer and educator. The outcome had tremendous impact on the awareness of sound production techniques, the contours and other perceptual elements of music making that were directly influenced by the traditional music that formed the basis of this research. A combination of the poetic and literary elements combined with the field work contributed to an artistic outcome which wouldn't have been possible should this research had been approached solely from a musical angle.

This in its turn had direct implications on the pedagogy that is now used for training and educating clarinet students at Silpakorn University. A new research is now being completed and forms the basis for a series of educational pieces for clarinet choir. This is directly inspired by the initial project which is described here. The main outcome of which is to use listening and aural communication as a valuable tool to contribute to the musical training of classical instrumentalists.