

How Pandemic Inspired Us to Make Music for and in Zoom

Nino Jvania

Vano Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire

Main topics

- COVID-19 pandemic and music education
- Teaching music online
- Performing music online
- Performing music online in ensemble

Challenge/problem - objective

- Introducing TMA
- TMA is Tbilisi State Conservatoire Contemporary Music Student Ensemble and the study course which is led by Associate Professor Nino Jvania. Its setting changes every year, which allows students of different departments - singers and instrumentalists who select this course - to get acquainted with the trends of contemporary music performance. Number of its participants varies between 30 and 60. Every year the ensemble gives concerts, at which it introduces the listeners to the works of contemporary Georgian and foreign composers of various generations. Concerts are an inseparable part of the educational process.



Challenge/problem - objective

- When the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, TMA was preparing the concert program. Online music-making became an inseparable part of our teaching activities. Though, unlike some of the leading world conservatories and music academies, Tbilisi Conservatoire did not have expensive programs allowing musicians to make music online with a minimum of sound distortion and delays. We had to use Viber, WhatsApp, Facebook, Google Meet, and Zoom applications. Music transmitted via those applications, especially when the internet connection quality is not at its best, transforms itself into noise-music to such an extent, that one can hardly recognize it. Especially problematic (compared to individual lessons with one student) became **teaching ensemble subjects** as this involved more than 2 participants with bad internet connections. The process was quite depressing and annoying, not only for students but for us, teachers too.
- Though, for me this annoying process served as a source of inspiration that helped me to achieve my **objective - to lead this particular course in a way that teaching Contemporary Music Ensemble online would really make sense!**

Methodology of implementation

- When I was practicing the prelude by Claude Debussy “What the West Wind Saw” with my piano class student, I came up with an interesting idea. The sound distortions caused by online music-making brought this prelude closer to the essence of the wind - it literally became **windy**.



- As an expert on contemporary music, I am quite open to all kinds of noises that became a part of music starting from the second half of the 20th century. And I realized that the composer of the pandemic period could also compose music representing the essence of our age, music to be performed **only using online resources**.

Methodology of implementation

- I commissioned online works first to **Professor Reso Kiknadze**, and later - to **Associate Professor Eka Chabashvili** - both composers teaching at TSC. As a result, TMA performed two works composed **exclusively for online music-making** that made all participant students happy and fulfilled in the depressing lockdown period. Above all, Georgian music repertoire was enriched by 2 outstanding works I am especially proud of.



Methodology of implementation

- Reso Kiknadze's "Metachronous Coronation Mass" for 51 musicians was composed during March-June 2020, performed and recorded on June 6, 2020. We used Zoom to record the members of the ensemble. Some fragments were recorded separately, with three conductors conducting either single performers or groups. Later, Reso Kiknadze used separate recordings to create the final version of the piece that exists only in digital format.

Full Score

Metachronous Coronation Mass for 51 musicians

Reso Kiknadze

The image shows a page from a musical score. On the left side, there is a list of 51 musicians, each with a small icon and a vertical line indicating their part. The right side of the page is mostly blank, suggesting the musical notation is either on the reverse side or is very faint. The page is titled "Metachronous Coronation Mass for 51 musicians" and is by Reso Kiknadze. A box labeled "Full Score" is in the top left corner.

Methodology of implementation

- Eka Chabashvili's "Buzzing On Zoom (Aleatoric Verses)" was composed in August-October 2020. We recorded it directly using the Zoom application. The main idea of this aleatoric piece (aleatoric music is music in which some elements of the composition are left to chance, or some primary element of a composed work's realization is left to the determination of its performer) was to make every single member of the ensemble an active participant in the composition process. Chabashvili gives instructions to musicians on how to use the score to create their own verses that singers later have to recite melodramatically, and instrumentalists have to compose melodies reflecting their own verses. The whole material was rehearsed intensively and then performed in one Zoom session on December 23, 2020, that was recorded and published without even being edited. The most interesting part is that all the sound distortions became an inseparable part of the music. Thus, the most annoying part of music-making served for us as a source of inspiration.

ლექსი ფინი
(იკითხება წელი, თუნდაც რამდენჯერმე, სანამ არ დამთავრდება ნაწარმოებში)

წელი ნაშთითი მოუღებები ანაზღად ქურას,
მღვარი ჩრდილი სხლტება ფერმჭროლ სახეზე...
აშკვიატა პიტეის პაზეი
ქაზალ სხულში აუღერებს აზრებს...
უქმის დანდებში დახლადარებუა
ვის ნაპრალიდან გადმოღერილი მკრალი შუტა,
როგორც ნაღები, მიუხის კალიებს დავდინება თეთრი ღაძები,
ოინზაზი ათინათები თიასაშუტენ ერისანს მისი წვერზე, ვითომც წაზები,
და ზოლის ისე აცვებუიან ცის ფსკერზე მწილელ მოვარეს მცერდზე.

მგალითად, სათურიაკორანი",
კითხვის ტექსტი Andanie,
7+5 მარცვლიანი სტუქსი.
ვაღები ვინაინი ვნად
ფინიეს, ორქოფიოს,
შუტა
რად როზევის რუდუქებას,
აგრესიული
წებური წიავის
ირასის ისტეს.

ცხრილები სიტყვებისთვის

| ასო | მარცვლების რაოდენობა | არსებითი სახელი | ზმნა | ზედსართავი | სხვა |
|-----|----------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------|---------|
| ა-წ | 1 - მარცვლიანი | აზრბ | აჭეს | | ამ |
| | 2 - მარცვლიანი | ალი | აზრბობს | ანვი | ანხლად |
| | 3 - მარცვლიანი | არტახი | ავარდა | ასპიტი, | ანდაზად |
| | 4 - მარცვლიანი | აღსარება | ავიციიდა | ავტორილი | არხინად |
| | 5 - მარცვლიანი | ათინათები | აღღარდება | ავრემლული | |
| | 6 - მარცვლიანი | აღღარდება | ავიციიდა | ავარდებული | ამოებში |

Technology, tools used

- We used mobile phones and computers, to rehearse and record music employing the software platform Zoom.



Outputs/Outcomes/Impacts

- The opportunity for students to take their favourite course and to finish it despite the quite unpredictable and unique circumstances that actually made it impossible to perform music in an ensemble;
- Initiation of a new genre, or at least contribution to its development;
- Two pieces of music that would have never been composed without this particular project;
- The project is an example of how not to give up in any situation and to transform disadvantages into advantages. This example could be inspiring for young students.

Lessons learnt (success factors/mistakes to avoid)

- When several creative people work within one project, everyone has to be open to the new ideas of other participants. As the so-called manager of the project, I initiated and organized it, giving freedom to composers, even in cases I, being a professional musician, did not agree with some of their ideas. I think that is the most important aspect of any project that ends in creative work or act.
- One should also be ready for a gap between work-as-imagined/expected and work-as-done; in particular, when work is implemented via online platforms.

Adaptability, transferability to other disciplines

- This practice could be recommended to other institutions representing the field of music. Though its variations could be used by institutions specialized in drama, dance, and visual arts - the fields that employ performances, happenings, or other genres related to performance practice and performing arts.
- The pandemic is over, though, many skills and teaching methods obtained during the lockdown are used nowadays too. Thus, this particular practice opens doors to many other nonconventional ways of teaching and performing artworks.

Are you interested in seeing and hearing how the pandemic inspired us to make music for and in Zoom?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!