Mikrotöne:
Small is Beautiful
- III -

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International Symposium:
"Mikrotöne: Small is Beautiful"

University Mozarteum Salzburg, June 28th - 30th, 2019
Organized by the International Ekmelic Music Society

Prologue

Agustín Castilla-Ávila

The following articles are selected papers presented at the international symposium "Mikrotöne: Small is beautiful" between the 28th and the 30th of June 2019 at the *University Mozarteum* in Salzburg organized by the *International Ekmelic Music Society*. This international symposium consisted of 21 conferences and 7 concerts.

We proudly hosted the exhibition "In memoriam Franz Richter Herf (17.12.1920 – 04.07.1989)"

The title "Small is beautiful" used by the *International Ekmelic Music Society* for its symposium is a quotation by the philosopher and Alternative Nobel Prize born in the region of Salzburg, Leopold Kohr. The *International Ekmelic Music Society* was founded on June 18th 1981 by Franz Richter Herf and Rolf Maedel and has its registered seat in Salzburg, Austria. The Ekmelic Music, developed by the two professors, caused Salzburg to become a new center of microtonal music – so it was considered necessary to co-ordinate future artistic and scientific activities in the form of a society.

The society was (co-)organizer of the Symposia "Microtones" in Salzburg with the co-operation of the *Mozarteum Academy Salzburg* (from 1985 to 1991), of the *Naturetone Symposia* in connection with the *Jahrhundertwende-Gesellschaft Heidelberg* (1989 and 1992), and of the *Oriental-Occidental Accord* in Salzburg (2007).

It is expected to host the symposium "Mikrotöne: Small is beautiful" at the *University Mozarteum* in Salzburg every other year.

For further information, please visit:
http://www.ekmelic-music.org/en/event/symp/small-is-beautiful-2019.htm

„Saxonality": Laurent Estoppey and Navid Bargrizan in Conversation

Navid Bargrizan and Laurent Estoppey

Why do we make music? For whom do we compose, perform, and produce art? Why do we collaborate with other artists? In the following conversation, Laurent Estoppey and Navid Bargrizan address these questions from their own individual perspectives, as well through the lens of their cooperation. During summer-2017, second "Mikrotöne: Small is Beautiful"- symposium, organized by the *International Ekmelic Music Society* at *Mozarteum University Salzburg*, Navid Bargrizan presented his saxophone duet 10 Aphorisms composed for and recorded by Stacks Duo consisting of Steve Stusek and Estoppey, whose recording of the piece was released by Navona Records.[1] Two years later, within the third "Mikrotöne"- symposium, Bargrizan introduced his solo saxophone piece *Pictures at the Micro-Exhibition,* commissioned by the *Harn Museum of Art* in Gainesville, Florida. As the Harn's summer-2018 composer-in-residence, he composed this piece for and in collaboration with Estoppey, who recorded it, premiered it at the museum, and performed it, along other pieces, in a concert of microtonal saxophone in the occasion of the 2019 symposium in Salzburg.[2] Estoppey and Bargrizan thus shed light on their aesthetic approaches, compositional and performative processes, and musical-microtonal structures in *10 Aphorisms* and *Pictures at the Micro-Exhibition,* as much as their music-philosophical and artistic-cultural views[3].

L: Navid, why do you compose?
N: I essentially compose to not bore myself. Composing is an intellectual activity that gives me the chance to experience new thoughts, new perspectives, new sound structures, new friends, new places. I do not seek to make some sort of big philosophical-ideological-artistic manifesto through my composition. It is much simpler for me - Just a game, something fun to do, a curiosity, a way to keep myself busy, and feel better about myself and my world. Perhaps it is a sort of self-psychotherapy, to avoid extreme neurosis and depression - a self-reflective tool. To see where I was before, where I am now. What I can do, what I cannot do. What I do understand, what I do not understand, and whether I can make sense of the compositional task that I give myself, or is commissioned from me, or not - Whether I can conceive a piece that sounds good to my ears and responds to my curiosity, or not.

L: And a follow up question: For whom do you compose?
N: Primarily for myself, in the sense of "keeping myself curious and busy" and delving into a sort of meaningful activity that requires some sort of skill. But I also compose for people who possess curiosity for innovative sound structures. Who would care to listen to my music, or perform it - Somebody like yourself, Laurent. However, it does not have to be an expert like you for whom I compose. It can be an enthusiastic listener who is willing to listen to my musical thoughts. If my compositions allow communication with other interested people, that is fantastic. Human interaction with like-minded and open-minded people, as well as not-like-minded and perhaps not-open-minded but friendly people, is

quite important for me. I remember once after a performance of a string quartet of mine that uses a lot of microtonal residual tones and spectral principles - so for the common listeners perhaps dissonant and unpleasant - an older gentleman came to me and respectfully said: "listening to your music was terribly painful!" That made both of us laugh. We stood there and talked about my piece. The guy genuinely cared to understand why my piece sounded, in his opinion, "terribly painful." We had a pleasant conversation there. Or my relationship with you; I really appreciate that you are interested in my works and have performed and recorded them. Yet, getting to know you, your own music and recordings, and traveling and spending time with you has been the best part of this relationship for me. The breadth and depth of your compositional and performative works has inspired me. I find your thinker-artist perspectives absolutely fascinating. However, the fact that I made a new, open-minded friend, with whom I can communicate and interact, is the best part. I am thinking about "Who Cares If You Listen?," the controversial title given to Milton Babbitt's iconic article by his editor.[4] I should say that "I do care if you listen"; But if you do not care to listen, I understand.

N: I would also like to ask you a related question, Laurent: Why do you make music? In other words, why do you compose, perform, and produce art?

L: Among all the definitions about art I came across, I stick to French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou: "Art is what makes life more interesting than art."[5] Music is then my main medim. Probably because I love the extreme abstraction of it and absolutely don't believe in the idea of "universal" language that some people like to attach to music. But in any case, music can reach parts of human beings that language cannot. Music codes can be always rethought, challenged, reinvented (well … all codes should be …). Being on stage makes me feel real, being in a specific space at a specific time. A concert is a privilege, for the audience, and for the performer. Sharing a unique moment in time is so special. A concert is a collaboration between the audience (it doesn't matter whether it's made of 2000 or 1 person) and the performer(s).

N: And what does artistic collaboration mean to you? Why do you collaborate with other artists?

L: Making art means working with other people. Whether they are musicians or using other types of media, what interest me is encountering another person and another oeuvre. I love to be fed with other thoughts, other visions. It always inspires me to push my work further. It also brings me to express myself outside of the music world, through projects such as envelop/p/e, an artzine which joins all types of media … fitting in an envelope, that I started producing in 2018. I love being in touch with visual artists, writers, poets, dancers, to get their different perspectives on art and on the processes of making art.

N: Speaking of encountering other people and pushing your work further, although you are an established composer yourself, you have premiered and recorded hundreds of new pieces by other contemporary composers. What is the importance of bringing newly composed pieces to life for you?

L: I'm always curious, and hopeful to discover something different, or simply something that would leave a real imprint on me. Learning a new piece is like reading a new book: you discover a new universe, a new story, and more than that! Then, your job is to digest it, interpret it, and invite the audience to share your vision on the work. Back to the notion of collaborations, learning a piece of music is a collaboration with the composer. If they are alive and willing to share their thoughts, it's even better!

L: Now that we are talking about composers and compositions, tell me Navid, do you like listening to your own music?

N: I do enjoy listening to my music. I do not make my pieces available for performance until I am satisfied with my musical constructions - until I assume that they are going to sound well. Most of the times - not always - in the hands of skillful performers, my assumption comes true. Therefore, when I listen to my well-performed pieces, they give me a sense of satisfaction - rarely that is not the case. However, I listen to my music infrequently. Perhaps every few months, I review one or two previously performed or recorded works of mine. Not because I do not like to listen to them, but because every day I have a huge load of wonderful music to listen to, as well as several other tasks that I have to care of - basically, just like everybody else, I simply do not have time to return to my previous works as often. This, of course, excludes when I am in the process of composing. There, I listen to the piece that is being shaped again and again—hundreds of times, on different devices, in different rooms, different situations. On the other hand, I do not compose a music tailored for relaxation or entertainment. It takes me a lot of concentration, attention, and mental activity to listen to my works. For relaxation, or in the car, I can barely listen to classical, or modern art music. That might get dangerous and would cause me accidents, because such pieces preoccupy my mind and distract me from focusing on driving, or relaxing. Honestly, I do not think anybody would care to listen to my music as much as I do! As my aforementioned, friendly, but dissatisfied, audience member said, maybe "It is painful to listen to my music".

N: What about you, Laurent? Do you listen to your own music frequently?

L: I usually have a hard time listening to recordings I make on the saxophone. I always feel I could have done this or that in a different way, or in a better way. I still hear some imperfections that I wish they wouldn't be there. Throughout the years, my ears have become more and more demanding. On the other hand, I love to create electroacoustic pieces using all sorts of gear, from synthesizers to Max/MSP, adding collages of speeches and historical sound-documentaries. Most of the time, I experiment until I really like something that I can't find anywhere else. I don't know if it's better or worse than a lot of music I love, but It's just different, and I enjoy it that way. Very often, when I listen to these pieces again after a few months, I ask myself 'How did I do this? How did I get these ideas?' I wouldn't be able to explain most of the process, decisions, and choices I've made - it's like I'm listening to someone else's music and it's very exciting.

N: Now, can you please tell me about the saxophone repertoire of microtonal music, or music composed for saxophone where intonation and tuning is a central structural element.

L: Reading books and articles by saxophone players and observing the confusion around microtones (are they effects, do they create a scale? A system? Do they come from natural spectrums of the saxophone, overtones, multiphonics?) actually makes this question harder to answer than one would think. In my experience, one of the most noticeable use of microtones in saxophone music is Edison Denisov's Sonata, composed in 1970, before the technology allowing analysis of musical spectrums was created and accessible. In the 1970's, saxophonist and pedagogue Ronald Caravan blended instrumental techniques into compositions that favor expression, quarter-tones being mostly used for emphasis. Composers founding and developing spectral music, mostly around IRCAM, Paris, used microtonality derived from their compositional system. Some very notable pieces for saxophone are: Gérard Grisey's *Anubis et Nout* (1983/1990) *Quatre chants pour franchir le seuil* (1998), Philippe Hurel's *Opcit* (1983) and Jean-Claude Risset's *Voilements* (1987). In Romania, following, among others, Horatiu Radulescu, a lot of different pieces have been composed, starting in the 1980's. A very interesting case of just intonation is found in Ben Johnston's solo piece *Ponder nothing* (1989).

A very peculiar microtonal piece, in which microtones (mostly quarter-tones) are used in order to create a totally new system of harmony can be found in Manfred Stahnke's *Ptitschki - Birds* (2015/2016). Nowadays, numerous pieces use microtones, and it has become a major skillset of the contemporary saxophonists.

N: This makes me assume that saxophone is a flexible instrument in terms of realizing microtones. What are the capabilities and deficiencies of saxophone in this regard? Is there any limit?

L: I think the answer is pretty ironic: the saxophone might be one of the least flexible instruments to play microtones. The irony resides in the fact that Adolphe Sax- its inventor - wanted it to be a very accessible instrument and easy to play. For this reason, he limited the number of keys, imagined a very simple logic to play a scale, accorded to a simplified Boehm system and used an octave key which simplifies the fingerings, but creates multiple intonational issues. Also, contrary to the other woodwinds (except the flute), no hole is covered directly by the fingers (thus allowing to create partial holes). The difficulty is then double: because of the nature of the instrument, some pitches allow multiple fingerings within a half-tone, while others only allow a couple. And even though a small adjustment on the saxophone will allow to play a pretty accurate quarter-tone above G, this quarter-tone is still considered as impossible to achieve, and composers are mostly discouraged to use it. About speed and fluidity, the saxophone player (in opposition to recorder and bassoon players for example) is not used to complicated fingerings in their normal practice. After having found the right fingerings, it takes a long time to assimilate them and to fully integrate them in the music, which is obviously the only goal.

L: By the way, what does saxophone represent for you, Navid, in the context of classical contemporary music?

N: Since, compared to many other instruments, it is a relatively recent one, for me it represents modernity, progressive thinking, and experimentation. Moreover, flexibility, possibility, and reliability. At least, that is what I thought before hearing your answer to my previous question! Another thing that I like about saxophone is the range of timbres it can produce, from very soft, mellow, lyrical, and velvety, to aggressive, agitated, and shrill. The saxophone's timbral capabilities represent for me openness and expressive diversity. I love saxophones of all sorts and sizes. I believe it is one of the instruments that I have composed most for. A funny memory: I remember hearing separately from two of my professional musician-friends: "I hate saxophone!" Now, I am wondering why?! Why didn't I ask them? Do saxophones cause traumas?

N: Laurent, before performing my pieces, what previous experiences did you have with microtonal music, either as a performer, or as a composer?

L: When I was a young student, as soon as I discovered the possibility of getting out of the chromatic scale, I fell in love with microtones. It was a pleasure to discover new fingerings (the ones I could easily achieve) and to try to make sense of them. I also loved listening to the result of quitting the chromatic scale. Then, before really thinking about *microtonal music,* I was exposed (as most of the young students who play contemporary pieces are) to quarter-tones - sometimes used as effects, sometimes to give an 'oriental' mood, sometimes being part of a more structural element of a composition. In the field of free improv, I use a lot of microtones, sometimes organized in systems, other times to get accurate variations of pitches in non-tempered systems, to respond to the context, particularly while playing with electronics.

L: I'm curious, Navid; In your Pictures at the Micro-Exhibition, you chose to borrow from Mussorgsky's Pictures of an Exhibition. How far did you think about this iconic piece of the saxophone repertoire?

N: I was looking for connections, bridges. Pretty soon in the process of conceptualizing the piece, I decided to quote Mussorgsky. Watanabe Schotei, whose mini-paintings at Harn Museum inspired the piece, lived roughly around the same time as Mussorgsky - that is the first bridge. Watanabe went to Paris to absorb Western styles of painting, including impressionism, which he later fused with Japanese traditional paintings. In his mini-paintings, I clearly see this. At the same time, Mussorgsky's proto-impressionistic music made quite an influence on impressionists - that is the second bridge. I also drew parallel between Watanabe's mini-tableaus and Mussorgsky's musical tableaus in *Pictures at an Exhibition,* basically a series of correlated paintings - that is the third bridge. I also thought of Mussorgsky composing music based on selected pictures at an art exhibition. I was also composing music based on (mini-)paintings at an art exhibition. I transformed the term "mini" to "micro," which not only implies Watanabe's small-format artworks, but also my use of microtonal fabrics - that is the fourth bridge. Then, I thought of "The Old Castle," an iconic piece of saxophone repertoire - after all, I was also going to compose for saxophone - that is the fifth bridge. Finally, I drew inspiration from the Japanese microtonal pentatonic scales and designed my own synthetic microtonal pentatonic scales that use twelfth-, sixth-, quarter-, half-, and whole-tones - that is the sixth bridge to Japan and small-for-

mat (mini/micro) paintings. So, I actively focused on Mussorgsky early on. I borrowed his music as contrasting, melodic, non-microtonal interludes, in-between my microtonal movements - as a means of juxtaposing familiar and equal-tempered (Mussorgsky) and unfamiliar non-equal-tempered (mine).

L: It is so funny that "The Old Castle" is such a nerve wracking, and of course beautiful, moment, each time I play it in the orchestra, and on the contrary, it is an extreme moment of relief in your piece!
N: That is Interesting! I am glad you get this feeling in my piece. But I am not sure why! Perhaps because of the dramaturgical structure of the piece? How I placed "The Old Castle" as an interlude in between two movements? Your recording of it is, of course, breathtakingly subtle!

N: Why do you yourself think it is so nerve wracking in the orchestral version, Laurent?
L: Well, I can say that while playing the solo in the middle of the orchestra, you almost feel like an external object, and you haven't played yet for about fifteen minutes. You have just listened to the amazing music around you. You're just thinking: Is my reed going to react properly? Am I using the right fingering for the initial middle C? It's going to be my turn, and it has to be so perfect!

N: And if I may shift our attention again to my piece, would you please tell me what caught your attention in Pictures at the Micro-Exhibition in terms of microtonality?
L: Most of saxophone pieces use microtonality either in a spectralist way, or work on the basis of a twenty-four-tone-per-octave scale. An approach that combines Just intonation with a more modal and varied patterns brings a totally different way of listening and being touched by the harmonies. Each part of the piece sounds at the same time very familiar, though totally different from most of other pieces. I love the structure and the general articulation of the piece, which presents varied Tableaus connected by the meta-theater promenade created by the straight quotations. At the end of the piece, I have the same feeling that I get at the end of Mussorgsky's: It was a beautiful journey through music, moving through various stories, adventures, and encounters.

N: Was the fact that the piece is based on visual elements, the Japanese paintings, of interest to you? Let me broaden my question: Do extra-musical associations influence your performance?
L: The relation to an artwork, and particularly to Japanese paintings in this case, is of the highest importance for me. I can say that I developed my artistic knowledge and sensibility through visual art, before music. Going to numerous galleries and museum forged my artistic vision, on which I anchor my musical expression. Literature, and poetry in particular, is also fundamental to me, to raise another sense of structure, rhythms, plots, developments. Other forms of art such as dance and theater awakened me to the relation to space and audience as a performer. I can say that I spent and still spend more time in contact to other arts than to music. My music is like a synthesis of all the art (but also social, historical and political) experiences I encounter.

N: You told me that learning to play the microtones in *Pictures at the Micro-Exhibition* was so challenging that "it was like learning a new music instrument." Would you please elaborate on what made it so challenging? And why was it more difficult than the microtones in *10 Aphorisms*?

L: I've performed a lot of pieces that contain microtones. Sometimes it is very challenging to perform them, but everything (thinking of the physicality of the fingerings) is anchored around the chromatic fingerings as a norm. In Pictures, there is no feeling of hierarchy anymore, and because of the nature of the music, fluidity has to be the main goal. Also, most of the time, a challenging technical passage is temporary—just a single passage to practice over and over. Whereas in Pictures, the difficulty remains constant almost throughout each movement. Another important point is the type of articulation required for the pieces. In Pictures, most of the microtones are used in slurred passages, which requires a perfect coordination of the fingers. In 10 Aphorisms—also shorter pieces—that integrate only two or three different microtones in each movement, most articulations are tongued or even staccato, which covers some imperfections in the movement of the fingers.

L: Speaking of performance difficulty, are you aware of the feasibility level of your compositions, Navid? Do you think about it when you write?

N: I think about it a lot, while I compose. I try to be aware for whom I compose - the capabilities of the performers. I like my music to be performed. I do not want to put notes on paper, then put it in my bookshelf for the rest of my life. If I know the performers, then I am, for the most part, aware of their abilities. If I do not know them, I research, listen to their performances, watch their videos. In the conceptualization phase of *10 Aphorisms,* I researched to get to know yours and Steve's Stacks duo. To my dismay, I was not yet familiar with your awesome projects and recordings. Then, I figured out that Stacks Duo is simply fantastic! Therefore, I could be daring. I should also mention that I consulted my friend Gerard Weber, himself an accomplished saxophonist. He read and played through the aphorisms, gave me some suggestions to change some things, and gave me the green light to send it you and Steve. For *Pictures at the Micro-Exhibition,* I was aware that I am composing something that might be difficult. However, by then, I knew you, your works, and your wide-ranging, masterful musicianship. I am aware of the general difficulty of my music - and have been reminded of this by my mentors and friends. Nevertheless, I would love to compose for curious, experiment-friendly, forward-looking performers, who like to be challenged. I am not necessarily a big fan of Ferneyhough's "New-Complexity," but I do respect him greatly. I appreciate his music, because I believe that it intellectually and technically challenges, and eventually elevates, the mental and physical capabilities of the performers, as well as the theorists, composers, and musicologists who study them. Are his pieces always realized in minute-detail? Perhaps not. But they do push the boundaries. I do not intend to compose a music as complex and difficult as Ferneyhough's. Yet, the experimentations that I do cause my pieces to be sometimes exceedingly difficult, I believe.

N: And can you describe your learning process in regard to playing the microtones in *Pictures at the Micro-Exhibition,* Laurent?

L: The first thing was to find the best fingerings for each tableau. Most of microtonal intervals can be reached very accurately but require complex fingerings. The accuracy of microtones also pushed me to sometimes find alternate fingerings for usual chromatic pitches, some of them being suddenly - and ironically - revealed out of tune. Then, being familiar with every part of the piece until the point I could only focus on the music—finding the right energy and directions for each gesture. It also took some time to shape each movement, to find their development, their specificities. And of course, thinking of the microtones, being able to play them in a totally integrated and fluid way. Each movement uses a different scale. It was a real challenge to directly move from one to another once, even as I could play them separately. Finally, understanding and shaping the whole piece, and not only playing separate miniatures or movements. Training the ear took some time as well-reaching the point when returning to chromaticism (in the Mussorgsky quotations) sounded almost 'wrong'.

N: What about *10 Aphorisms*? What caught your attention in this piece?
L: I perfectly remember the very first notes of the piece we played in rehearsal with Steve Stusek. I immediately stopped him after a few notes and told him: How does he (Navid) do that? It sounds like a Swiss alphorn! Throughout the piece, the resulting sonority is different from most of the sonic feelings I've encountered in hundreds of pieces I played. On a side note, I'd like to say that one of my most important motivations to play contemporary pieces is to discover new approaches for the saxophone and music. Very few pieces bring me this feeling of a total discovery. I love this feeling of playing just a few notes in a new piece, being totally surprised but attracted at the same time. *10 Aphorisms* did just this to me. Also, the extreme concision of each movement strikes me. In sometimes less than thirty seconds, a whole new world is created by the microtonal construction and the variety of rhythms, telling a complex but clear story. This imaginative variety is nevertheless very well-controlled in the development of the piece, creating an overarching meta-story.

N: Could you please also tell me about other pieces and composers whose works you performed during the 2019 - Mikrotöne"- symposium in Salzburg, as well as their particular approaches to microtonality?
L: I felt very lucky to be able to present such a different set of approaches to microtonality, but also to the saxophone and music in general. This allowed me very easily to conceptualize the concert as a whole and not as a succession of pieces, which has always been a particular point in my work. Beside your piece, a duo for saxophone and electric guitar by Agustín Castilla-Ávila was featured. He built it through a particular guitar tuning: six G strings tuned in sixth-tones. The saxophone then plays pretty melodically, moving across the sixth-tones. British composer Donald Bousted uses a quarter-tone scale to create four miniatures with the intention of bringing together emotion and humor. For the occasion I commissioned two pieces to two musicians I regularly collaborate with. Maurizio Gueranndi is a Swiss composer, who first worked in post-minimalism, rhythmically influenced by Indian music (he himself is a very accomplished tabla player). When I invited him to write a solo microtonal piece, he started by choosing very subtle multiphonics (almost all the notes being out of the chromatic tuning) to define his harmonic field. American composer

and percussionist Aaron Bachelder is very familiar with microtonality. He co-produced with Johnny Reinhard "Microfest Winston-Salem" in North Carolina. In his piece for guitar and saxophone, William Anderson alters the chromatic scale to bring expression in the melodic line. He composed a piece for saxophone and electronic media. To create a continuity and an arch to the concert, I asked each composer to talk ca. one minute about their relation to microtonality ahead - their recorded voice then would introduce each piece. It was very touching to hear the voice of all the composers on the program. It allowed us to hear these three beautiful statements: Microtonality is …
… a bridge between contemporary music and music from other parts of the world.
… is like painting the failures and ambiguities of perception.
… is an approach of the infinity.

N: Considering all of these approaches to microtonality, how would you explain your method of realizing the microtones in *10 Aphorisms, Pictures at the Micro-Exhibition*, or other pieces—such as fingerings, embouchure, etc.?
L: First, I almost never use the embouchure to get microtones, because it affects the timbre too much, and the pitch is less accurate to reach than with fingerings. Working with microtones is both a development of the fingerings and the listening. A few books will provide fingerings, probably the most accurate these days is *The Techniques of Saxophone Playing* by Giorgio Netti and Marcus Weiss.[6] The player should try them out, adjusting them if they don't quite work on their instrument. To develop the intonation, of course one can (and has to!) work with a tuner, but more interestingly, he has to build a relation with the microtones. For example, for quarter-tones, practice various intervals based on a chromatic scale, but deviated by ¼-tone. By practicing all the intervals from all pitches, we'll discover that some fingerings are really difficult to realize and will push us to find alternate fingerings, which might not be in the aforementioned book. We discussed fingerings a lot, but another very important point is the tone color of microtones. If the general tone follows the nature of the instrument, about half of microtones are produced by adding keys lower than regular notes, which affects the tone, making it hollower. An important attention and work has to be put into finding the best homogeneity for all the tones – so that microtones don't sound ‚special' (in part because of their tone quality), but just like any other pitch.

L: Navid, do the instruments you write for influence your compositional process?
N: Maybe the instruments do not affect my compositional process in the true sense of the word. I can summarize my usual compositional process as follows: 1. Contemplating and choosing a concept; 2. Studying the instrument(s); 3. Composing or improvising and transcribing my improvisations; 4: Cleaning up my notation; 4. Editing, editing, and editing, until I feel satisfied. Nevertheless, I always begin by thinking about the specific instrument(s) for which I am writing. Often, I have to take a few days to review instrumentation/orchestration books to remind myself of all the ranges, peculiarities, and characteristics of the instruments. I also watch videos and tutorials related to those instruments on the Internet. Furthermore, I listen to and study as many recordings and scores as possible, written for that instrument—preferably close to the style of my own music. If friends who play those instruments well are also available, I sometimes ask them for help and advice. In the

case of *10 Aphorisms* – the first time I was going to compose for saxophone – I listened to numerous recordings and studied several scores. I also thoroughly studied Londeix's book *Hello! Mr. Sax,* as well as Netti's/Weiss's text.[7] I repeated these steps – not as comprehensively as the first time though - the next times I composed for saxophone. In this sense, perhaps we can say that the instruments for which I compose do influence my compositional process to some extent.

L: And is it different for you to write a piece for a specific performer you know rather than performers you do not know?

N: It is absolutely different. If I am lucky to know, or to be able to research, the capabilities, as well as the artistic-cultural-philosophical tendencies and preferences, of the artists who perform my works, that is indeed helpful. Then, I would try to address their preferences and capabilities in my composition and would do my best to tailor my pieces for them. However, if that is not the case, I consider the venue for which I am composing, or perhaps the audience, or the institution, city, or country in which it is going to be performed. Such information would guide me, to some extent, to adapt, for instance, the level of difficulty of my piece, or its aesthetic concept. I think it is a privilege to know the performer of my work. It is also a privilege to know that the performer of my piece is willing to experiment and go beyond his/her safe zone, or his/her familiar frameworks. Therefore, I feel honored to have had the chance to collaborate with extraordinary thinker-artists like yourself, Steve Stusek, Tolgahan Çoğulu, and Manfred Stahnke.

L: I would like to ask you a question that is related to your background: What are the influences of Iranian art and music in your compositions?

N: I basically see Iranian art, including music, as one of the several traditions that inspire me - just like Euro-American, East-Asian, or African traditions. Iranian art does not occupy an outstanding place in my preferences. I do not feel any intense attachment to it. However, Iranian folk and classical-art musical cultures are indeed unique and interesting, as much as, for instance, Iranian poetry. They do offer me a lot of possibilities to experiment with tuning, intonation, and microtones, among other elements. There is no doubt though that because of my background, Iranian poetry, visual arts, and especially music, have unconsciously influenced my thinking. In fact, I believe that my curiosity for experimenting with microtonality emerged from my early exposure to Iranian classical music. Take *10 Aphorisms,* for example. There, one particular aphorism is vaguely inspired by folk wedding ceremony music that I have heard in the Northern Iran. There is no direct connotation. But I thought of an interlacing rhythmical idea, which I think comes from those pastoral wedding ceremonies. I did not want to reconstruct anything, but to compose a structure that projects this particular aura. In *Pictures*, the very last movement directly builds on rhythmical-metrical elements from Iranian classical art music. Here I made a rather direct connection to the Iranian tradition. In my other works, for instance *Se-Chahar-Gah* for microtonal guitar that I composed for Tolgahan, I build motivically and melodically, and to a lesser extent intervallically and rhythmically, on "Dastgah Chahar-gah," a modal system in the classical Iranian music. Or in *Kupferteich* for viola that I composed for Manfred, I use microtonal and thematic elements from "Dastgah-Nava," another Iranian modal system. I greatly value and

emulate Manfred's approach in his wonderful music: Recombining and re-synthesizing elements from various musical traditions. Iranian music is indeed exciting - but so are also Gamelan, Slendro, Are'are, Georgian chorales, alphorn and Native American musics, blues, rock, serialism, and just intonation, to name a few of my interests. I honestly do not buy "cultural appropriation" argument in this regard. I love broadening my horizon, drawing inspirations from a multitude of sources, and forge hybrid musical structures that I find appealing. One of these fantastic sources is definitely Iranian art and music.

L: Then, what is the proportion of theory versus poetry in a figurative sense—in other words, intuition and inspiration—in your hybrid musical structures?

N: György Ligeti, a big hero of mine, said that for him music composition is like scientific research - in the sense that the composer asks himself a musical question, or posits a musical hypothesis. For instance, how can I draw impressions from Japanese mini-paintings, Mussorgsky, microtonal scales, and some non-Western musical traditions, synthesizing them into a musical structure that speaks to me?[8] Then, the composer begins to experiment, to see if he can answer his question and address his hypothesis. That is what I did in *Pictures* and *Aphorisms*, as well as most of my other pieces. However, it is hard for me to describe the proportion of "theory" vs. "poetry." Perhaps it is a mixture of those. Maybe at the beginning, as I begin to conceptualize the piece, it is more theoretical, then as I go forward, I rely on my intuition. I say this, because rarely do my pieces go to the exact direction that I presuppose. Usually, after I write a bit of a piece, I let the piece dictate to me where I should take it—there, I trust my intuition. Let us take *10 Aphorisms* as an example. At the time, I was preoccupied with reading aphorisms by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Wittgenstein. From a purely formal, as well as philosophical, perspective, the idea of aphorism sounded appealing to me: How can I say in a concise, but logical, manner what I want to say? I also thought about Webern's extremely short pieces. I asked myself if I can compose musical aphorisms in a sort of correlated way - in a way that, although they are separate aphorismic pieces, they are unified. So, I came up with the idea of difference-tone-harmony that I borrowed from Manfred's opera *Orpheus Kristall* and his fourth string quartet titled *Schrödingers Kristall,* as well as the minimum use of pitch and rhythmic materials, as unifying elements within this 10-aphorism-construction. The aphorisms are separate, but unified through difference-tone- harmony, minimum use of pitch and rhythm, conciseness in terms of duration, and a ratio from the harmonic series that each individual aphorism is based on. In sum, I think I might have so far relied equally on intuition or inspiration and structuralism or theory, in most of my works. I do not have any artistic ideology. I just like to experiment and come up with sound fabrics that are to some extent creative, sound good to me, and respond to my curiosity. Ligeti and Stahnke have influenced me here too.

N: You constantly conceptualize and produce new multimedia artistic projects, Laurent, using visual elements, textual elements, computer software, electronic sounds, various musical instruments, and of course often saxophone. First, why saxophone? What role does saxophone play in your art-technology world?

L: The saxophone is my first musical medium. I started to learn it in a school of music in Switzerland at age 10 and went then through the full conservatory structure. The choice of

an instrument is always interesting. In my case, the variety shows on TV fascinated me. I wanted to be the guy playing in a band with successful pop singers and I hesitated between trombone and saxophone. Later on, at age 16, I hesitated again between going to a jazz school or the conservatory. Encountering a fantastic saxophone teacher pushed me toward the ‚classical' path.

N: And then, what is the relevance of working across media for you?
L: For a long time, because of my education, and probably also because of the level of technique one has to achieve in musical studies, I didn't allow myself to use other instruments or media I hadn't studied and for which I hadn't gotten an ‚official' recognition. It took several years to realize that I also had ideas and skills to open my field of creation. At first, electronics - mostly through Max/MSP that I self-taught - were an extension of the saxophone. Later on, it started to become an independent medium. Now, the saxophone remains my main instrument, but it's part of a bigger galaxy of sounds in my music world. I'm currently working on a series of pieces in response to a set of poems by an American poet, who asked me to translate them in French, and which should be published in 2022. I chose to work mostly on the guitar and some synthesizers, but no saxophone. Also, I absolutely don't know how to traditionally play the guitar. I follow my musical instinct and knowledge to choose special tunings, pedal effects, and various ways to produce sounds, such as an ebow and percussion sticks, to bring myself to unknown territories.

L: To wrap up, how do you see the place of classical contemporary music in the artworld, and the world in general, Navid?
N: It seems to me that there are different sorts of classical, or art, contemporary music. The most avant-garde music that experiments creatively, rather than just imitating what has been done previously, has been always marginalized. It breathes in niches. But it does exist, it does breathe. Of course, commercial classical music – Mozarts, Chopins, Puccinis, and contemporary composers who still compose in romantic-tonal and post-romantic-post-tonal styles – are at the forefront, because the listeners like to hear what they are familiar with and what is ingrained in their memory – encountering something innovative, something strange and unfamiliar, scares them. Each of those trends have their place in the art world though. They attract their own listeners. I love Mozarts, Chopins, and Puccinis. I listen to those and enjoy them. However, as a composer I do not care to create works that lean towards the commercial axis of the classical music - I find that boring. Why should I repeat what Bartok, Ravel, or Berg have done so masterfully? As a result of this approach, my music also breathes in the niches. It is marginalized, but it exists. The artworld is fortunately diverse. It does not only include experimental art music, or commercial classical music, or pop, etc. We need this diversity. We have choices. Although too many choices might be detrimental. This reminds me of "It's a Miracle," a song by one of my favorite artists Roger Waters, which is about how humans, who have endless choices, have amused themselves to death.

N: And my last question for you, Laurent: both from the standpoint of a performer and a composer, what is your advice for younger artists who would like to experiment with tuning, intonation, and microtones?

L: I would say that you should ask yourself: Why performing microtones? Answers can be extremely diverse, but in the end, the only good one is: What does it bring to your art, how does it feed you artistically? Do you like them? Do you enjoy the harmonies they provoke? Practicing microtones takes a very long time. As any extended technique (or simply parameter of playing), I would advise a daily practice dedicated to it, through ear training, scales, systems, and personal research. Finally, listen to all kinds of music, included non-Western, and simply accept all pitches and sounds as music.

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Endnotes

[1] For Stacks Duo's recording of *10 Aphorisms*, released on Navona records see: https://www.navonarecords.com/catalog/nv6259/.

[2] For audio and video recordings, as well as the scores, of *10 Aphorisms* and *Pictures at the Micro-Exhibition* see the following page on Estoppey's website: http://laurentestoppey.com/bargrizan-estoppey.

[3] We are grateful to Ms. Ivy Chen, the founder and coordinator of the *Harn Museum* Composer-In-Residence program, who made this collaboration possible. For more information on this initiative and a video of Estoppey's premiere performance at the Harn Museum see: https://harn.ufl.edu/composersinresidence#:~:text=The%20Harn%20Museum%20Composers%-2Din,works%20performed%20in%20the%20galleries.

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[4] M.Babbitt, "Who cares if You Listen?," *High Fidelity,* Vol. 8, no. 2 (1958): 38–40.

[5] This quotation appeared in Filliou's 1984 artwork titled "Dear Skywatcher: Art is What Makes Life More Interesting Than Art," material: print on paper and envelope, size: multiple 48 x32 cm, collection: Van Lierde (Brussels).

[6] G. Netti and M. Weiss, *The Techniques of Saxophone Playing* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2010).

[7] J.-M.Londeix, *Hello! Mr. Sax, or Parameters of the Saxophone,* trans. William and Anna Street (Paris: A. Leduc, 2014).8 György Ligeti and Manfred Stahnke: "Gespräch am 29. Mai 1993," in *Musik - nicht ohne Worte,* ed. Manfred Stahnke (Hamburg: von Bockel, 2000), 121–152.