

Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre

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**Borrowing Existing Material, and Irony:  
Compositional Strategies and their Aesthetic Context**

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## Abstract

The thesis “Borrowing Existing Material, and Irony: Compositional Strategies and their Aesthetic Context” (“Olemasoleva muusikalise materjali korduskasutamine ning iroonia: kompositsioonistrateegiad ja nende esteetiline taust”) is part of a creative research doctoral project and it investigates the compositional process of creating new music by borrowing existing musical material to fulfill a personal ironic intent. The studies on borrowing actions show how the selection and use of existing musical material has a deeper meaning than just inspiration to a tradition or style. In this thesis, the concept of irony triggers and gives meaning to such actions, expressing a personal vision of the world. The aim of this research is to show how I developed a structured approach that satisfies a technical and an aesthetic need at the same time. How can composers effectively borrow existing musical material to satisfy personal aesthetic goals?

The autoethnographic approach led an introspective reflection on personal artistic interests, experiences, and compositional processes, aiming to gain deeper self-awareness and insight into the creative decision-making process. Furthermore, following the Information Theory, the thesis addresses the description of the creative process by dividing semantic information and aesthetic information. Thus, the research reports how the composition process involves selected musical conventions (melody and musical form), the borrowing actions (quotation and allusion), compositional strategies (recontextualization and modification), and eventually how the music created incorporates the element of irony, which remains a personal artistic and aesthetic choice.

Reflecting on the outcomes of the research, the study underscores the importance of introspection and self-awareness in the compositional process. By critically examining personal interests and creative impulses, composers can cultivate a deeper understanding of their artistic identity and refine their compositional approach. Finally, the insights gained from this research have potential applications in pedagogy, as exemplified by the development of the "Composing with 14th Century Technique" course at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

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# 1. Introduction

This artistic research fits itself in a recurring discourse in Western cultured music; when analyzing the compositional styles of different historical periods, it is achievable to identify a fundamental model from which each period's style evolved. This becomes clear if one picks up *The Oxford History of Western Music* by Richard Taruskin. In the Introduction, Cristopher H. Gibbs writes that “composers often modelled pieces on earlier ones” (2006), and already by looking at the book's index, it is possible to observe this trend. The confrontation with tradition is therefore a natural aspect throughout the history of Western classical music and personally, it is an aspect that has always had great weight, perhaps because of the way music education is designed in Italy, where I started and continued my studies for 10 years before moving to Estonia. For instance, during my bachelor in “Choral Conducting and Composition”, I studied for three years almost exclusively the Italian renaissance style, focusing mostly on Palestrina. My final exam was to compose a motet in Palestrina style, and to conduct a Mass by Palestrina. Considering the field of composition, in Estonia I have witnessed a different approach, where students compose their own music without any particular stylistic indication. Nevertheless, there are many courses focused on the music and techniques of the past. Thus, regardless of the weight that different western academies give to this historical-pedagogical aspect, it is nevertheless a widespread mode of teaching. Without giving a positive or negative judgement on this, I consider it important to try to understand where I, as a composer, stand with regard to these models, traditions, practices, conventions we are taught and passed on.

A further step can be taken considering that not only there are models to refer to but it is not unusual for composers to reuse certain musical materials. Just think of parody masses, forms such as theme and variations, the use of folk tunes or folk dances. Taruskin's book (2006: 746) exemplifies more or less all these aspects when, for instance, he reports and then comments on how Johannes Brahms presented his first symphony to a friend:

*“My symphony is long and in C minor.” In C minor. To anyone conversant with the symphonic tradition into which Brahms was trying, against the odds, to break, the words were enough to make the blood run cold. It meant he was taking on the model of models: Beethoven's Fifth. Vying with that masterpiece meant incurring a host of obligations far beyond achieving a tight motivic construction. There was also the obligation to reenact (yet without merely repeating) Beethoven's archetypal trajectory, embodied in the rhetoric of “Struggle and Victory.” As with the aborted symphony Brahms had attempted more than twenty years earlier, the First Symphony includes allusions to earlier music. There are references to Schumann's *Manfred*, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, and, most obviously, to Beethoven's Fifth and Ninth Symphonies. Such a high level of allusion was a regular fixture in Brahms. Despite the lack of public programmatic content, his*

*music was often anything but abstract in conception; the subtle allusions were typically ones intended for insiders to hear, not meant for the general listener. His music was as laden with symbolism as Beethoven's Ninth itself, probably even more so, but unlike the works of the New Germans it contained no built-in decoder key, no public aids to interpretation, and hence no single certifiable message.*

In this particular case, Taruskin comes to the conclusion that Brahms was able to make the “traditional symphony a viable option once again, a genre that could now be pursued without the stigma of being considered unoriginal and unimaginative.” (Taruskin, 2006: 750).

However, my goal is not to make some classical musical form interesting again, or to change it; rather, I focus on the importance of certain melodies, gestures and musical instruments in the creation of a composition. So, in this sense, this second consideration by Taruskin becomes even more important:

*This pastoral theme first appeared years earlier in the form of a birthday greeting Brahms sent to Clara from Switzerland and that may have carried some personal meaning between them (another hidden allusion?). The theme has archaic rhythms (a “Lombard” snap in the second measure, a “double dot” in the fourth), a rustic “raised” fourth degree (the F# in m. 6), and, in the original birthday greeting, words that parody old German folk songs: “High in the mountains, deep in the valley, I greet you a thousandfold!” The alphorn theme is followed by another kind of emblem, this time a religious one, when a choir of trombones, horns, and bassoons intones a choralelike theme.*

In reviewing my compositions, I realised that I not only had reference models but that I often recurred to existing material to produce new musical material for my compositions. While this practice is far from being new, as the example of Brahms shows, I believe it is essential for composers to delve into the underlying reasons guiding their choice of specific materials and the intended artistic purpose of such choices. Borrowing existing material is “an act that conveys meaning”, thus a personal and context-related action (Burkholder 1994). By reflecting on my own scores I was able to individuate that another typical tendency was the use of irony.

The concept of irony has to be understood as a personal way to look at the world, as an assumption or precondition that influences my artistic practice. Thus, in this thesis I address irony as part of the theoretical framework (Chapter 2) that affects other aspects of the research; consequently, borrowing actions depend on my interpretation of the concept of irony. I was already aware of the use of irony during the final year of the master's program; in fact, the final thesis analyzed a piece of mine that used the melody from Johann Strauss’ senior Radetzky March. Although borrowing actions were often present in my compositions, initially my interest was in investigating the ironic aspect of my compositions. Only later, thanks in part to discussions with colleagues and professors I met during these years I realized that the practice of borrowing actions was what determined my compositional process, while irony remained a personal way of understanding things. By blending the reuse of an existing material and the application of irony, I realised that I could probably finally start to find a

personal answer to the question that creates troubles to all young composers: how do you compose? Over time, this question naturally evolves and necessitates personalized responses tailored to each artist's unique needs. In my case, the right inquiry wants to understand how a composer can effectively borrow existing musical material while taking into account the factors that influence these creative choices, in this specific case employing irony.

In my opinion it is important in artistic research, as Barbara Lüneburg says, “to make the implicit explicit” (2023). Working with existing models and materials is certainly an established practice, but I am not aware of many composers who describe this process in detail, nor there are composers who have thoroughly discussed their ironic point of view in their compositions. This does not mean that I consider such personal analysis necessary for every composer; rather, it is meant to be an example, or a model, for those composers interested in deepening their relationship with the materials they choose to compose with.

Finally, the confrontation with the materials I use has also led me to clarify certain aesthetic and artistic aims. The use of the ironic tool is inextricably linked to the material I choose and how I process it. In this research, I interpret irony as a key rhetorical device that shapes my compositional process. It guides my choice of musical materials, informs how I reinterpret them, and defines my artistic goals. Although not always evident to the listener, irony remains a central force in my self-expression and creative approach, rooted in the cultural context of my upbringing. A deeper understanding of my interpretation of irony has helped me to become more aware of the compositional process.

I want to report Umberto Eco that in the annotations to his novel *The Name of the Rose*, discusses the artistic process (2023: 586–587):

*The author should not interpret. However, they can explain why and how they wrote. The so-called writings on poetics do not always help understand the work that inspired them, but they do help understand how the technical problem of creating the work is solved. [...]*

*Those who write (those who paint or sculpt or compose music) always know what they are doing and how much it costs them. They know they have to solve a problem. It may be that the starting data are obscure, instinctual, obsessive, no more than a desire or a memory. But after that, the problem is solved at the drawing board, by questioning the material they are working on – material that exhibits its own natural laws but at the same time carries the memory of the culture with which it is loaded.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> L'autore non deve interpretare. Ma può raccontare perché e come ha scritto. I cosiddetti scritti di poetica non servono sempre a capire l'opera che li ha ispirati, ma servono a capire come si risolve quel problema tecnico che è la produzione dell'opera. [...] Chi scrive (chi dipinge o scolpisce o compone musica) sa sempre cosa fa e quanto gli costa. Sa che deve risolvere un problema. Può darsi che i dati di partenza siano oscuri, pulsionali, ossessivi, non più che una voglia o un ricordo. Ma dopo il problema si risolve a tavolino, interrogando la materia su cui si lavora – materia che

Following these thoughts, I show in this thesis how and why I questioned the material I work on, and what problems I faced and how I solved them.

To make the discussion as clear as possible, it is now a case of explaining the key terms. This artistic research focuses on the **borrowing action** that a composer can perform. There could be several terms to describe the act of taking an object: adopting, assimilating, stealing, incorporating, simulating, parroting, mocking etc. However, the term borrowing remains the most appropriate as it fits into a series of studies that investigate this very act in music; it is also a word that encompasses the action of **quoting** and that of **allusion**, which are the two I focus on in my compositional process, thus the two addressed by this thesis. In Chapter 2.1 I will report on the studies I have used that support this part of my research.

Similarly, the word *irony* is used as it encompasses all those facets of humour, parody, satire, grotesque etc. However, the word irony has a deeper meaning of its own and is constantly being re-discussed in the various humanistic fields of research. In Chapters 2.2, 2.3 and 2.3.1, I will therefore explain how I have faced the concept of irony and then developed a personal synthesis; how I have interpreted and used the rhetorical tool of irony for personal aesthetic purposes.

Objects taken as existing material to be processed refer to a tradition; to eliminate possible misunderstandings about the word *tradition*, I will use the word *convention*: “a custom or a way of acting or doing things that is widely accepted and followed” (The Britannica Dictionary 2023 accessed on September 24, 2023). More specifically, the conventions discussed here fit into the tradition of the Western academic music community, which this thesis addresses. If in the course of the discussion one finds the expression *Gregorian tradition* for example, I mean that I am referring to certain conventions of that style. The exposition of musical examples in Chapter 3 will clarify this aspect. Moreover, I focus on a few conventions that are relevant to my cultural background; in sub-chapter 1.1.2, I will explain how I have identified them and in 1.1.3 I will describe the development of a self-analysis tool.

When dealing with a convention, an artist can decide to embrace or oppose it, question or enhance it. Borrowing existing material in a manner that evokes established conventions and interpreting it with a personal touch of irony sets the stage for me to create new music.

The following sub-chapter 1.1 will show the research question and explain how the autoethnography methodology met some of my needs, especially to understand and develop my compositional process.

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esibisce delle proprie leggi naturali ma al tempo stesso porta con sé il ricordo della cultura di cui è carica. Translation by the author.

Sub-chapter 1.2 serves to explain the relevant literature and thus the context in which this research was born and matured; 1.3 introduces on a personal level, texts and artists that I feel are close to me in terms of how they have elaborated their concept of irony.

Chapter 2 will tackle the different theories and concepts that research addresses: the borrowing actions, the concept of conventionality in art, and the connection between irony and Information Theory. It must be said that this research does not question Information Theory as such, but uses it as a tool that provides structure to the arguments of the thesis; one of the starting point of this theory (the division between semantic and aesthetic information) was also useful in developing a self-analysis diagram (sub-chapter 1.1.3) and a way of describing compositions useful for the purposes of this thesis (Chapter 3).

Finally, the composition process is described in Chapter 3, where I give detailed examples of: the musical elaborations of existing musical material, the creation of new musical material and my ironic interpretation of such material. I will also include a personal teaching experience born from the studies made for this research.

In the final Chapter 4, I will clarify the practical implications of this research, that may help composers and artist in general and that can interest musicologists and theoreticians.

## **1.1 Research Question and Methodology**

The questions around which this research has developed are rooted in a general interest in the practice of borrowing action that characterizes art from all historical periods. What are the consequences of a borrowing action? What is the aim of an artist when performing this action? Revolving around similar questions, the thesis inquiries from a personal point of view in the same direction. How do composers navigate the tension between respecting the original character of borrowed musical material and applying their own artistic needs, in my case irony, to reshape it, and what factors influence their choices in this regard?

Referring to the compositions I develop, this research aims to understand and show the strategies a composer can apply when (s)he wants to engage in borrowing actions pursuing her/his own artistic purposes.



This research is practice-based as my personal compositional practice feeds the musical inquiries expressed above and vice versa. As often happens, the methodology outlined here was clarified during the research process itself: the list below serves to divide the single moments in order to better analyze and explain them to the reader, but it does not represent a rigid timeline that I followed over the four years of research.

- 1) Observation of compositions written before the beginning of the PhD studies.
- 2) Selection of the most recurrent and significant actions, strategies and objects.
- 3) Identification of my personal interests expressed in the written compositions through autobiographical exercises.
- 4) Description of the compositional process.
- 5) Evaluation of technical compositional aspects and personal goals achieved or failed.

As a first methodological step, I retrospectively analyzed my scores, also those written before starting this research, during my Master studies; in particular, I was looking for the motivations and goals that were guiding my practice. From this first phase emerged a personal disposition towards the use of the ironic tool. I therefore wanted to compare myself with other composers that I felt were close to me in terms of their use of irony. In this phase many books about irony in art and music helped my understanding of the variety of manifestation irony can have (Bauer 2011; Brown 2007; Cherlin 2017; Den Dulk 2012; Dombrowski 2020; Everett 2004; Johnson 2009; Monelle 2006; Muecke 1970; Pirandello 1908; Purpura 2013; Sheinberg 2000; Zank 2009). Through analysis and aesthetical considerations, I could elaborate my own point of view on the matter and my interests in using irony in music. About a couple of years later, analyzing the newly written compositions, I defined more specifically the practice concerning the use of existing materials. The second step then, was to determine that my interest was focusing on the borrowing actions, specifically quoting and allusion; these two are in fact the ones that, in my understanding of compositional practice and for my artistic purposes, I consider the most effective. They are the ones that allow me to keep the ironic aspect more in the foreground during the compositional process. I have also decided to select and describe the two strategies that are more efficient in this context for me: the **modification** and the **recontextualization**. These operations apply to a melody or a musical form. It should be specified that my interest is to keep the irony relevant and satisfying from my point of view during the creation process, my aim is not making the listener comprehend my ironic view. As a final step, I then had to select the passages from my compositions that best showed the borrowing actions and their strong connection to the ironic interpretation that I use to find musical material to compose with. At this point, a detailed

description of the compositional process of those passages remained necessary, as well as a personal reflection that could clarify my ironic view of those passages.

In conclusion, this paper provides the description of my compositional process in three parts: 1) the existing material: how I use the borrowing actions, i.e. **quoting** and **allusion**, and the **modification** and **recontextualization** strategies I apply; 2) the creation of the new material: how I generate new musical material from existing borrowed material to actually compose the new piece; 3) a description of the role of irony in the compositional process; from the choice of musical materials, melodies or musical forms, to their elaboration.

The methodology for this practice-based research is strongly sitting on autoethnographical approaches. Particularly, I am referring to that kind of approach that puts the author in relation with the others. As displayed by Heewon Chang: “Given that culture is a web of self and others, autoethnography is not a study simply of self alone”, autoethnography is one of the ways that gives the opportunity to “include others as co-participants or coinformants” (Chang 2008: 65). From this perspective then, I can collect, study and analyze composers that have or have had similar experiences; I can confront this database with my subjective knowledge, practice and interpretation of the matter; eventually, I can develop personal and solid reflections for delivering contributions to the community. Moreover, the exercises included in Chang’s book (Chang 2008: 59-112) have been a very helpful starting point for a self-reflection process; I was able to define the main cultural influences, thus the conventions and models, that shape my compositions, that are spontaneously or non-spontaneously part of the compositional process. Through this approach I could unfold how I understand the concept of irony and how it influences my view on the art practice (see Chapter 2.2 and 2.3).

There are ongoing discussions about the legitimacy and the writing style of autoethnography approaches.<sup>2</sup> The debate is outside the interest of this research, but I need to make a consideration about the writing style: this research does not present its content autoethnographically (or in a self-narrative way) as some ethnography researchers do. In fact, while autoethnography allows me to collect data and reflect on them in a manageable way, I do not feel comfortable using a writing style

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<sup>2</sup> For deepening the debate, I suggest to read the article by Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, *Autoethnography: An Overview – Historical Social Research*. 2011, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp. 273–290.

Chang also warns: “Here are five potential pitfalls that autoethnographers need to watch out for: (1) excessive focus on self in isolation from others; (2) overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation; (3) exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source; (4) negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-narratives; and (5) inappropriate application of the label “autoethnography” (Chang 2008: 54).

too personal nor I think for this research this style would be of any help to present my or others' thoughts and ideas.

### 1.1.2 Identification of Personal Motivations and Interests

Halfway through this research, the exercises offered by Chang allowed me to reflect on some aspects of my identity and define cultural aspects and interests. Some of these were clearly already present in my compositions and I was also aware of many aspects of my cultural background; nevertheless, after these exercises I could decide the aspects I wanted to deepen and then to show in the research. Thus, this section explains the third step of the methodology outlined at the beginning of the previous sub-chapter.

In Chapter 4, Chang proposes exercises to help identify a research topic (2008: 63–64). I was already pointing in the right direction because I had already identified irony and the use of existing materials as a focus. However, some of these questions require an additional effort of self-reflection that results in an introspective investigation. Very often in composition lessons, the teacher asks the student what his or her goal is, whether a material is important, what is its role and how he or she wants to elaborate. The kinds of exercises proposed in this book, I believe, can develop an ability to reflect on the material that the composers have created or selected.

The questions she proposes are only prompting; in my case I found useful the following (63–64):

*how does your life experience shape the theory that will frame your method? What “cultural baggage” do you bring to the research encounter? How will your identity offer opportunities, insights, [and] innovations for the research? And for the readers of your research? In what ways does this raised awareness of your identity help to bring into focus the relationship between the researcher and [others in the similar situation]?*

To be honest, these questions more than the research itself have provoked new observations on my compositional approach and then, as a consequence, on this thesis. It is in particular the terminology “cultural baggage” and “identity” that made me change the perspective on how I approach the musical material. Only by connecting the material with the history and meaning that the material has for me, I started to consider more my own view and interpretation of the chosen material. While I initially engaged with material primarily on an affective or instinctual level, these exercises encouraged me to explore a deeper connection. I began to recognize that the material held a more profound, personal significance, and I approached its processing with greater care, as it now I realized represent an integral part of my identity.

Further, Chang's "inventory activity", which suggests the use of thematic areas such as proverbs, rituals, mentors, artifacts, virtues, and values, proved to be highly beneficial. The more helpful for me were the proverbs, rituals and artifacts. By recalling and documenting memories associated with these categories, I could clearly see my connection to the city and popular culture of Rome, as well as my Catholic education. While these elements were evident even before the exercises, systematically documenting these formative memories triggered additional personal reflection. For instance, these reflections directly led to the identification of specific materials I used in my composition as final artistic project of my doctoral studies.

Also, as Chang remarks "the categories can expand to represent the cognitive, affective, social and material aspects of the culture that you have acquired in the interaction with others" (2008: 76). In fact, many of the memories these exercises brought up, were linked to places or people; this also triggered other thoughts. I recognized that, when selecting musical material, I often thought about a particular person or event and composed as if I were conveying a message or commenting on that moment or individual. Although the composition evolves away from these initial cues, I discovered a crucial moment in my artistic process.

This is exemplified in the composition *Nostra Ignuda Natura* for choir written in 2022/2023 for SATB choir. The text used is by Giacomo Leopardi (1798–1837), an Italian poet to whom I am linked since high school, when I studied this poet. Discussing the work with a friend, I began to recall the precise moments when I had first encountered the poetic text I was using. Reflecting on these moments from high school, following Chang's exercises, led me to retrace those experiences. This refocusing on my life experience caused a shift in the musical choices and meaning I wanted to attribute to certain passages. In particular, at the beginning of the composition, I use the text *Dialogo di un Venditore di Almanacchi e di un Passeggere*<sup>3</sup> (1824–1832), in which the question "then what life would you like?"<sup>2</sup> is asked. I intended to leave this question open without providing the answer from the text. However, I had previously used that text in an essay for school, including the answer "not the past life, but the future."<sup>2</sup> This memory encouraged me to highlight the opinion of my high school self, as I consider him to be wiser than the present me in this regard. Consequently, the final version of the first movement closes not with an open question but with the answer.

In conclusion, while I was already aware of some of the personal interests and the cultural baggage, such as the poems in *romanesco* dialect or my catholic education, Chang's exercises provided me the

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<sup>3</sup> English Translation: Edwardes, Charles 1882. *Essays and Dialogues by Giacomo Leopardi*. London, Trübner & co., Ludgate Hill.

smaller and almost forgotten parts of my past and with a more profound understanding of my background. However, doing these exercises and reflecting on them with the tools Chang offers, provided me with more insights. This process allowed me to explore the intricate nuances of these facets of my identity and brought to light a characteristic present at the inception of my compositional process. Moreover, through reflecting on the exercises' outcomes, I could refine my interpretation of the musical materials I select and then clarify my ultimate artistic intentions. The materials I borrowed for my compositions are intrinsically connected to the popular culture of Rome, the Catholic religion, my early musical experiences, and educational background. The meaning I attribute to these materials is profoundly influenced by the people, events, and places that hold the most significance in my life. All these topics, as Chang called them, are also what form the conventions my person follows, consciously or not. Being more aware of each of these aspects allows me to better focus on the final artistic aims, thus also on the most suitable compositional techniques and ironic tools.

### **1.1.3 The Development of a Self-Analysis Tool**

Referring to the five steps of the methodology outlined at the beginning of sub-chapter 1.1, this section wants to explain how I developed a tool for a personal evaluation of my composition, which eventually became useful also as a compositional tool. The theory that pushed me toward this solution will be addressed later on in the text, in the theoretical chapter. Thus, in this sub-chapter I will describe how I utilize the diagram without providing a theoretical argumentation.

While reading different ideas and theories from some studies (Hatten 2008; Meyer 1967; Moles 1969; Muecke 1986) I started to approach differently the way I think about the composition process. More specifically, these studies helped me to find a way to study and develop the “irony-work”, as Muecke calls it, which in my case is the music that I create.

The major influence in this new way of thinking of mine is the Information Theory. In fact, this not only directly influenced the compositional process, but also suggested to me a specific approach for this thesis in describing the compositional process. In particular, Moles' book (1969) suggested to me a separation of the aspects that make up the compositional process, namely the semantic information, i.e., the score (the written text), and the aesthetic information, i.e., an interpretation, a meaning, that the listener can trace in the work. This led me to develop a diagram that is an integral part of the compositional process itself. I soon realized that this diagram is actually flexible, a tool that allows

me to visualize schematically the role of the different components; the content of each box can change during the compositional process.

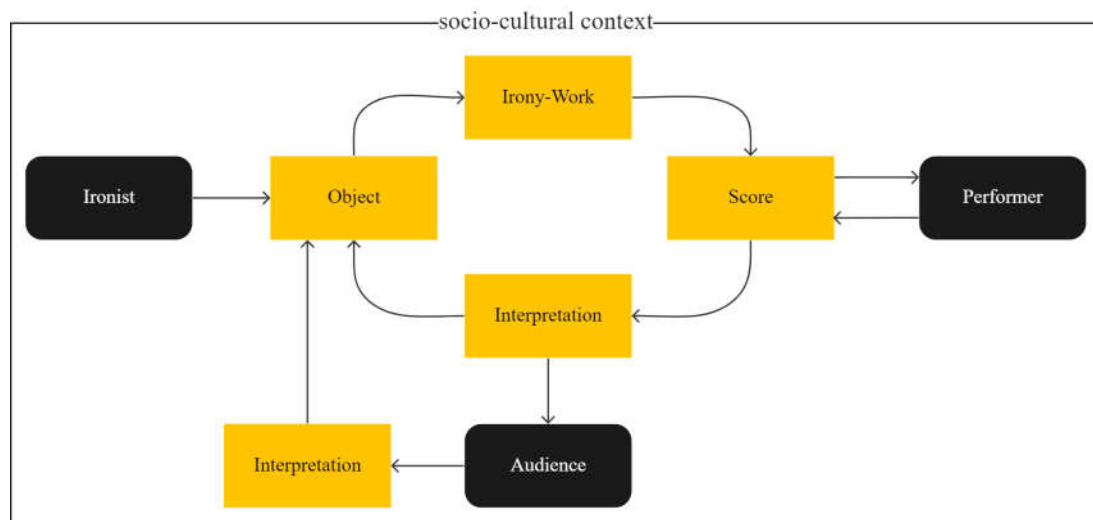


Figure 1. Outline of Relations of the Creative process

It is important to specify that in this research the goal is to study and show the compositional process from the composer's artistic point of view. This diagram should therefore be reduced, at the moment, by removing the audience and performer components, showing itself simpler and focused on the problem of this thesis:

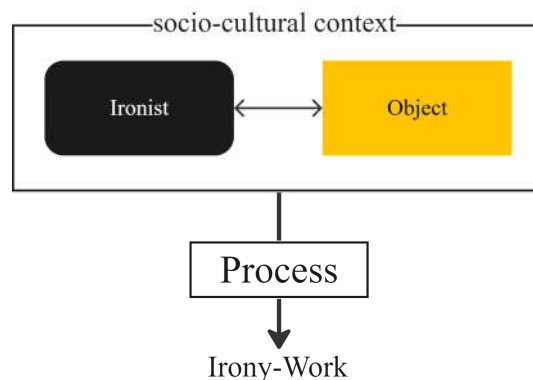


Figure 2. Outline of my Composition process

In practical use, all this way of reasoning and using the diagram is obviously very personal, but precisely because of this I believe it is possible for everyone to find his or her own approach and use of similar diagrams. In sub-chapter 3.1 and 3.4, is it possible to find examples of these diagrams used in the compositional process of some of my pieces.

As for the influence of Information Theory in describing the compositional process, it can be noticed already in the organization of the text of this thesis. Chapter 3 follows the separation between semantic information and aesthetic information; the first category is the description of the written score and compositional technique (sub-chapter 3.2, 3.3 and 3.5). The second, more personal category, provides the interpretation I ascribe to the compositions and borrowed material (sub-chapter 3.4 and 3.5).

Thus, it is clear how Information Theory has influenced my research from a practical, an analytical and expository point of view. The reader will find more information and explanation of how I developed the diagram in Chapter 2, more specifically in sub-chapter 2.3.

## **1.2 Context and Literature**

In order to understand how to use borrowing actions for specific artistic purposes, I had to rely on sources from different fields. In fact, I needed to start from certain theoretical paradigms from which I can elaborate a synthesis. Central are studies that deal with borrowing actions in music where I could confront my approach and techniques in music composition. Then, those focused on irony provided me information to better position myself in this complex concept. In order to connect these two aspects, the paradigms offered by certain sources in the field of semiotics are fundamental. Thanks to these studies, I found a way to link an artistic need of mine with a compositional technique.

The existing analysis of the practice of borrowing covers all periods and styles of music, putting various considerations and points of view at the center of the discussion (Balmer et al. 2016; Burkholder 1994 and 2001; Cherlin 2017; Hatten 2018; Johnson 2009; Metzger 2003; Monelle 2006; Norris 1973; Taruskin 2005; Zalman 2019). The main goal of these studies sometimes is not to unfold the borrowing actions, however they discuss this practice. The different nature of these studies can only enrich my knowledge on the matter. The motivations that lead artists to resort to borrowing are of various natures and often personal; in this thesis I decided to adopt the point of view suggested in the music field by Burkholder and Metzger who observe the phenomenon from a cultural point of view as exploited in Chapter 2.1. Indeed, their study focuses on the cultural value that artists and the public give to an object, and how its meaning changes when it is reworked or reimaged by the borrowing artist. The meaning, in my artistic practice, changes through the instrument of irony.

To explore irony both as a concept and as a tool, studies from theorists (Bauer 2011; Brown 2007; Burnham 1994; Cherlin 2017; Everett 2004; Johnson 2009; Monelle 2006; Sheinberg 2000; Zank 2009) or artists not related to music (Fo 1990; Pirandello 1908) inform this research. In particular, the books by Sheinberg, Brown and Zank were fundamental when I first started to develop this research. They analyze only one composer each but with a different approach. Sheinberg tries to explain Shostakovich's irony in a more philosophical way but also by trying to give criteria to distinguish the variety of forms in which we can understand the presence of irony. Brown is more technical, in the sense that proposes more analysis of on a musical level about Bartók's oeuvre. Zank's book, focusing on Ravel, reflects a lot on the context and starts often his arguments from testimonies of the time. What makes them important to me is that they approach the subject from a composer's perspective, seeking ironic manifestations also in personal correspondence between composers and their friends or interactions with journalists.

In general, these books guide the exploration of how irony manifests in music, offering a structured approach to uncovering ironic attitudes within musical compositions. They prompt discussions regarding the ways in which music can embody irony as a fundamental aspect of its creative expression. Furthermore, these studies often provide detailed descriptions of various ironic devices used in music and their application. These descriptions furnish numerous examples that have been useful in shaping my understanding of irony in music. They serve as points of reference for my own use of ironic devices, thus helping me to develop my own approach to irony.

While the specific studies I mentioned are undoubtedly valuable, I have also found great insight in the works of Dario Fo and Luigi Pirandello. Although these texts do not address the technical aspects of using irony in music, they offer aesthetic ideas that strongly resonate with my artistic practice. This personal resonance stems from the fact that both authors are Italian, I have been familiar with their plays since high school, and I could more easily absorb and understand the perspectives presented in the books used here. These broader aesthetic considerations have significantly influenced and informed my artistic works.

Studies in the field of semiotics (Eco 1964; Lotman 1977; 1981; 2022) provide elements and definitions on conventionality in art, the symbol, and more generally on the interpretation of art. From these studies I have taken the paradigms that can give foundation to the arguments that this thesis develops.

Finally, to better understand on a personal level the interpretation of both the ironic tool and the meaning of borrowing actions, I recurred to Heewon Chang's book *Autoethnography as a Method*



published in 2008. This introspective investigation helped me to precisely define which tools and materials to use in my artistic practice, and thus to individuate the main points of this thesis.

Another fundamental book is by *Information Theory and Aesthetic Perception* by Abraham Moles (1969). Approaching music from this point of view made me possible to divide the components of the composition process; if he divides the information the listener receives between semantic and aesthetic information, similarly I report in this thesis separately the description of the score, in Chapter 3.2 and 3.3, and the description of my aesthetic choices in Chapter 3.4.

### **1.3 Irony in Composition: an Artistic Perspective**

In this section I want to unfold why and how I recur to ironic devices when composing by describing the personal reasons behind my musical choices. The reasons are in part related to a natural tendency, linked to my cultural background, but also based on aesthetic and philosophical considerations of some important figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

I was always interested in those studies that try to understand the meaning of music. The analysis of art by Umberto Eco on the postmodern condition is an example that clarify that artists are aware in choosing languages opened to a variety of interpretations (Eco 1964) and it is generally accepted that for example the understanding of an opera is not unique and universal. While the dispute is beyond the scope of this research, it is within this discussion that I began to formulate some of my ideas. In a period as the one we are living in with various way of expressions it is hard not only to understand the role and the meaning of music but also to define, to ourself and to others, a personal view and aesthetic. This ambiguity, contrast, or coexistence with what I see in the world or in others, it is always a stimulation for me and it is something I want to express and reflect on through my compositions.

Personally, a very important point of reference is Luigi Pirandello, the Italian novelist and playwright whose aesthetic has been important for many artists. It is worth to say that something comic not necessarily is ironic, and what is ironic does not aim to make people laugh all the time. As clearly emerge in Pirandello's thoughts, irony is rooted not in a comical but rather a tragic approach to the world (Pirandello 1908: 126, 134). His works revolve around the problem of identity where irony works as a device for highlighting the ambiguity, skepticism or the struggle in human life. The irony then, is a device, which allows Pirandello to look at some nuances of reality that is never easy, defined or ready-made. Kierkegaard (1841) already proposed this function of irony. There is an important

passage in Pirandello's essay *L'umorismo* that I feel very close to; it is a personal position toward art: "The creation of art is spontaneous [...] it cannot be the result of conscious reflection."<sup>4</sup> (Pirandello 1908: 131). More precisely, he specifies that an artist collects data spontaneously and instinctively, and only then processes it through intimate reflection (1908: 73, 156). Also, Dombrowski notices that "according to *L'Umorismo* the breeding ground of ironic art is necessarily an "innate and inherited melancholy, the sad vicissitudes or a bitter experience of life," or "a pessimistic or skeptical outlook as a result of study and of meditation on human existence and on the destiny of man." These sorrowful insights determine "the peculiar temperament known as humoristic" (Dombrowski 2020, accessed on March 20, 2022).

It is possible to find a connection with Kierkegaard's thought, described by Muecke. The German philosopher suggests that irony cannot be turned on or off, "it is not possible to be ironic from time to time". An ironist "considers the totality of existence *sub specie ironiae* and is never ironical in order to be admired as an ironist" (Muecke 1986: 30). Kierkegaard describes also another reason of using irony, as a tool for taking distance from the reality and for dissimulating the truth. It is better to leave the explanation of Kierkegaard's point of view and of irony as philosophical concept to studies in that field. However, I am recalling some of his basic thoughts for starting a reflection on how one can recur to irony in art. It has to be said also, that taking distance from reality is certainly one possible reason of using ironic devices, as Dombrowski suggests about surrealistic art. Personally, I prefer to work with ideas and objects that I care about and use the ironic approach toward the world to change my perspective. It is possible to reflect on common problematics with a fresher mind or to find new problematics where one might not have seen them before. The irony becomes more a lighting tool than a dissimulation instrument. An ironist does not have heroes, rather he dissects and unveils heroes' hidden characteristics. "An ordinary artist takes care of the body: a humorist look at the body and its shadow<sup>5</sup>" (Pirandello 1908: 157–160). Again Dombrowski sums up Pirandello's thoughts: "In an ordinary artifact, thinking remains invisible, whereas in art-as-embodiment-of-*umorismo*, reflection is not hidden but instead becomes an analytic principle, apt to disassemble and decompose the image." (Dombrowski 2020). Dario Fo, who dedicated his life to this kind of approach criticizing most of the times the society, believed that in the tragedy there is almost only one reaction while in the comedy you can have a broad spectrum of reactions (Allegrì and Fo 1990). This aspect of irony, intended as a rhetorical tool, is what I rely on in shaping my artistic works. Sometime, in his theatrical works, Fo is able to bring out problematics without explicitly talking about them, and thanks to ironic devices,

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<sup>4</sup> Translation by the author.

<sup>5</sup> Translation by the author.

he increases audience's involvement in such matter. He wants to arise questions and specific contradictions in society. Dario Fo and Franca Rame probably did not want to dissimulate or taking distance but rather to emphasize some elements and thematic.

In order to apply irony I need to target an issue, which is the object under the lens of irony. I want now to take into the discussion Olivier Messiaen's oeuvre about whether it is possible or not to raise issues in others through instrumental music. In 1944, he described technically his music in his *Technique de mon Langage Musical* but it is also very possible to approach the understanding of his aesthetic. To summarize, religious symbols, bird songs and colours are the factors that mostly causes the shape and choice of the melodies, harmony, rhythms and timbres. Messiaen composed music connected to those personal interests and beliefs but it remains quite challenging to investigate if a listener can understand these external references, especially without having a previous knowledge of Messiaen's intentions; it is uneasy if not impossible to recognize the symbolic value of that specific melody or harmony, with that rhythm or timbre. As long as I know, he was not interested in making everything understandable for the audience. Similarly, the purpose of raising issues through music is for me an achievement that nurture the composition process, a goal that shapes my musical choices and a reason to compose. Thus, even though I target an issue, and I have a goal that drives the composition process, I accept the free interpretation of my music by listeners and performers. I will return on this matter in the Conclusion of this research after the description of my works.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In this Chapter, I will report the fundamental ideas about the existing musical material that guide this research. Therefore, I will discuss some passages of the two studies that more than others serve my artistic research and that helps to clarify the descriptions of my own compositions to the reader. Furthermore, I will address firstly the concept of irony, as I understood it, explaining my perspective and aims in using irony as a tool. At last, I report the Information Theory through Abraham Moles' view, and finally how I developed a diagram that helps my composition process.

### 2.1 The Borrowing Actions: Quotation and Allusion

In 1994, Peter Burkholder proposes to consider the practice of musical borrowing as a separate field. He explains that the word “quotation” cannot possibly account for all the varieties of using existing material (Burkholder 1994). Burkholder devoted himself to this type of study and was also the author, in 2001, of the entries **Borrowing**, **Allusion** and **Quotation**, in the New Grove Dictionary; it can be wise to start with his definition of the three terms. The borrowing action foresees “the use of one or more elements from a specific piece”. Regarding Quotation and Allusion, the former is defined as “the incorporation of a relatively brief segment of existing music in another work” that “is distinct from other forms of borrowing in that the borrowed material is presented exactly or nearly so, unlike an Allusion or Paraphrase.” In fact, the Allusion is “a reference in a musical work to another work or to a style or convention” where the material “is not quoted directly, but a reference is made through some other similarity between the two works, such as gesture, melodic or rhythmic contour, timbre, texture or form”. It is worth saying now that I chose to undertake these two borrowing actions because I selected them as the more efficient tools to combine with my artistic needs, which I will discuss later on.

The aforementioned paper (1994) undertakes Charles Ives' music noticing that each borrowing action brings along with it a numerous of possible meanings. In addition, Burkholder attempts to list the *topoi*, the common themes, of quotations in Ives' music showing how various the borrowing actions can be. In the Grove Dictionary, he adapts and develops a table that provides “the most fundamental questions about any instance of musical borrowing in new compositions or improvisations”. Looking

at Burkholder's work alerts us to consider how complex can be the musical analysis of a quotation and how many possible layers of meaning we can encounter. "It is possible, even frequent, for composers to borrow material that listeners may not recognize and for listeners to hear similarities composers did not intend" (Burkholder 2001). It is also worth to notice in the context of my artistic research, that from a composer's perspective the selection of the material borrowed potentially influences the meaning of what (s)he is creating, and the elaboration the composer may apply provides another layer of meaning to the final result.

Continuing along the same line, the book *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music* by David Metzger, in the introduction, suggests that "when a musician borrows from a piece, he or she draws upon not only a melody but also the cultural associations of that piece. Just as with a melody, a musician can work with and transform those associations. Those manipulations provide a means to comment on cultural topics and to reconfigure fundamental cultural relationships" (2003). It is intriguing also that Metzger takes into consideration both popular and classical music, elucidating that the final aim is the same: to transform cultural association. Metzger also compares Peter Maxwell-Davies *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Fables of Faubus* by Charles Mingus, the former being premiered in 1969, the latter in 1964. If "the jazz piece nonchalantly unfurls *Dixie* and then minces it with a bluesy retort", the *Eight songs* present a distortion of Handel's aria. Nevertheless, it is possible to find common points when we approach these works looking for their cultural meaning. In fact, both present a connection between past and present, but both performances "mock men in authority, be it a racist governor or an insane monarch." Maxwell-Davies, through the quotation of Handel's aria "comments on the imposing weight that music from previous centuries places on contemporary musical life and how the mass of that tradition can lead to creative anguish, distortions, and even silence". The quotation of *Dixie* and other tunes in Mingus's work suggests a rejection of the past of the grand Old South, "and his own celebratory virtuosic licks proclaim a present free from the violence and pain upon which that era was erected." (Metzger 2003).

It can be important to discuss all the possible nuances of existing material in music and name all the different techniques and situations; nevertheless, since my goal in this research is to understand compositional tools and how I can reshape them for my own artistic needs, I will go no further. Studying music with the tools proposed by Burkholder and Metzger provided me a new perspective to reflect on my intentions at the beginning of the composition process. If I consider the material I choose and the elaboration I apply, I can have a more straightforward path for the composition process and the piece's final aim.

### 2.1.2 The Selection of the Material

It is necessary now to exploit how it happens the choice of melodies and musical forms as materials of my compositional work. In addition to the personal reasons already expressed in Chapter 1.1.2, it must be said that these musical elements are also easily recognizable in the world in which I live and work. This therefore allows me to refer to conventions and elements that the society I live in can easily recognize, and thus to interface with as many listeners as possible. In fact, referring to Dunsby (2006):

*Western music, with its origins in liturgical chant, can be said to be inherently melodic: the word 'theme' was in use in the seventeenth century, and 'motif' (later, 'motive') became a common term in art, literature, and music criticism two centuries ago. In the nineteenth century the common English translation of the German word 'motiv' was 'figure', and the definition of this in 1906 (Parry, at a time when recognizable music theory might be said to have become clearly underway) was comprehensive and prescient: «It is in fact the shortest complete idea in music; and in subdividing works into their constituent portions, as separate movements, sections, periods, phrases, the units are the figures, and any subdivision below them will leave only expressionless single notes, as unmeaning as the separate letters of a word.» This definition is almost as all-embracing as was to be Bent's definition some seventy years later of 'analysis' itself [...], and this indicates that 'motive' has been a critical element of the whole modern music-analytical enterprise. The definition also captures, and anticipates, a central impetus in music theorizing as a language analogy.*

Regarding the musical form, similar considerations can be made. What I refer to in my compositions are well-known forms in the western musical world, both classical and non-classical tradition: Gregorian chant, pop songs, marching band, symphonic music, renaissance masses.

These elements, therefore, are shared with the community that I engage through the ironic aspect. To explain further, we need to start with a general definition of a symbol and Ernst Cassirer's idea. The German philosopher proposes the human being as a symbolic animal who understands and expresses the world through symbols (Cassirer 1955). In this context the meaning of the word “symbol” is close to the meaning of “metaphor”: “something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association, convention, or accidental resemblance” (Merriam-Webster dictionary, accessed on April 7, 2022). Anyway, it seems more appropriate to use “symbol” rather than “metaphor” in relation to my compositions since I choose existing musical materials that represent a culture and may have different external references. This aspect is a characteristic of a symbol, which can be “an act, sound, or object having cultural significance and the capacity to excite or objectify a response”. The feature of exciting a response is an important aspect to work with; in fact, the material

I choose aims to 1) capture listeners' attention, 2) create a frame and 3) target an issue. In order to achieve these aims, in many of my compositions there is at least one passage where the existing musical element is recognizable. Metzger also elucidates this idea: "Once the borrowing is evoked, the exchange between the original and new work central to cultural agency begins. That exchange, of course, can start only if the listener can recognize the quotation." (2003: 6). It is crucial then to make sure that the quotation is recognized, and only then the elaborations I propose can be interpreted by the listeners. To recognize the quotation means to recognize the symbol, so the conventions, that quotation carries on. To better understand this passage, in the next sub-chapter, I refer and discuss the ideas elaborated by Jurij Lotman.

### 2.1.3 Conventionality in Art: Melodies and Musical Forms as Symbols

The definition of *convention* given in the Introduction is generic and refers to various fields of life. However, in the art world, there are specific studies about conventions. If we start from the insights of Charles Pierce, also used by Umberto Eco as the basis of his works, a symbol is a sign that can only be learned culturally (Eco 1964). To give an example, the number 4 does not have a meaning in itself, but our culture ascribes it to it; we therefore learn the meaning of this symbol, the 4, culturally: it is a convention. Lotman's studies expand this idea in the art field, he explains that "convention in art is the realisation, in artistic creation, of the ability of sign systems to express the same content by different structural means"<sup>6</sup> (Lotman 2022: 59).

Every convention is understandable within the specific culture that created it and someone that does not know that culture would probably misunderstand it. To exemplify, "in the Japanese puppet theatre, the actor who moves the puppets remains visible to the spectator but the latter does not notice him because he excludes him from the boundaries of the artistic space"<sup>7</sup>; something that in Sicily for instance, where the actor moving the puppet is behind the scenes, would appear strange, maybe disturbing, then unconventional. "A 17th century Chinese viewer perceived the European portrait in

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<sup>6</sup> La convenzionalità nell'arte è la realizzazione, nella creazione artistica, della capacità dei sistemi dei segni di esprimere lo stesso contenuto con mezzi strutturali diversi. Translation by the author.

<sup>7</sup> Nel teatro dei burattini giapponesi l'attore che muove i burattini rimane visibile allo spettatore ma quest'ultimo non lo nota perché lo esclude dai confini dello spazio artistico. Translation by the author.

*chiaroscuro* as a strange jumble of washed-out colours”<sup>8</sup> (2022: 60). And also, “allegories in Classical paintings are a case in point. The viewer must know (he acquires his knowledge from the cultural code lying outside of painting) just what is meant by poppies, a snake with its tail in its teeth, an eagle sitting on a book of laws, a white tunic and a red cape in the portrait of Catherine the Great by Levitsky” (Lotman 1981: 17).

Returning to music, my choice to resort to melodies and musical forms that are recognisable to the community in which my music is produced and most listened, allows me to consciously play with the conventional meanings that these materials remind to me and to others. I can be sure, for instance, that the majority of people in the Western world recognize the melody of *Somewhere over the Rainbow*; most of them probably do not even need to stress themselves to remember it. I borrow this melody for my composition *Dies Rainbow* (see Chapter 3.2), and by making the melody recognizable, I am calling the listener in participating in the composition; the audience is invited to wonder why there is this melody. It may be that it is there just for pleasure and it has no meaning for a listener, but as a composer this use of a material provides me with motivation and further material for my artistic activity. “From the materials of conventional signs the poet creates a text which is a depictive sign” (Lotman 1981). Some of these conventional signs are, in my case, existing material I borrow. Other kinds of conventional signs are the new material I write; in fact, the text I write, hence the score, stems from my Western education, which is mainly heard by listeners with the same education. Nevertheless, each person has specific knowledge and different experiences that lead them to interpret the composition in a singular and unique way. I will come back to this point in sub-chapter 2.3.1 when discussing the Information Theory by Moles. Dealing with conventions of the Western culture allow me to know in advance more or less what musical environment the audience could experience. Nevertheless, as this chapter also clarify, the interpretation remains open and, after all, it often happens that the audience and the author have different interpretations. In this regard, it seems appropriate to cite a clear and ironic example, in line with this research. According to Joachim Lucchesi (quoted in Vigliero 2015: 9), in 1933 Bertol Brecht declares that the success of the *Three Penny Opera* was determined by everything that was irrelevant to him “the romantic plot, the love story, the musical part” and that it was precisely the bourgeois class that acclaimed the opera, the same class that was the object of his criticism in the opera. Similar story with his work *Drums in the Night* “I sensed the dark foreboding that the people eager to shake my hand warmly were in fact the scoundrels whose heads I would have loved to bash in.” (Vigliero 2015: 21) This very story may not

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<sup>8</sup> Uno spettatore cinese del XVII secolo percepiva il ritratto europeo in *chiaroscuro* come una strana accozzaglia di colori slavati. Translation by the author.



sound ironic to some, but exemplifies the difficulty for an author to predict what an audience can read in an artwork.

To conclude, melody and musical form are musical materials that can represent, also, symbols; as such, they carry with them conventions that are partly personal and partly shared by the community. Only by recognizing this intrinsic value, an interpretation and elaboration with ironic, parodic, grotesque and humorous intentions can be possible. My interest as a composer is to play with these meanings for achieving the three aims just listed in the previous subchapter<sup>9</sup>, although the listener remains free to interpret as he or she pleases (Eco 1964). In the next Chapter I delve into the ironic approach to music and then into the composition mechanism.

## **2.2 Understanding Irony: Concepts and Application in this Research**

Irony seems to be a concept that by its very nature eludes definition. It is strongly linked to the context and the person and for this reason in this thesis, the use and meaning of irony will only appear more understandable through the concrete examples given in Chapter 3. However, it is crucial to provide further clarification regarding my understanding and use of this concept.

First and foremost, it is important to underscore that when I use the term *irony*, I am encompassing its multifaceted nature. As I will discuss in the next subchapter, irony is a complex concept with various possible interpretations. In my compositions, irony takes on diverse forms and can be subject to different interpretations by both listeners and performers. However, the choice to use the single word "irony" is deliberate, as it conveys a deeper and, at times, even philosophical approach to understanding the world. Moreover, it appears more effective to employ a term that encapsulates multiple meanings, rather than resorting to several seemingly synonymous but not quite synonymous words (such as parody, sarcasm, grotesque, humorous, comic, etc.). Furthermore, the authors and artists who inspire me consistently use the term "irony," making it a natural choice to maintain continuity.

In the context of this research, I can only express my own understanding and interpretation of irony. In my practice, irony serves as a rhetorical device that provides motivation, purpose, musical tools,

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<sup>9</sup> 1) capture listeners' attention 2) create a frame 3) target an issue.

and materials for my compositions. It acts as a means of self-expression, shaping the music I create. It also serves as a lens through which I interpret the world around me and engage with the realm of music. Through my ironic perspective on objects, including musical materials, I can identify the elements I wish to incorporate, decide how to reinterpret them, and define the artistic objectives of the composition. While these aspects may not always be apparent to the listener, irony remains an essential guiding force in the compositional process and borrowing actions. It is an attitude deeply rooted in the cultural context of my upbringing, one that I believe is essential to preserve and convey. Furthermore, I designed Chapter 2.3 to offer a practical example of how to study and apply irony as a tool for artistic purposes. The elucidation of my thought process and how I approached literature and the information theory can serve as a model for other artists interested in exploring the ironic aspects, or other facets, of their artistic work.

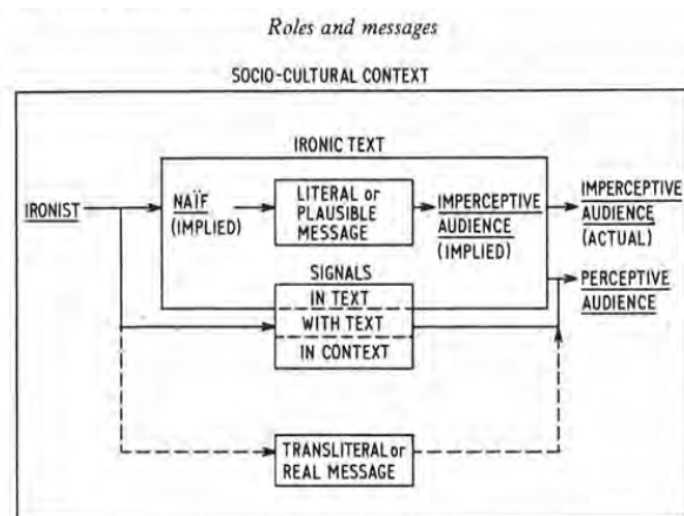
### **2.3 Irony: a Short Overview**

In this chapter, I intend to create a common ground with the reader on the general and more common meaning of irony in the Western culture. Hence, I report some points of view and definitions of irony to open a general discussion on art that will nurture the following chapters about music.

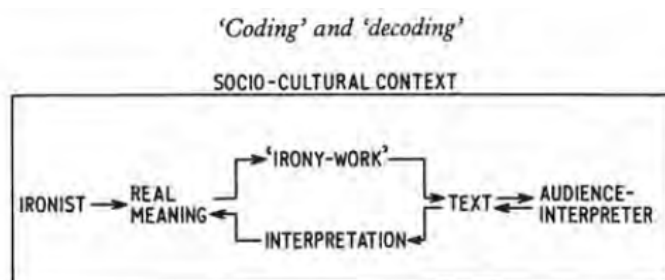
It is probably wise to start with a definition from the Merriam-Webster dictionary. The irony is 1) the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning; 2) a usually humorous or sardonic literary style or form characterized by irony; 3) an ironic expression or utterance. It can be further defined as 1) incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the normal or expected result; 2) an event or result marked by such incongruity. Also, we can experience irony when we are in presence of 1) an incongruity between a situation developed in a drama and the accompanying words or actions that is understood by the audience but not by the characters in the play (called dramatic irony); 2) a pretence of ignorance and of willingness to learn from another assumed in order to make the other's false conceptions conspicuous by adroit questioning (called Socratic irony) (Merriam-Webster dictionary accessed on February 12, 2022).

This paragraph can help in having a general description about irony, but there are some other fundamental features worth of attention. I report two diagrams from the chapter “instrumental irony”

from Muecke's book *Irony and the Ironic* (1986: 40–41). His study deals with literature and it delineates some characteristics of how irony works.



**Figure 3.** Muecke D.C., 1986. *Irony and the Ironic* p. 40-41



**Figure 4.** Muecke D.C., 1986. *Irony and the Ironic* p. 40-41

Muecke does not explain the term “real meaning” in the second diagram, but since it is not a philosophical discussion it may be better to replace it with “object”, a term that I will use for my analysis.<sup>10</sup> The diagrams clarify what the Merriam-Webster dictionary only suggests; specifically I want to highlight that: we need an object or a subject in order to use irony, i.e. we need to apply irony to something or someone; there must be a user and an audience (a receiver); irony can also come, or be enriched, by signals (gestures or symbols undoubtedly exaggerated or in contradictions). Moreover, from the diagrams, we can see that irony works within a socio-cultural context. This means that an author needs to know the context in which (s)he is applying the irony; and only in this sense the just mentioned signals can have an ironic meaning. To give an example in music that might simply explain this statement, one needs only think that the use of atonality was perceived as madness in *Erwartung* by Arnold Schönberg in the 1909, while in the 1969 the dissonances of *Eight Songs for a*

<sup>10</sup> For a deeper understanding of the two diagrams I suggest to read Muecke's book (1986: 40–41). It would not be helpful for this research to discuss all the components and the meaning of the arrows of such diagrams.

*Mad King* by Peter Maxwell Davies are the signal of the moments of lucidity of the king (Bauer 2011: 111)<sup>11</sup>; in 1969, in fact, the music community in Western countries was already somehow used to the dissonances that in 1909 were undoubtedly harsher and unintelligible for the audience. The musical context, with 60 years of difference, therefore offered two opposing solutions to the two composers. At the same time, individuals make the audience and the single person that is receiving an ironic message can read and understand differently from others depending on its own culture, social role, personal history, taste etc. Then, if we want to understand or discuss how irony works, we need to take into considerations at least idiosyncratic contexts, roles, messages (from the literal to the hidden ones) and interpretation processes.

Although these diagrams are helpful, Muecke spends many footnotes, and then many pages, explaining the various manifestations and the small different interpretations or utilizations of irony. As he says: “these examples offer a way into the complexities of discourse about irony” that has a “labyrinthine history” (Muecke 1986: 13). Being irony a literary device that characterize the humour (according to the second definition in Merriam-Webster dictionary), we can look at Pirandello’s essay *L’umorismo* to delve in other aspects. At the beginning of the book, he tries to describe the differences of meaning of the word *humour* between some European cultures, which confirm that the way of using irony depends on the culture and changes throughout history, making the attempt of catching a real meaning or a definition of irony more difficult (Pirandello 1908).

To summon, this chapter offers the reader a general understanding of irony, highlighting key features that will be central to the upcoming discussions. If we now read the general definitions from the Merriam-Webster dictionary, we can clearly see that it is not enough to comprehend deeply what irony is and how it works, especially in music. I also provide my personal view on irony and its aim for artistic purposes. The following chapters will deal with some theories and aesthetic considerations and finally the text will delve into the music field.

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<sup>11</sup> Further reading on the *Eight Songs for a Mad King*: Chapter 3 in Metzger, David 2003. *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music*.

### 2.3.1 Information Theory

In this sub-chapter I will report the most important passages from the books that helped me in understanding my composition process and thus to develop a diagram that I use as a tool for creating new music. It should be noted that Information Theory serves to provide structure to the arguments of the thesis; it was also useful in developing a self-analysis diagram and a way of describing compositions useful for the purposes of this thesis. This research does not question Information Theory as such, but uses it as a tool.

I would like to start with a personal thought that should also explain the way I approached the studies that I used for this chapter (Hatten 2018; Moles 1969; Muecke 1986). I am interested in creating music that the listener can recognize but cannot predict. The audience, thus the listener, is part of the socio-cultural context (Figure 3 and 4) and helps provide me with elements about the conventions I address in my compositions. “But music is not a natural system. It is man-made and man-controlled. And it is able to combat the tendency toward the tedium of maximum certainty through the designed uncertainty introduced by the composer” (Meyer 1967). This statement relates to Information Theory and it helps me to make evident that music floats between conventions that are at the same time recognizable but also subject to composer’s modification and interpretation; when I borrow an object I know that if the quotation of a melody, for instance, is literal, the listeners immediately have in their minds how that melody continues and develop; but as a composer I want to introduce uncertainty, as Meyer said, in order to keep the audience interested and curious. I am personally motivated to create this balance between certainty and doubt, predictability and unpredictability, that can interest the listener and myself.

Before undertaking the Information Theory I need to briefly describe the starting point of my reflections. The book by Robert Hatten *A Theory of Virtual Agency for Western Art Music* published in 2018, proposes that music has a virtual agency, where “the virtual addresses the gap between music’s actual material or physical aspects as (organized) sound and those both irreducible and emergent semiotic inferences that enable us to hear music as having movement, agency, emotional expression, and even subjectivity” (2018: 1). Moreover, Hatten continues the argument by considering the Greek theatre and the so-called dramatic irony. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, dramatic irony is an “incongruity between a situation developed in a drama and the accompanying words or actions that is understood by the audience but not by the characters in the play”. Hatten claims that in music we have not only two but three components. Dramatic irony exists

mutually between listeners, performers and composer. Each component can have its own interpretation of the musical gesture and this creates a tension in the musical process. This tension calls for my attention very often during the composition process and it influences the musical choices. Also, as previously stated, I need to apply irony to an object or a subject, and I need a receiver of my ironic actions; thus, it would be probably impossible to use irony without having the purpose of involving the audience somehow. Thus, rethinking Muecke's diagram in a musical context, we should add the component of the performer as reported in the diagram on page 31 of this thesis (Figure 5).

I need to consider now a passage of Moles' book *Information Theory and Aesthetic Perception* (1969). In chapter 5 he distinguishes two point of views: semantic information and aesthetic information. According to the objective psychological theories, a perception triggers a reaction, and everyone, when receiving a message, reacts to both these kinds of information. Semantic information provides instructions and involves a logical process; in a musical context, the score can be likened to a manual that contains established signs and rules. Musicians can read the same semantic information, the same score; the perception of the score prepares a reaction and suggests a result. On the contrary, the aesthetic information does not share signs or logic and it is untranslatable but only "approximately transposable" (Moles 1969: 130); it can be considered as personal. This type of information recall the individual knowledges and culture, thus is different for everyone and it has not a proper or precise function. It determines internal state and it can show results only in the actual, physical or psychological reactions. The distinction between messages with semantic and aesthetic content is only theoretical, a dialectic solution that can allow us to reflect and analyse different aspects of an artwork. To clarify this distinction I report the example Moles proposes in his book.

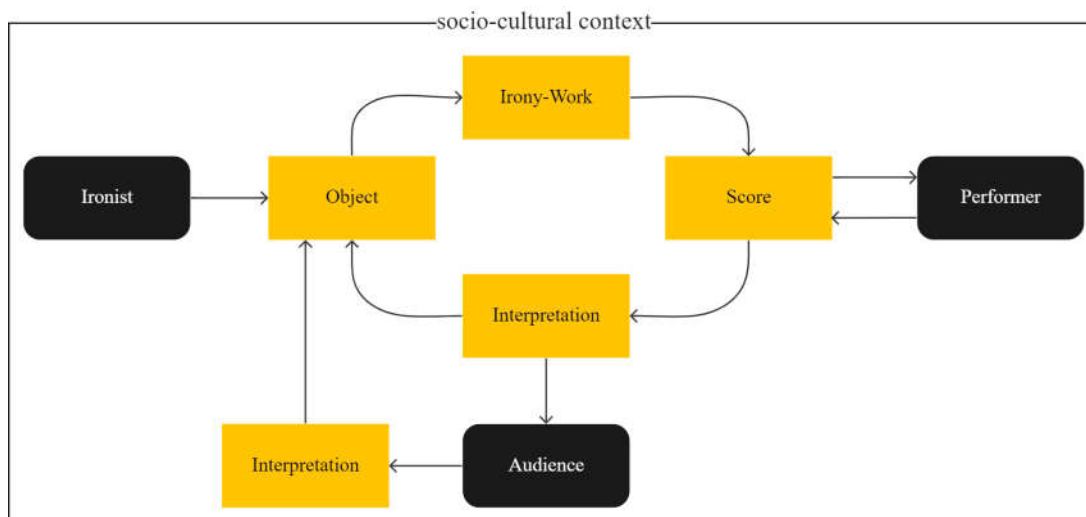
In a theatre play, the argument, the action, the story told, as well as the grammatical structures and the logical implications, are semantic information. The movements of the actors, the warmth of their voices, their expressions, the richness of the scenery are chiefly aesthetic information. The auditor obviously looks for the latter rather than for the "story" of Hamlet in the theatrical work of art (Moles 1969: 133).

Moles also describes how difficult can be to analyse the semantic and aesthetic information in art, with music being the more complicated. The reason is that there are too many factors that leave the interpretation, so the aesthetic information, open; there are many characteristics subject to change at each performance from the musician's as well as from the listener's point of view. Thus, in music the aesthetic message is infinitely richer in elements and carries more information than the semantic message (Moles 1969: 167). Nevertheless, he tries to reduce and reflect in a scientific and mathematical way on different parameters showing that there is space to make such an analysis. In

the context of this thesis there is no need to deepen more these problematics. These theories and reflections provide me a way to approach the musical practice. Personally, I am interested in delivering a score with all the semantic information a performer needs, but at the same time I look to leave the music open to interpretation. Aesthetic information, as Moles suggests, is multifaceted and layered; it allows individuals to choose which information is important and how to interpret it. Even though this seems to be a natural condition of all kinds of artwork, I have also a personal interest toward the creation of various layers of meaning. “Works of art are an extremely cheap, capacious and well-structured way of storing and transmitting information” (Lotman 1977: 23). I do not try to control the aesthetic information or listeners’ and performers’ interpretations. These personal considerations are discussed and clarified in the Conclusion, after the analysis of my scores, where all these layers are unfolded and explained through practical examples.

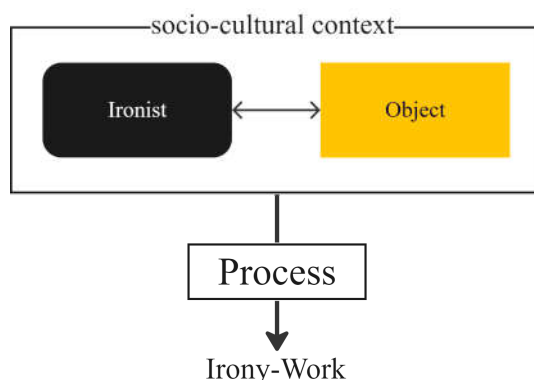
It is possible now to reflect on Hatten’s and Moles’ theory together. Considering the aesthetic information of a composition, the component of the performer develops a personal thought to the piece and a different point of view; this means that probably the musician will have a different interpretation than the listener’s one. Moreover, if the performer gives its own interpretation, this means that the listener receives a filtered message not the one the composer could suggest with the score. Also, the performer has the semantic information, the score, and probably spend a lot of time studying it. The audience normally does not have the score, and in this case the semantic information are probably very limited and almost indistinguishable from the aesthetic one. In fact the listener has to elaborate immediately all the musical laws, as Moles called them, (s)he receives. It should be clear how much this problematics are complex and probably it is wise to divide and work on each component before putting them together. Since this paper represents a first step of a wider research, and since it is an artistic research, the analysis is designed on myself and my practice.

To help the reader’s memory, I now reproduce the same diagram given in sub-chapter 1.1.3, which is Muecke’s diagram (Figure 3) with some adjustments:



**Figure 5.** Outline of Relations of the Creative Work

Since the focus of this thesis is on the role of the ironist, it is worth to have a diagram representing the process to the creation of the “irony-work”:



**Figure 6.** Outline of my Composition Process

In its simplicity, this diagram allows to focus on very few and precise aspects. Kierkegaard (1841) and Pirandello (1908) both think that an ironist can not turn off his/her ironic interpretation of the world. In my case, the analysis of the object works as a trigger for a self-reflective process. This activity stimulates new aims both artistic and personal. Thus, in this artistic research, the irony-work is the result of a self-reflective process of the ironist on the object in a socio-cultural context.

In the next Chapter, I will unfold the relevant aspects of the composition process through specific examples from some of my recent artworks.



### 3. Practical Outcomes

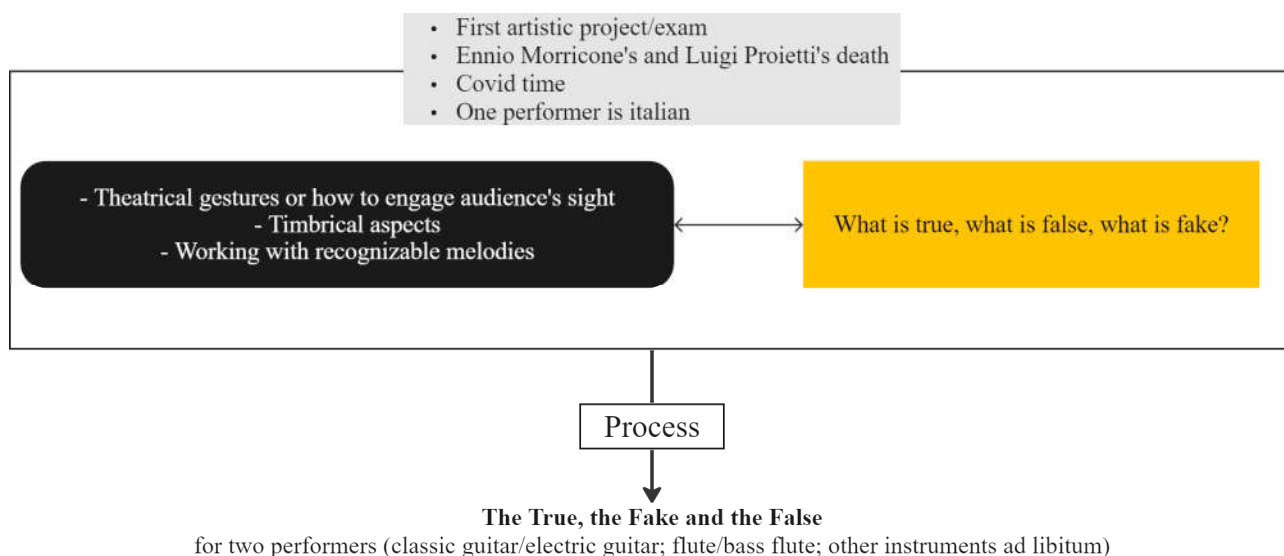
In this Chapter, I will show the use of the diagram I developed by connecting the idea of Virtual Agency (Hatten 2018), the Information Theory (Moles 1969), the diagram that Muecke shows for explaining how irony works (1986), and my personal interest as a composer. Thus, the text will delve into the descriptions of my musical creations. There are three different types of excerpts from my compositions during the period (2020–2023): 1) examples about the borrowing actions, further divided into two sub-chapter, one for the Quoting action and one for the Allusion action; 2) examples on the creation of new musical material starting from the borrowed one; 3) a description of what connects irony and the musical choices made in the compositions. The compositions chosen as examples are those that can most clearly show my intentions and my way of working with/on the material.

At the end of the descriptions and musical examples, it should be clear that the borrowing actions, together with the personal ironic approach, are triggers of the composition process. It must be said that, in a composition, the new musical material I develop is more than the amount of the borrowed material I use.

Moreover, in the sub-chapter 3.5, I will report how this research resulted in the creation of the course *Composing with 14<sup>th</sup> Century Technique* for the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre that I hold for two academic years.

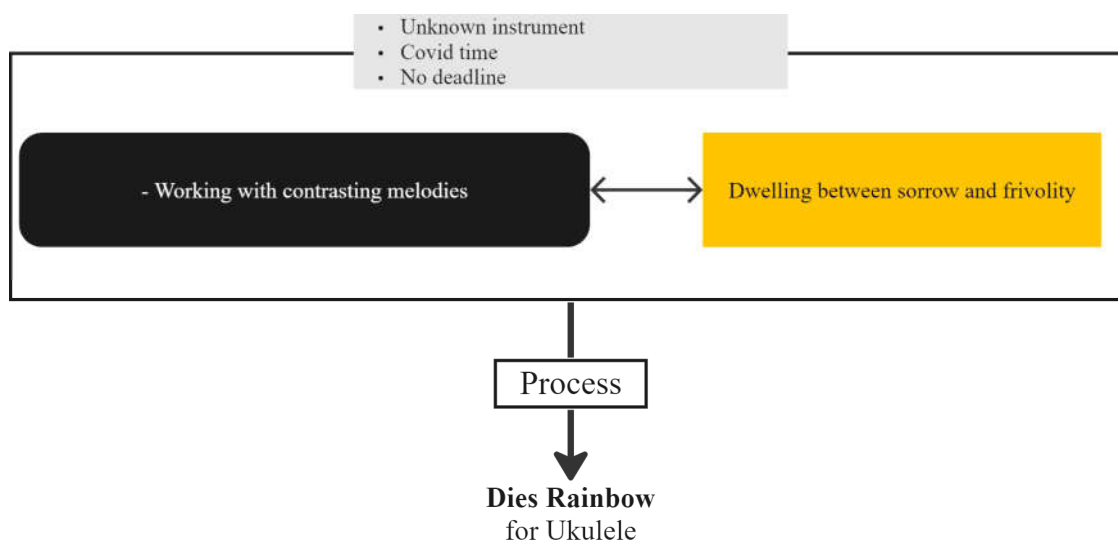
#### 3.1 Self-Analysis as a Compositional Tool

The diagram I developed in Figure 6 is shaped differently for each composition. Hereafter is my first artistic project diagram. In this case this diagram was developed after the composition and it allowed me to reflect retrospectively: on the context I inhabited when I composed the piece (the grey box); on the main aspects I, as an ironist-composer, investigated (the black box); on the extra-musical concept that guided the artistic choices (the yellow box).



**Figure 7.** Diagram of the Composition Process of *The True, the Fake and the False*

When considering a 35 minutes composition like this one, it is very useful to build such a diagram before starting the analysis of it as it summarize in a glimpse the most important characteristics of the composition. After a few diagrams made retrospectively, I tried to make diagrams for new works. I found useful to schematize the important features of a composition before and during the compositional process; the following one is for a work of 4 minutes and for solo instrument, and I used it during the writing process of the composition:



**Figure 8.** Diagram of the Composition Process of *Dies Rainbow*

This diagram shows a comprehensive summon of many aspects of the work, and it helps me to focus during the composition process. It must be said that some of the information written in the boxes were not useful; for example, the fact that *Dies Rainbow* did not have a deadline probably had no influence on the compositional process and it is not relevant in this research. However, it suggests the state of

mind in which I composed, a serene and honest exchange of ideas with the performer. Also, the “unknown instrument” in the grey box, reminds me that I needed to study the instrument I was composing for, a ukulele, which I never used before; these kinds of information may be useful in the future when maybe I will come back to look at my compositions.

Since the diagram is built on very personal interests I do not think that showing all the diagrams I developed for each composition would be useful. Although, it is important to consider that such a diagram is variable to personal needs; I sometimes change the content of the diagram during the composition process: this diagram, for me, is a tool for clarifying and it considers all the thoughts I have in my mind, not only those guiding the composition process. The final diagram is always made when the composition is completed. In addition, I will report another diagram in sub-chapter 3.4 when describing a different situation than the one I have been described so far. This will add something to consider for the final thoughts of this thesis.

### 3.2 Working on Existing Material: Modification and Recontextualization strategies

The compositional strategies chosen to process existing material in order to fulfil my artistic needs are modification and recontextualization. In fact, these two are the ones that best allow me to elaborate my personal ironic thoughts in the musical and instrumental situations that I will report on later.

As a first step, it is best to specify that by **modification** I mean small changes or minimal elaborations of a material or element; this may mean, for example, changing the rhythmic value of a few notes of an existing melody, but without making it unrecognizable. Or the timbre, the instrumentation, can be different, but the notes and rhythm remain the same as the original.

About the compositional strategy of **recontextualization**, on the other hand, I mean that the extracted material finds itself in a completely new context. This means that not only the musical elements around the existing one are different (e.g., the harmony, other voices that counterpoint the original element, the musical development that leads to the quotation of the existing material and the new material that springs from it), but that the element that is recontextualized acquires a new meaning. While it is true that when an object is moved it is naturally recontextualized, we cannot always know how or how much the new context changes the object; by the word “recontextualize” in this research,

Both of these strategies work differently depending on whether we decide to apply quoting action or allusion action. The following subchapters will better show this difference with practical examples.

If the Quoting action foresee the exact, or at least as recognizable as possible, citation of the original existing material, then it is evident that the modification of this material will be minimal; much more important will be the aspect of recontextualization.

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The image displays a musical score for 'Nastari, Dies Raimbow', spanning bars 21 to 39. It consists of four staves. The first staff (bars 21-26) features a melody with dynamic markings *p* and *f*. The second staff (bars 27-32) continues the melody with *p* and *mf* markings. The third staff (bars 33-36) shows a more complex texture with multiple melodic lines and dynamic markings *p* and *f*. The fourth staff (bars 37-39) includes a 'tambora' section with a 3/4 time signature and dynamic markings *p* and *f*. Red and blue brackets are used throughout to group specific melodic phrases across the staves.

**Example 3.** Nastari, Dies Raimbow, bar 21–39.

The use of **modification** in this composition does not concern the American song except for very small adjustments that do not affect the intelligibility of the original melody (e.g. the first G is a quarter longer, or the E at bar 27 should be an octave below). The Gregorian chant, rhythmically, it is certainly quite far removed from what the original would sound like; without entering in a discussion about the historical performance of a Gregorian Chant, it is quite evident that here the melody is proposed in a rapid manner and sometimes with dotted rhythms, characteristics not belonging to that style. However, I have maintained a certain fidelity in the division of the verses, and in the singability that characterizes this style of music. It is worth to notice also that the two melodies alternate at certain moments, making it possible to hear them one at a time, as is the case from bar 26 to 31.

The **recontextualization** strategy occurs automatically between the two melodies. In counterpointing each other, one creates the new context to the other. This concerns both the harmonic aspect and the general mood usually we address to the two melodies. For instance, note the F natural of the *Dies Irae* against the F sharp of the pop song; of course such contrast is not part of either of the two melodies. About the general mood, *Somewhere over the Rainbow* is usually linked to joyful character, while the Gregorian chant is dedicated to the Day of the Dead, thus a mourning feeling, and it has in fact been used very often in horror films such as *The City of the Dead* (John Moxey, music by Douglas

Gamley and Ken Jones 1960), *Sweeney Todd* (Tim Burton, music by Stephen Sondheim 2007) and *The Shining* (Stanley Kubrick, music by Wendy Carlos and Rachel Elkind 1980) (Zalman 2019).

In conclusion, regarding the use of the two strategies in *Dies Rainbow*, the clash of moods that the two melodies bring along with them, creates new contexts for both melodies without the need to strongly modify either of them.

I would like to give another example that will be very useful later on when exposing the connection between existing music material and the new material in the next section of this paper. *The True, the Fake and the False* is a composition written in 2020 for two performers: a guitar player, who needs also an electric guitar and a congas; a flute player, who needs also a bass flute, some small percussion and an harmonium. The composition borrows two existing material: one is the main theme from the movie *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* composed by Ennio Morricone (1966), the second one is the roman folk music *Stornello*.

Morricone's theme has a phrase of eight bars in which a motif of two bars is repeated four times. The motif can be divided into two parts: the first part consists of a fast leap of fourths that remains the same in each repetition (a very small variation in the third repetition); the second part of the motif, characterized by longer notes, is always different.



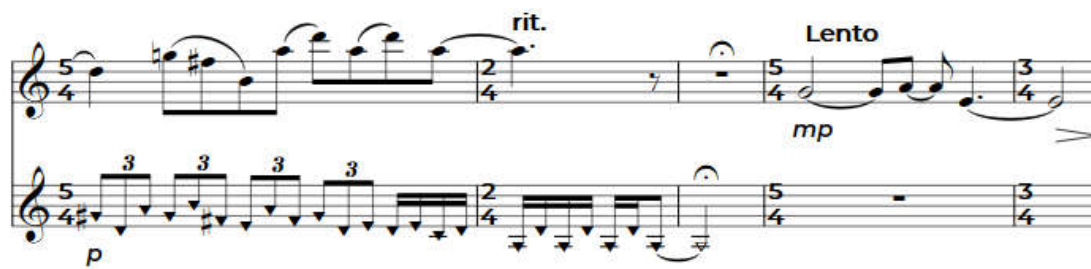
**Example 4.** Morricone, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, Main Theme.

I decided to use these two parts as autonomous and it is possible to find them separately, together or in the opposite order with the longer notes followed by the fast leap. The quotation of the theme recurs different times throughout the entire composition with very few and small **modifications**. Already at bar 12 of the first movement the bass flute plays the first part of the motive with a different rhythm and an octave lower (bass flute sounds an octave lower than written):



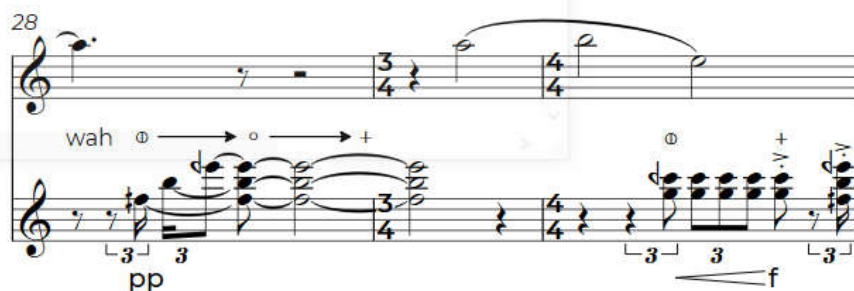
**Example 5.** Nastari, *The True, the Fake and the False*, I movement, bar 12–13.

At bar 33 the bass flute plays the first part of the motive in the same octave, at bar 34 the classical guitar echoes it with the palm mute technique; after the fermata, we can hear the second part of the motive alone, one tone upper the original:



**Example 6.** Nastari, *The True, the Fake and the False*, I movement, bar 34–38.

The presence of quarter tones and the electric guitar sound characterize the second part of the composition. This harmonic and sound environment helps me to **recontextualize** Morricone's theme, as for instance at bar 29-30 of the sixth movement, where the flute plays the ending part of Morricone's theme between microtonal harmonies and the wah-wah effect of the electric guitar.



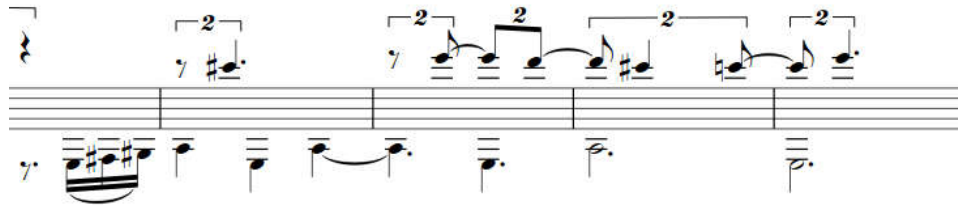
**Example 7.** Nastari, *The True, the Fake and the False*, I movement, bar 29–31.

Regarding the roman folk tune *stornello*, it must be explained that is a simple and short ABA poem with satiric text and often love-themed. As a musical form very often it lays on a characteristic bass movement:



**Example 8.** A typical accompaniment of a *stornello*.

In *The True, the Fake and the False*, I borrow two characteristics of the *stornello*: the melodic interval of the bass with its peculiar pace, and the major chord. It is possible to recognize these two features during my composition, as for instance the bass line in the second movement (bar 11):



**Example 9.** Nastari, *The True, the Fake and the False*, II movement, bar 11–15.

In the sixth movement, the electric guitar plays the *stornello* bass movement in a microtonal context:



**Example 10.** Nastari, *The True, the Fake and the False*, VI movement, bar 6–12.

Also, the harmonic environment in this same passage, is an alteration of a E major: the flute plays the three notes of the E major chord, while the electric guitar tries to interfere playing G quarter-tone sharp, the E quarter-tone flat, E, B and A.

To summarize, in *The True, the Fake and the False*, the **modification** and **recontextualization** strategies change form and become more elaborate along with the development of the composition. Modifications of existing material are minimal and initially concern only a few rhythmic values and harmony; often the quoting is positioned so that the listener has the opportunity to identify it. Towards the middle of the piece, with the insertion of the microtones, it is not only the harmony that become more complex, but also the rhythms and timbre; all these features together help to transport the existing material into a context far removed from the original. The clash between quartertones and natural notes, the use of the distortion and the wah-wah effect in the electric guitar, the reverberation of the flute, and the use of pre-recorded tracks, are all disturbing elements for the listener who wants to try to recognize the quotations.



### 3.2.2 Modification and Recontextualization in the Allusion Action

The fundamental characteristic of Allusion is to suggest the existing material, that becomes a reference to start from more than an object to modify; how recognizable the existing reference material is then depends on several factors that are not the subject of this research. Therefore, in the Allusion Action both strategies (modification and recontextualization) act by profoundly changing the reference material.

Referring to the ukulele piece I mentioned in the previous section, the reader may have noticed that the lower voice is characterized by the dotted rhythm.



**Example 11.** Nastari, Dies Rainbow, bar 22–29.

This is neither accidental nor dictated by personal taste; this rhythm is in fact typical of some funeral marches, namely the famous Chopin op. 72 and Beethoven op. 26. This is an example of an Allusion action: I wanted to combine the Gregorian chant of the *Dies Irae* with a rhythm that recalls a mourning atmosphere, but this rhythm is a feature that recalls, suggests, alludes to but does not exactly quote an existing music; rather it alludes to a convention of how the mourning and funeral atmosphere is often represented in Western music. This is a fairly simple and straightforward way in which to apply the Allusion action.

The composition for choir (SATB) *Nostra Ignuda Natura* written in 2023, presents another example of the Allusion action. I decided to borrow a typical musical form of a renaissance mass as a material for the third movement. Specifically, the object I wanted to manipulate was the very beginning of a renaissance mass, which is usually in the form of canon, and in particular, my inspiration was the hexachord Ut, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La that many composers used as Cantus Firmus.

Here after I report the first page of the *Missa Ut, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La* by Palestrina and the beginning of the fourth movement from my composition.

Kyrie.

CANTUS I.  
CANTUS II.  
ALTUS I.  
ALTUS II.  
TENOR.  
BASSUS.

Ký - ri - e - lé - i - son. [Ký - ri - e - lé - i - son.]

Example 12. Pierluigi da Palestrina, Missa Ut Re Mi Fa Sol La, Kyrie.

$\text{♩} = 96$

*mp pregando*  
*ppp* — *p pregando*  
*molto vib.* — *non vib.*  
*(pp)*  
*mp pregando*  
*mp pregando*

o - do - ra - ta  
gi - ne - stra con - ten - ta de - i de -  
do - ra - ta  
o - do - ra - ta gi - ne - stra con -  
ser - ti fior gen - ti - le  
ta - gi -  
ten - ta de - i de - ser - ti  
do - ra - ta gi - ne - stra con - ten

Example 13. Nastari, Nostra Ignuda Natura, IV movement, bar 1–29.

In this example the **modification** concerns the scale itself; I decided to use the Lydian Dominant scale (C-D-E-F#-G-A-Bb) that has seven pitches instead of six that characterize an hexacordum. Moreover in Palestrina after the voices sing the hexacordum, they counterpoint the other voices freely; in my composition after they sing the scale they restart from the beginning without any other notes. Also, while in Palestrina the Cantus II sings the Cantus Firmus after few bars (every notes of the hexacordum have the same value), I give to tenors the ascending scale in long values, starting from D without singing the C; other parts sing in canon the entire scale, descending, starting from the soprano, then the altos and finally the bass. Eventually, the rhythm is different; I kept the slow pace and mood that some renaissance mass has (note also the indication *pregando*, to pray, at the beginning), but rhythmically the triplets are not part of the referring style.

The **recontextualization** occurs in the resulting harmonies. The canon is built to have all the notes of the scale present and in a way that there are no octaves between the parts, thus respecting the Renaissance principles; on the other hand the resulted harmony have often diminished or augmented fourth and fifth that are distant from the renaissance style. Also, this section is followed by another that has an entirely different style and mood where perhaps the Lydian Dominant scale is also more suitable in my opinion.

The musical score for Example 14, titled 'Nastari, Nostra Ignuda Natura, IV movement, bar. 63–70', is presented in four staves: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The music is written in 4/4 time and features a canon of the Lydian Dominant scale (C-D-E-F#-G-A-Bb). The lyrics are: -col scioc - co se - - - col su - per -. The Soprano and Alto parts sing the scale in descending canon, while the Tenor and Bass parts sing the scale in ascending canon. The Tenor part starts with a long note on D, and the Bass part starts with a long note on C. The score is marked with a '63' at the beginning of the Soprano staff.

**Example 14.** Nastari, Nostra Ignuda Natura, IV movement, bar. 63–70.

Thus, an ancient musical form is the object of the **modification** and **recontextualization** strategies in the Allusion action for the composition *Nostra Ignuda Natura*; this was modified in content (the notes of the scale, and the rhythm) and recontextualized in a general framework of language not belonging to the original style.

A different example of the Allusion Action happen in the composition *La Sinfonia delle Cose* (*The Symphony of Things*) for Wind Orchestra written in 2023. If the beginning of a Renaissance mass is so typical that someone familiar with that style might perhaps recognize the reference I used in *Nostra Ignuda Natura*, in this case I apply the Allusion action on such personal references that it would be impossible for a listener to guess them, except by pure chance.

The existing material comes from the song *Everybody wants to rule the World* (1985) by the British band Tears for Fears and the song *Du Hast* (1997) by the German metal band Rammstein, In the case of the two pop songs, the material taken is so widespread that it could actually come from any piece of music, from any genre. For this reason, the modification is almost nonexistent; as for the recontextualization, it is instead a simple re-harmonization with instruments entirely different from the originals.

Regarding the British song, I took the initial idea of having a passage that is harmonically interesting to me despite its simplicity; a floating between D major with an added sixth and a B minor seventh with an accent on the second and fourth movements. The **recontextualization** concerns harmony and timbre; this idea is repeated several times throughout my composition always with different instrumentation and harmonies. In the example given from my symphony, the harmony is around A minor with an added fourth and B flat major; toward the end this same material is atonal.





**Example 16.** Nastari, *La Sinfonia delle Cose*, bar 7–8, Flute and II Clarinet.

The **modification** occurs in a simple augmentation of the rhythmical value:



**Example 17.** Nastari, *La Sinfonia delle Cose*, bar 61, 1st type of augmentation.



**Example 18.** Nastari, *La Sinfonia delle Cose*, bar 220, 2nd type of augmentation.

As for *Du Hast*, similarly, the **recontextualization** changes the harmony and timbre of a simple and common rhythmical idea. Originally, electric guitar and synthesizer play what is called a *riff* in a song of this kind; I entrust the idea mainly to the brass section at the beginning, until the rhythmical patterns grows and takes over all other musical ideas of the composition, bringing the music to its climax:



**Example 19.** Rammstein, *Du hast*, synthesizer riff.



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The first appearance has a small **modification**; instead of two sixteenths and an eighth, I use a sixteenth plus a dotted eighth. This variation is a material often used throughout the entire composition. In bar 21 there is this variation and then its inversion, rarely used.



**Example 21.** Nastari, *La Sinfonia delle Cose*, bar 20–24.

To sum up, the Allusion Action in *La Sinfonia delle Cose* focuses on simple materials taken from songs of recent times. If rhythmically the materials remain mostly the same, the harmonies, instrumentation and overall context is so different that it is impossible for a listener to make the connection between the material presented in my symphony and the original material. Moreover, as already mentioned, it is material so typical of any musical genre and historical period that only I can know its origin.

I shall return to this point in the Conclusion, highlighting the importance of the cultural value of the existing musical material taken as object for creating new compositions.

### 3.3 Working with Existing Material: Creation of New Material

The work I developed with existing materials, just shown in the previous chapters, is the starting point to create new musical material and in this sub-chapter I am going to show some examples of this elaboration.

In *The True, the Fake and the False* (2020), I was interested in two elements: microtones and timbral aspects. Musically, I extract and split into small cells some elements of the existing material; in this way I can work with materials that are not more recognizable as a quotation: the melodic interval of

the fourth that characterizes both the *stornello* and Morricone's theme, the small and fast bass movement of the *stornello* (E, F#, G#, A), and the major triad typical of the Italian folk tune.

For instance, the third movement is for flute solo and is based on the first three fast notes of the *ornello* that are distant one tone each. I use this structure to build small cells of three notes each starting from different pitches; after using the small cells without giving them space to develop, at the centre of the piece I present a scale (bar 87):



**Example 22.** Nastari, The True, the Fake and the False, III movement, bar 87.

The single cells and the entire scale are also used with rhythmical variations and different timbres: dry clicks and air sounds. This material is so small and completely out of its original context that it cannot be considered as a quotation anymore. More important, this single cell misses its function, which is to drive the music to the tonic; in fact the single cell should have four notes, where the last one it's the resolution of this gesture.

Bars 35–38 of the fourth movement has an example regarding the use of the major triad:

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**Example 23.** Nastari, The True, the Fake and the False, IV movement, bar 35–38.



In this moment of the composition there is, from up to the bottom, a flute, an electric guitar and a recorded electric guitar. The harmony floats at first around G, in the first two bars, and then around E major/minor seventh chord; the flute insists especially on G, D and, at bar 38, on E. The electric guitar deviates the harmony applying quarter tones especially on G and B; the recorded track plays both natural and quarter tones sharp D (the fifth of G and the seventh of E).

Another example can be found in *La Sinfonia delle Cose*, where the simple existing material taken as object, offered to me the possibility to create new material. Specifically, I take only the first three notes of the original idea and then, through a diminution, I create and develop a new simple material that guides an entire passage between bar 104 and bar 134. It is helpful to look again at the material from the song *Everybody wants to rule the World* before the excerpt from my composition.



**Example 24.** Tears for Fears, *Everybody wants to rule the World*, bar 1.

**Example 25.** Nastari, *La Sinfonia delle Cose*, bar 127–130.

In the same composition, I use an idea from the third movement of Shostakovich's *Eighth Symphony*. I do not quote in any way the original material but I only use it to create a new material. In this case, the elaboration of this new material is quite free and personal. I had in mind the passage from Shostakovich's symphony during the creation of my composition.

**Example 26.** Shostakovich, Symphony n.8, III movement, bar 77–84.

Somehow, by obsessively repeating that passage while working on my music I naturally mixed the two musical content and I developed an episode. I call it an episode because only the brass section presents it in bars 198-210 of my composition (Example 27).

It is possible to see that the similarity to Shostakovich's idea is minimal, and the differences are a lot. However, the two compositions have a rhythmical, obsessive line against a fortissimo long notes line; moreover, both examples show strong timbrical contrast (strings-woods in Shostakovich, woods-brass in mine). While in the case of Shostakovich, this material is central of the entire movement and it is in fact developed, for me it is only a moment, shortly before the end of the composition. This is because, even if it is not a quotation, my intention was to allude to Shostakovich, and I did it by creating a new material from his composition and by using it only in one precise and important moment, like I would do it with a proper quotation.

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Obl.

2 Fl.

2 Ob.

Cr. In.

Fg.

Cl. pr.

5 Cl. I

5 Cl. II

5 Cl. III

2 Cl. ent.

Cl. b.

Cl. Cb.

2 Sax. ent.

Sax. T.

Sax. Br.

Sax. Bb.

4 Cr.

Hr.

4 Tr.

4 Cnt.

2 Tbn.

Tbn. B.

2 Tba.

Timp.

Tom-T.

Pt.

Rud.

27

ff

pp

Wood Blocks

Example 27. Nastari, *La Sinfonia delle Cose*, bar 205–212.

### 3.4 The Underlying Irony

In this section, I want to report on the motives and purposes of the compositions described above. Still following Metzger's and Burkholder's idea that borrowing existing material is "an act that conveys meaning" (Burkholder 1994), it seems necessary to explain what meaning I wanted to convey with my borrowing actions. I therefore need to explain how in the different compositions presented so far irony provided the trigger for the composition. It must be emphasized that each one can interpret irony differently, even when evident. That is why this section is to be considered as a personal description of an artistic work that has no other purpose than to be an artistic work. If the listener or performer understands, perceives or misinterprets the presence of irony, it is not this research that will investigate the causes.

The composition *The True, the Fake and the False* presents the alienation of the existing material as the main ironic aspect; the quoting and allusion actions should rise a feeling of estrangement, creating uncertainty and doubts in the listener's perception; the musical elements are introduced and left in more or less defined ways throughout the entire composition, and the quotations are then more or less perceivable. The recorded tracks plays in a subtle way and it is not easy to understand immediately that, for instance, there are two "fake" (meaning, pre-recorded) electric guitars playing from the speakers in the last movement.

In *Dies Rainbow*, the irony arises from the new context the two borrowed materials have and create each other. Having a lighthearted tune like *Somewhere over the Rainbow* counterpointing a Gregorian chant that quintessentially represents the Day of the Dead is like having two characters who say the opposite of each other, but both are telling the truth. Expressing a concept using its opposite is one of the forms in which irony can work.

In *Nostra Ignuda Natura*, I changed the content of a musical form. In this case, I recreate a situation that in Western culture is sacred, the beginning of the Mass, but I changed its words and musical content. The musical form is typical of the Renaissance, the text is from the mid-nineteenth century, and the musical content is typical of the twentieth century. This mixture of different languages and conventions creates a distorted image of each.

*La Sinfonia delle Cose* has musical elements chosen from very different genres to create a pastiche that is ironic, probably only to me. In fact, I find it rather difficult for the audience to recognize what musical material I have borrowed. The underlying irony that triggered and guided the compositional

process is the idea of having a pastiche of different musical worlds, pop music, metal music, and classical music, played by a wind orchestra. However, the pastiche is then elaborated in such a way that the musical language sounds much more homogeneous than if I had juxtaposed the musical elements without elaboration. Thus, the pastiche idea triggers the composition but disappears in the final result.

There is an additional point to be made that links us back to sub-chapter 1.1.2 on autoethnography. The material is related to personal affections or memories

### 3.5 Decentering the Composer: a Performer-Driven Composition

I want to add one last example of a composition that has not been reported yet. This work is not developed around me, but inspired by the performer. *Elogio dell'Errore* (Praise to the Mistake) is a piece written in 2022 for a performer who plays the period clarinet, modern clarinet, plus a tambourine on one foot. It was commissioned by my colleague and friend Vittoria Ecclesia; precisely because of our friendship, I was able to dwell on some aspects of her life, instead of mine, to find musical material. In fact, she specifically asked me to use the two different clarinets because she works and does research with both; I then added the tambourine and some theatrical elements. I knew that Ecclesia in fact started playing clarinet in marching bands, and this suggested to me the idea of using the march as an idea, but not only as musical material. The performer then has to march on stage, run and change clarinet; the tambourine rhythmically emphasizes all these actions. In addition, in the second section of the piece, we identified some passages that were difficult to perform with the period clarinet for physical reasons of the instrument and I used the tambourine to "cover" the mistakes that naturally the instrument produce.

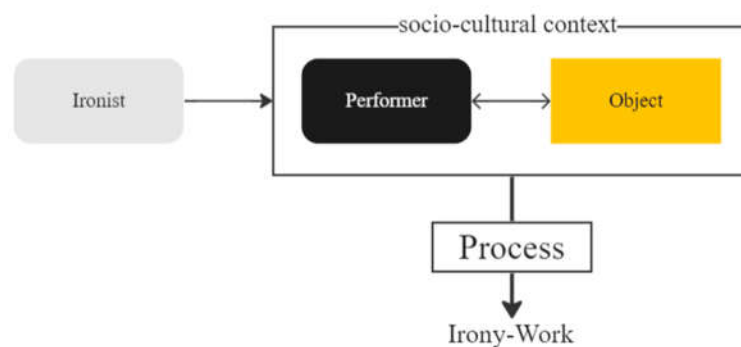
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The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented on two staves. The top staff is a vocal line with a treble clef, and the bottom staff is a piano accompaniment with a bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into measures by bar lines, with some measures containing multiple rests. The piano accompaniment features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some measures containing triplets. The overall tempo is marked as 'Moderato'.

**Example 28.** Nastari, Elogio dell'Errore, bar 144–147.  
Upper staff: rhythm of the tambourine. Bottom staff: clarinet part.

With this example, I want to highlight how the methods developed in this research can be applied by changing some factors, namely the context and interests of the performer instead of the composer's. This different approach provided me with a different challenge that I found intriguing and educating. It may sounds banal but I have personally proved that I do not necessarily have to refer to myself to produce music, on the contrary I could learn from other's experiences and interests. I can develop musical aspects that without a confrontation with a musician other than myself would have remained hidden for longer if not forever; the theatrical aspect for example came almost spontaneously thinking about the march, a cue provided by the performer, and only because of her willingness to spend time rehearsing was it possible to materialize.

Referring to the diagram of page 26, in this experience I, as ironist, observe the situation from outside and give my interpretation to the different components. It is an opportunity to compare my own thoughts with other's one providing a different experience to the composition process. It is possible to see this difference in the diagram that follows, which presents a little but crucial modification from the original diagram:



**Figure 9.** Diagram of the Composition Process of *Elogio dell'Errore*.

Furthermore, I also received various opinions after the premiere. One listener saw it as a tribute to Fellini, another a protest against war, and a more generic interpretation thought that this composition expressed the joy of playing. Even though this confirms that the audience can see and listen whatever they desire or want to, composing and playing with Ecclesia around the musical idea of the band and the concept of "mistake" was natural and interesting for both of us. I believe that looking for personal attachment or interests can provide motivation to work better and in detail.

This example falls within the compositions that use the allusion action taking as object the idea of the marching band. Moreover, it is possible to recognize the recontextualization strategy, since the music does not present any traditional marching band harmonies or melodies and thus the marching



movements are in a new context. The modification of the act of marching occurs on a rhythmic level, which should be very regular in a traditional march but in this case are not.

### 3.6 Teaching Experience

While working on this thesis, I was able to develop and propose a course to the Department of Classical Composition in the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. This course, called Composing with 14th Century Technique, wants to introduce to students some important aspects of both Medieval and contemporary music offering insights about the composition practice in general. As discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, taking the past as a model to learn and rethink our point of view on similar topics seems to be natural of Western culture, and after two years dedicated to this research it came almost natural to create a course that reflects in a practical way, through compositional exercises, on this aspect. The course grew out of the very studies and experiences made during the research, and intends to point out to students how certain compositional techniques or musical ideas have not fundamentally changed, what changes are the languages and contexts. For instance, the example of borrowing actions is emblematic of this and I dedicate one lesson to the quoting action discussing different compositions based on the melody of *L'Homme Armé* in Medieval times and then some contemporary compositions such as *Sinfonia* by Luciano Berio. The action is basically the same, but the context is different and then the meaning and the aim of such action. Discussing this with students at the beginning of their composition studies arise many questions, which is, in my opinion, always a good starting point.

When I describe this experience I like to remember Henze's quote (1982):

*[One's] approach to the composers of the past and to one's own particular experience must always remain an integral part of some dialectic, living process... He [the composer] must draw on the archetypes of his culture, for only by reference to their presence can he make clear in what way his own music diverges from that of other composers of his own generation and of the past.*

I find this sentence shows an interesting approach to confronting oneself to the past; the dialectical process is what I try to suggest to the students and what I consider important for my activity as well.

## 4. Conclusion and Final Thoughts

This practice-based research wants to delve into the compositional process concerning new music that involves the use of existing musical material through borrowing actions. Characteristic of this research, being artistic in nature, is to show the above process through practice from a personal point of view, and in this case it was therefore necessary to examine the concept of irony to which my artistic production is strongly related. The research was developed around the question on how composers can effectively borrow existing musical material to satisfy personal aesthetic goals.

The answer to the question was to develop a structured approach to the technical aspect and the aesthetic aspect in order to analyze and reflect on it separately; then, integrate these two components (in my case by developing the diagram, sub-chapter 1.1.3, 3.1) in order to work consistently on the selected elements and overcome the intuitive aspect. The latter remains important especially in the early stages of composition since the ironic aspect that triggers all the process is indeed driven by intuition or the emotional state of the moment. Personally, however, I find the musical result most satisfying when I can technically and rationally guide intuition to find what I consider the maximum expression of the musical material I am using.

To respond to this compositional problematic I developed a methodology tailored on myself starting from autoethnographic inputs and then by integrating the fundamental concept of the Information Theory. More specifically, following the advice and exercises provided by Chang (2008), I first learned how to identify personal interests and individual characteristics. I also learned how to categorize and link them together in order to nurture a reflection. This activity provided me with a better self-awareness, which also resulted in identifying new points of interest to consider as an artist. For example, I was able to clear the meaning I was giving to the musical materials I was choosing and I could express better my thoughts with those materials. This also allowed me to select the compositional strategies most suitable for the artistic end I envisioned for a new composition.

Information Theory suggested the division of argumentations that this thesis follows, and it is something that I will keep with me in future research. Furthermore, the diagram I designed, reported in Chapter 1.1.3, represents the components I have in mind while composing. I usually make this diagram after the first sketches of a new composition, and this helps me to individuate more clearly the conventions I am referring to and the meaning I want to express.



The practical examples presented in this thesis demonstrate how borrowing actions, coupled with strategies of modification and recontextualization, shape the compositional process. By breaking down existing musical material into smaller cells and exploring rhythmic variations and timbral aspects, I have shown how new musical material can emerge while retaining traces of its origins. Moreover, my personal ironic approach has served as a catalyst for creative exploration, prompting me to rethink some conventional musical elements and challenge listener's expectations.

From a more theoretical point of view, I resorted to the studies on borrowing actions done by Burkholder (1994; 2001) and Metzger (2003) thanks to which I was able to understand the different meanings these actions can have, through examples from different musical genres. I observed how and why different composers resort to borrowing actions, thus being able to take inspiration and reflect on my own motivations and compositional process. Central to my exploration has been the intersection of personal aesthetic goals and compositional technique. I consider the concept of conventionality in art, particularly in the way Lotman addresses it (1988; 2022) and by reasoning on theories and examples by Burkholder, Metzger and Lotman, I decided that for this research I wanted to explore **quotation** and **allusion** as borrowing actions, and to work on melodies and musical forms as musical material. With respect to musical material, I also decided to use those that could most likely be shared with the audience that was most likely to hear my compositions, for example, melodies from famous pop songs such as *Somewhere over the Rainbow*, or musical forms important in Western culture such as Renaissance masses. Although these materials can evoke different meanings and diverse images in everyone's mind, they represent those conventions that trigger my reflections; from conversations I have had with colleagues, professors, and audiences, I believe that the recognition of these conventions also initiates reflections in the mind of the listener (see the example of *Elogio dell'Errore* in sub-chapter 3.5). This can be considered as a personal knowledge to investigate in the future for other purposes, but in this research, where the main aim is to work on the compositional process, this kind of knowledge helped me in designing the diagram.

Moreover, my curiosity in studying the concept of irony and how to express it in music put me in front of something very complex and probably a question impossible to answer. However, this provided me with questions and interest in composers I had not considered in this respect, such as Ravel (Zank 2009). To quote Eco, as already done in the introduction, the composer poses problems and solves them (2023). Dealing with irony in music poses many problems, which I may not have solved, but which certainly pushed me to widen and deepen my studies and to write music with a lot of desire to verify thoughts and ideas I had in mind. Moreover, the interest toward the problem of communication in art led me to study the Information theory which provided me a way of dividing

the argumentation of this thesis and most importantly the different aspects of my composition process. Personally, I consider one of the major achievements of this thesis the development of a mindset that pushes me toward the verification of ideas or insights; to put it better, I have developed an attitude toward artwork that involves more courage in seeking solutions and a *modus operandi* that I feel is more effective.

I also want to emphasise that this research wants to be a first step into a wider one. In fact, the study of Information Theory, of the concept of convention and of irony, predispose several questions aimed at understanding the interaction of a musical creation with the listener and the performer. Also, the diagram on page 31 (Figure 5) from which I developed the one used in this thesis, have both the listener and the performer as main components together with the author. In many passages of this thesis I already create a link toward the audience and performers, and the literature of this thesis also points toward these two components as well (e.g. Burkholder 2001; Eco 1964; Hatten 2018; Lotman 1977; 1981; 2022; Meyer 1956; 1967; Metzger 2003; Moles 1969; Monelle 2000; 2006; Nattiez 1990). This interest is so profound and natural that even in this thesis a first step toward the performer has already taken place (sub-chapter 3.5) and I intend in the future to include the performer's and the listener's component in my research.

I also consider a very important result the awareness I have gained toward the use of compositional strategies and borrowing actions, which has also led me to try out how I can apply them toward non-musical materials. In the case of *Elogio dell'Errore*, the reference material is still musical, but already we can consider it somewhere between music and image, because the act of marching involves a physical action. Therefore, I tried to step a bit more outside from music when I composed *Pappagalli Verdi* (Green Parrots) for ukulele in 2022. In fact, this piece is meant to take as its cue the image that many people have of the ukulele as a toy instrument, and instead I create a sound environment far from what one could consider a toy-sound. This result is to be considered as a ramification of this thesis, and was in part presented at the UIC 2023 (Ukulele International Conference) in Alessandria, Italy.

Eventually, the insights gained from this research hold implications beyond artistic practice, extending into the realm of pedagogy. The development of the "Composing with 14th Century Technique" course at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre exemplifies how these insights can be translated into educational settings. By engaging students in practical exercises and critical reflection, this course aims to foster a deeper understanding of compositional techniques and aesthetic choices.

In conclusion, this practice-based research proposes an example of how a composer can conduct introspection to identify more clearly those personal or artistic interests that sometimes are only intuited. Reasoning in a structured way about these aspects provides greater awareness and can uncover new interests and tools to work with. It remains clear that everyone has their own personal way of working, but sharing experience serves precisely to manifest the possibility of different paths. This is useful for young artists who are still seeking security and need to experiment, but more mature artists may also encounter difficult times from a creative point of view and can find comfort and help in the experiences of others.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XsMOpnOWqME>

*Fabrizio Nastari. Nostra Ignuda Natura 2023, live recording, excerpts:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwC7fif3WXc>

*Fabrizio Nastari. The True, the Fake and the False 2021, live recording:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2TzA-wtMdQ>

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## List of Doctoral Concerts

### Artistic Project 1

Program: Fabrizio Nastari, *The True, the Fake and the False* (2020–2021)

Date: 26.05.2021

Venue: Kulturnhalle, Leipzig, Germany

Performers: Unassisted Fold

### Artistic Project 2

Program: Fabrizio Nastari, *Nostra Ignuda Natura* (2021–2022)

Date: 31.03.2023

Venue: Mustpeade Maja, Tallinn, Estonia

Performers: Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir

### Artistic Project 3

Program: Fabrizio Nastari, *ÉPOS* (2022–2023)

Date: 21.05.2023

Venue: EMTA Suur Saal, Tallinn, Estonia

Performers: Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir

### Artistic Project 4

Program: Fabrizio Nastari, *A Student's Tale* (2024)

Date: 03.11.2023

Venue: EMTA Black Box, Tallinn, Estonia

Performers: L'Arsenale Ensemble, Stage Director: Liis Kolle



## Töö lühikokkuvõte

Uurimus „**Olemasoleva muusikalise materjali laenamine ja iroonia. Esteetilistel eesmärkidel rakendatud kompositsioonistrateegiate uurimine**“ on loovuurimusliku doktoriõppe kirjalik osa, milles käsitletakse muusikalise materjali laenamist uue muusika loomise protsessis. Tulenevalt käesoleva töö loovuurimuslikust iseloomust näitlikustan esteetilistel eesmärkidel rakendatud kompositsioonistrateegiaid läbi isikliku praktika ja vaatenurga. Kuna minu loominguline tegevus on tihedalt seotud irooniaga, siis osutus minu uurimuse jaoks keskseks iroonia kontseptsiooni ja mõiste uurimine.

Praktikapõhise uurimistöö eesmärk on näidata, kuidas meloodiate või muusikaliste vormide laenamine võib luua uut muusikalist materjali, mis vastab konkreetsetele esteetilistele vajadustele. Teisisõnu, kuidas saab helilooja tõhusalt laenata olemasolevat muusikalist materjali, pidades silmas isiklikke esteetilisi eesmärke?

Minu doktoritöös mängib võtmerolli laenatud materjali ja iroonia seos. Kuigi keskendusin esialgu oma magistritöös iroonia uurimisele, sain hiljem aru, et laenamine on minu loometöös sama oluline kui iroonia. Laenamise ja iroonia ühendamise kaudu hakkasin kujundama omaenda komponeerimisprotsessi ja -tööriistakasti.

Eesmärkide saavutamiseks töötasin välja spetsiaalse metoodika, mis sisaldab autoetnograafilist lähenemist. Täpsemalt öeldes sidusin mõned isiklikud huvid ja aspektid oma kompositsioonipraktikaga, järgides Heewon Changi raamatus „Autoetnograafia kui meetod“ (2008) antud soovitusi ja harjutusi. Nende harjutuste abil suutsin arendada oma kunstilist teadlikkust – mõista, milliseid kunstilisi eesmärke soovin saavutada. Kui eesmärgid on selgemad, muutub sobivate vahendite leidmine lihtsamaks. Kuigi ma juba teadsin, et iroonia on see kontseptsioon, millele minu loomingulisus rajaneb, täpsustas autoetnograafiline lähenemine minu arusaamist enda kunstilistest taotlustest ja nii suutsin paremini teadvustada oma huvi juba olemasoleva muusikalise materjali laenamise vastu. Sellele tuginedes vaatasin oma varasemate aastate partituure ning leidsin, et tsiteerimine ja vihjamine on minu kompositsiooniprotsessi peamisteks ja tõhusaimateks vahenditeks.

Rahuldava teadmiseni jõudmine läbi teadlikkuse arendamise ei olnud kiire ega lihtne. Minu kogemus näiteb, et enesevaatlus on loomeinimeste jaoks väga sageli oluline ning loodan, et autoetnograafiline lähenemine, mis selles väitekirjas tooni annab, inspireerib ka teisi loomeinimesi endale õigeid küsimusi esitama.

Minu uurimistöö järgib informatsiooniteooria põhiideed, mille kohaselt saab informatsiooni jagada semantiliseks ja esteetiliseks. Sellel jaotusel põhineb ka väitekirja struktuur, mis jaguneb laenatud muusikalise materjali (semantilise informatsiooni) ja iroonilise isikliku tähenduse (esteetilise informatsiooni) vahel. See jaotus on ka muutunud minu loomingulise tööprotsessi lahutamatuks osaks: alapeatükis 1.1.3 selgitan, kuidas töötasin välja diagrammi, mis aitab mind kompositsiooniprotsessis eneserefleksiooni tööriistana. See diagramm on minu vajadustele kohandatud lahendus, kuid oma paindlikkuse ja struktuuri tõttu võib diagrammist olla abi ka teistele loomeinimestele. Sidudes informatsiooniteooriat Douglas Colin Muecke'i (1970) uurimusega irooniast kirjanduses, võib minu väljatöötatud diagramm aidata selgitada kompositsiooni konteksti ja eesmärke. Diagrammist oli abi, et teha kindlaks, millist muusikalist materjali soovin arendada, olgu see siis juba olemasolev materjal või originaalne muusikaline idee.

Nagu sageli praktikapõhistes loovuurimustes, inspireerisid mind teiste loovisikute seisukohad, mis tundusid mulle kõige lähedasemad. Erilist rõhku panin mind huvitavaid mõisteid käsitlenud muusikateadlaste ja teadlaste kirjutistele. Kogu ajaloo jooksul on heliloojad sageli loonud oma teoseid varasemate teoste eeskujul. See kontseptsioon pärineb klassikalisest traditsioonist. Minu enda haridusteel, eriti Itaalias, oli renessanssmuusika ja selliste heliloojate nagu Palestrina uurimine väga olulisel kohal. Pärast Eestisse asumist õppisin aga tundma teistsugust lähenemist heliloomingule, mis võimaldas rohkem stiililist vabadust, säilitades siiski ka seose varasemalt kasutatud tehnikatega. Heliloojana olin uudishimulik, miks tunnen teatud materjali või stiiliga lähedust ja kuidas see mu enda loomingut mõjutab. Näiteks, nagu osutab Taruskin, näitavad Brahmsi viited Beethovenile ja teistele heliloojatele, et varasemate teoste tsiteerimine ei tähenda originaalsuse puudumist, vaid pigem toimib tsitaat uuendust soodustava rikkaliku pinnasena. Sarnaselt Brahmsile, kes on oma teostesse peitnud vihjeid – mõnikord isiklikke –, kasutan ka mina oma loometöös juba olemasolevat muusikalist materjali, et anda edasi sügavamat tähendust. Peter Burkholderi (1994; 2001) ja David Metzgeri (2003) põhjalikud selgitused laenamise kohta – kuidas laenamine on seotud kultuurikonteksti ja tähendusega, mida kunstnik soovib laenamist kasutades edasi anda – võimaldasid mul mõista, miks ja kuidas ma üht või teist laenamisviisi rakendasin.

Iroonia mõiste otsustasin defineerida tuginedes enda tõlgendusele. Oluliseks mõjutajaks oli Luigi Pirandello, kelle teosed rõhutavad irooniat kui traagilist vahendit (mitte koomilist), mida kasutatakse reaalsuse ebamäärasuse ja keerukuse peegeldamiseks. Pirandello jaoks paljastab iroonia sügavamaid tõesid inimolemusest. See on kooskõlas Søren Kierkegaardiga, kelle arvates ei saa iroonik oma iroonilist vaatenurka välja lülitada. Mina ei kasuta irooniat selleks, et varjata tõde, vaid selleks, et pakkuda värsket vaatenurka tuttavatele teemadele. Erinevalt Kierkegaardist ei kasuta ma irooniat

selleks, et (kujutatavast) olukorrast või objektist distantseeruda, vaid pigem on iroonia minu jaoks tööriist, mille abil saada ainesega kontakti ja seda reflekteerida. Selle vaatenurga esindajateks on näiteks Dario Fo ja Franca Rame, kes kasutasid irooniat, et provotseerida mõtlemist ja arutlemist sotsiaalsete vastuolude üle, tuues nii esile iroonia kui retoorilise vahendi.

Oma kompositsioonides rakendan irooniat pigem valgustava kui varjava vahendina, kasutades seda ideede ja väljakujunenud normide küsimuse alla seadmiseks. Pean rõhutama, et aktsepteerin kuulajate vabadust kujundada oma tõlgendus sõltumata sellest, millistele teemadele ma ise tahan muusika kaudu tähelepanu juhtida. See lähenemine on sarnane Olivier Messiaenile – tema isiklikud huvid ja tõekspidamised kujundasid tema kompositsioone, kuid ta ei eeldanud, et publik peaks neid tähendusi täielikult mõistma.

Otsustasin süvitsi käsitleda kahte seost laenamise ja iroonia mõiste vahel: konventsionaalsuse mõiste kunstis (Lotman 1988, 2022) ja informatsiooniteooria (Moles 1969). Mõlemad aitavad arendada suuremat teadlikkust tähendusest ja muusikalisest sõnumist, mida tahan edasi anda. Sellegipoolest, nagu informatsiooniteooria ise ütleb, jääb kunstiline sõnum tõlgendamiseks avatuks. See tundub veelgi ilmsem muusikas, mis koosneb määravas osas niinimetatud esteetilisest informatsioonist, mille tõlgendusväli on üks avaramaid. Heliloojana pean siiski oluliseks täpselt teada, mis on minu kunstiline eesmärk; mind ei huvita võimalike tõlgenduste etteaimamine ega juhtimine, isegi kui see peaks võimalik olema. Minu loomingulist protsessi juhib tahe konkreetset tähendust väljendada ja edastada. Lotmani uuringud kunsti konventsionaalsuse mõiste kohta ja Abraham Molesi raamat informatsiooniteooriast muusikas (1969) on aidanud mul mõista, kuidas iseendale edastada muusikalisi ja kunstilisi eesmärke, mis on mulle olulised.

Kolmandas peatükis tõin välja mitu näidet, mis kajastavad minu loomingulist protsessi samm-sammult ning selgitasin laenamise ja kompositsioonistrateegiate rakendamist. Esiteks käsitlesin tsiteerimist, näidates eraldi modifitseerimise ja rekontekstualiseerimise strateegiate kasutamist. Samuti tõin näiteid, et demonstreerida eeltoodud strateegiate kasutamist vihjamise abil. Toimingute ja strateegiate klassifitseerimine võimaldas mul komponeerida viisil, mis on minu jaoks kõige tõhusam. Kui mul tekkis loomulik spontaanne huvi mõne objekti vastu, siis selle objekti üle mõtisklemine, kasutades laenamist, aitas mul aru saada, miks see objekt mind huvitab. Siiski olen viimastel aastatel kirjutanud mitu teost, ilma et oleksin kasutanud laenamist, ning ma ei pea neid kompositsioone vähemväärtuslikeks. Sellegipoolest on minu loomingus alati olemas selge isiklik tähendus, kuigi olen täiesti teadlik, et keegi teine ei saa täielikult mõista, mida püüan edasi anda.

Minu teose „La Sinfonia delle Cose“ isiklikke viiteid, muusikalist inspiratsiooni ja laiemat tähendust on üsna võimatu täielikult mõista, kuid ometi juhtisid kõik need tegurid mu loomeprotsessi. Lisaks sellele on viis, kuidas ma muusikalist materjali modifitseerin ja arendan, tõhus ka siis, kui loon algupärast materjali, sest kogemus laenamisega juba olemasolevast materjalist on ülekantav ka originaalmaterjali komponeerimisele.

Samuti katsetasin teistsugust lähenemist: kui tavaliselt tõuseb muusikalise materjali inspiratsioon minu enda huvidest, siis kirjutades teost „Elogio dell' Errore“ („Kiitus veale“) avanes mul võimalus pöörduda teise inimese – esitaja – kui kompositsiooniprotsessi käivitaja poole. 2022. aastal kirjutatud teoses – mille tellis minu sõber ja kolleeg Vittoria Ecclesia, kes mängib nii vanaaegset kui ka tänapäevast klarnetit – järgisin esitaja soovi pidada silmas mõlemat klarnetit ning lisaks veel tamburiini ja teatrielemente. Teades Ecclesia tausta puhkpilliorkestrites, kasutasin marsi kujundit mitte ainult muusikaliselt, vaid ka teatraalselt: teost esitades muusik marsib, jookseb ja vahetab laval klarneteid, kusjuures esitaja jala külge kinnitatud tamburiin rõhutab neid tegevusi. Teose teises osas esitatakse vanaaegsel klarnetil ebatavalisi käike, mis pilli mehaanika tõttu ei kõla puhtalt ega selgelt; tamburiini helid katavad sümboolselt neid loomulikke vigu, lisades esitusele muusikalis-teatraalset materjali.

Eeltoodu näitlikustab, kuidas minu välja töötatud diagramm ja lähenemine võivad nihutada fookuse teose autori (elu)kontekstilt ja huvidelt esitaja omadele. Selle teose loomise õpetlik väljakutse kinnitas mulle, et saan palju õppida teiste kogemustest. Teose teatraalne aspekt tuli tänu Ecclesia panusele esile loomulikult ja teos valmis ainult meie koostöö ja proovide kaudu. Esmaesituse kuulajate tõlgendused olid mitmekesised: mõned nägid seda kui austusavaldust Fellinile, teised sõjavastase protestina või lihtsalt rõõmsa mänguna. See kinnitab, et publik tõlgendab muusikat omatahtsi, kuid minu ja Ecclesia puhkpilliorkestritest ja „vigadest“ inspireeritud koostöö oli mõlemale loomulik ja rikastav protsess. Teoses „Elogio dell' Errore“ on kasutatud vihjamist, viidates puhkpilliorkestri mõistele, kuid ilma traditsiooniliste harmooniate või meloodiateta, seega seda mõistet rekontekstualiseerides. Marsirütmi on muudetud, luues nii ebakorrapärasuse, mis vastandub tüüpilisele marsile.

See väitekiri juhib tähelepanu ka mallelegi, mis võib tunduda endastmõistetav, kuid mida on vahel hea meelde tuletada: mida rohkem helilooja teab, seda vabam on ta valima, mida uut teost luues kasutada. Selle eesmärgi saavutamiseks on vaja uurida ja tundma õppida võtteid, et teravdada näiteks väljendusoskust. Seda silmas pidades töötasin Eesti Muusika- ja Teatriakadeemia kompositsiooni eriala bakalaureuseõppe üliõpilastele välja kursuse „14. sajandi tehnikaga komponeerimine“. Selle kursuse loomise ja andmise kogemuse kaudu on minu huvi keskaja ja renessansi muusika vastu veelgi

süvenenud ning samuti tundub, et üliõpilased leiavad vahendeid, inspiratsiooni ja küsimusi, mille üle järele mõelda ja millele tuginedes loodetavasti oma oskusi ka tulevikus arendada.

Soovin rõhutada kompositsiooniprotsessi varjatud aspektide avamise olulisust, nagu on soovitanud ka Barbara Lüneburg. Iroonia ja laenatud materjali kasutamise analüüsimise kaudu on minu eesmärk süvendada arusaama loometegevusest. Loodan, et minu pakutud teadmised on abiks järgmistele heliloojatele, kes uurivad sarnaseid meetodeid.

Kokkuvõttes on käesolev praktikapõhine uurimus näide sellest, kuidas helilooja saab ennast reflekteerida, et selgemini määratleda mõnikord vaid vaevu aimatavaid isiklikke või kunstilisi huve. Neist aspektidest struktureeritult mõtlemine suurendab teadlikkust ja võib viia uute huvide ja loomeviiside avastamiseni. On selge, et igal loojal on oma isiklik töömeetod, kuid kogemuste jagamine aitab rõhutada erinevate loometeede võimalikkust. See on kahtlemata kasulik noortele loojatele, kes veel otsivad kindlust ja vajavad katsetamist, kuid ka küpsemad kunstnikud võivad loomealaselt keerulistel aegadel leida lohutust ja abi kaasteeliste kogemustest.

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