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Bridging the Gap

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Introduction

I grew up in Washington, D.C. and attended a school that was literally right down the street from me. When I think about this time, I don't remember any separation between my education and the arts; I both learned from and through music, in particular. As I grew older, I couldn't help but notice a wedge growing between what came to be two distinct and increasingly detached worlds - a gap that confused and discouraged me. This project has become in large parts an effort to bridge that gap. It is my hope that people will interact with it accordingly, engaging with both musical and literary components and using each to inform the other. Throughout the process of creating and writing, I have had to acknowledge the strengths and drawbacks of these elements; I have become increasingly aware of the insufficiency of language - of its inability to capture that which song does so effortlessly. At the same time, I recognize that it could be challenging to fully comprehend the musical pieces of this project without accompanying text. As you interact with the following material - which is laid out in an effort to integrate the visual and auditory - I hope at the very least it makes you think about the friction, space between, and union of these components as well as the impact of modes of learning which necessitate and encourage intellectual, affective, and embodied engagement.

In light of this effort to involve the musical within the academic and to call attention to the academic within the musical, I have chosen to examine national anthems. As far-reaching, accessible pieces emblematic of national identities, they demonstrate music's ability to shape collective values and behaviors, reflect upon the social and cultural landscape it is created in, and induce change. National anthems not only offer a valuable opportunity to study and deconstruct notions of unity and representation, but enable accessible means of studying and interacting with

society. In doing so, they challenge the removed approaches to obtaining knowledge academia often prioritizes, and thus incentivize reflection, transformation, and growth. The following written work and corresponding composition, therefore, consider what we know them as, where they come from, and what we could (re)imagine them to be. Strangely enough, the same elementary school which inspired my own musical journey was named after Francis Scott Key, the man credited with writing “The Star Spangled Banner.”

My first section engages with national anthems as a means of unification and indoctrination. I explore music’s capacity to project a national identity onto a vast expanse of people, uniting a diverse, disconnected entity. I implement motifs and chord progressions from countries such as America, England, France, Italy, Chile, Bulgaria, China, and Israel to mimic and later distort what serve as reflections of collective values and belief systems, deconstructing nationalistic themes and notions of supremacy inherent to these national symbols.

I then examine the connection music enables with our past. To do so, I study the social context from which “The Star Spangled Banner” emerged - the sentiments it carries with it and protects. This process of preservation - and the erasures inherent to it - allows for intergenerational interaction as well as narrative shaping. By decontextualizing and “dislocating” licensed audio samples and sonically deviating from the expected, I attempt to highlight music’s capacity to serve as a link between and portrayer of worlds.

The conclusion of my piece considers transformation - both future reimagining and personal reorientation. Specifically, I discuss improvisation and the revolutionary tools it lends artists to remake the world. Composed of solely vocals, this section is unique in that it is entirely improvised and scored after the fact. I reaffirm the importance of art in the study of society;

society informs music, and therefore engenders an accessible, immersive, and collaborative means of studying society.

Section I

Projecting National Identities: Unification and Indoctrination

National anthems, as national symbols, are inherent to nationhood. The nation is both imagined as limitless and far-reaching and as representative of an insulated community - an invisible bond ensuring comradeship (Anderson, 1991:8). Music anthems, which were adopted by the English language just under two centuries ago, emphasize this attachment, serving as a country's national persona (Waterman, 2020:2607). Rooted in traditions of ruling houses or groups using banners or crests as forms of announcement and distinguishment, national anthems have become essential to a sort of national packaging similar to flags, currency, and postage stamps, allowing nations to "declare themselves internally as cohesive and externally as distinctive" (Cerulo, 1989:77). They represent a nation's identity, validating social institutions as well as creating bonds between citizens, thereby enforcing conformity to social norms.

Emile Durkheim (1915) claimed that by rallying around a symbolic object, "individuals become and feel themselves to be in unison" (p. 262). In the United States, we are certainly taught to assemble around the national anthem, reciting it in school and at favored gatherings such as sports events; it presents itself in moments dedicated to embodying the nation's essence. This normal and normative exposure further legitimizes the power and effectiveness of such a symbol. Unisonance, meaning strangers' utterance of the same verses to the same melody, "effectively and efficiently allows 'each' person to sing the music of the 'whole' nation with 'all' other citizens" (Waterman, 2020:2603). Large-scale musical collaboration such as this is, in fact, scientifically proven to affect social bonding, with large choir conditions generating greater

changes in social closeness than smaller (Weinstein, 2016:153). As such, inclusion and connection are inspired and furthered by songs of social control such as national anthems.

Enforcing a national identity, however, is inherently exclusive to the entities distinguished from the nation itself. America's national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner," England's "God Save The Queen," and "La Marseillaise," the French national anthem, demonstrate this quite well. All three anthems employ "othering" to not only distinguish themselves as superior to separate nation bodies, but to forcefully - and even violently - diminish and vilify them. Both "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "La Marseillaise" portray battlefield scenes, evoking patriotic feelings and demonizing the enemies of the nation (Erden, 2019:48). "God Save The Queen" was actually written to celebrate victory in war and utilized to support nationalist movements at the time (Cerulo, 1989:90). As Stanley Waterman (2020) states, music "serves as a rallying point for expressing personal and group identities, thereby exaggerating rather than minimizing differences" (p. 2603). Values and goals are projected upon citizens and transmitted from one generation to the next (Davis, 1995:52); however, this created community remains accepting of only those who adhere to its narrow conception of identity.

Fascinatingly, national anthems are not known for being particularly remarkable examples of either poetry or musicianship. In fact, Waterman (2020) goes so far as to identify the lyricism in these songs as "banal" and their tunes "mediocre" (p. 2603). Rather than highlighting or requiring technical skill, their consumption is meant to affect the broader population through public and social performance and inspire patriotism. A passionate approach towards concepts such as victory, the nation's motherhood, and its citizens' masculinized comradeship romanticizes tradition and glorifies the distant past (Waterman, 2020:2607).

Commonalities between national anthems exist in part because among former colonies, many anthems are based on European anthems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, particularly “God Save the King” (now “God Save the Queen”), “La Marseillaise,” and “Kaiserhymne” from aforementioned England and France, in addition to Austria-Hungary (Waterman, 2020:2612). All three effectively demonstrate the basic musical code structure most anthems follow - a consistent and fixed configuration of notes (Cerulo, 1989). This stability expresses itself through limited range and repetition to enhance predictability unlike the embellished musical code, which prioritizes erratic, wandering motion, variation, and ornamentation. In this way, the basic elements of this system “maximize the likelihood that their message will be universally apprehended and comprehended” (Cerulo, 1989:81). Countries like Albania, Colombia, North Korea, Palau, and Zimbabwe, among others, share this Western-European musical template. With 90% of national anthems employed in a major scale, 12% notated as fortissimo and 55% as forte at the onset, these sonic similarities allude to triumphant, forceful celebrations of supremacy and patriotism (Waterman, 2020:2612). As anthems themselves belong to distinct genres - usually hymns or marches - to a certain extent, homogeneity is to be expected.

In my own composition process, I kept to these broader characteristics between and among anthems, writing my adaptation in the “Western” music tradition, or the twelve-tone diatonic scale. The beginning of my composition mimics and combines elements of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” “God Save The Queen,” and “La Marseillaise.” In the key of B ♭ major - like that of “The Star-Spangled Banner” - this victorious, positive mode endorses feelings of pride and unity. I chose to implement a four-string quartet - composed of two violins, a viola, and a cello - in the opening, as stringed instruments are historically utilized to perform national

anthems and generally represent traditional strains of music (Kennaway, 2016; Holden, 2016). In measure 19, however, there is a shift in the tone of the piece as the second violin strays from the melody and emerges dissonant, adapting the melody of the first line of “The Star-Spangled Banner” and concluding on a B natural rather than a B \flat - the tonic, or first pitch of the B-flat major scale. This diminished fifth, while very close to the original pattern of notes, allows for a disturbing and sour sound that colors an otherwise comfortable, patriotic melody. In the following measures, the original, recognizable configurations of the anthem return as eerie and distorted. With various instruments venturing outside of the major mode even as a build in both pitch and volume occurs, a jubilant resolution is denied. The implementation of piano serves to anchor the key even as both violins and viola careen off track, maintaining a steady rhythm throughout the new configuration of the famous lines:

And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.

The repetition of the warped introduction to “The Star-Spangled Banner” as represented by the stringed instruments serves to mock the celebration of liberty and the assumption of supremacy.

The most notable transition following this is the piano, which leaps suddenly into a busy, cascading melody driving the string quartet and added contrabass. Here I include elements from the Chilean, Italian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Venezuelan, and Israeli national anthems - reimagined elements designed to showcase melancholic sentiments even within nationalistic pieces. The piano overshadows and distracts from these longer note value implementations, creating rhythmic and auditory tension between instruments competing for dominance. The final build concludes with a return to the adapted first line of “The Star-Spangled Banner.” For the first time, the melody is not only doubled but quadrupled; each instrument succumbs to the theme, connected even in this inharmonious manipulation.

Section II

Reflecting Social Contexts: Music and Memory

The capacity of national anthems to unite and indoctrinate speaks to the needs of the time period from which they emerge; by studying “The Star Spangled Banner,” for example, we may also learn about the social context it is reflective of. “The Star Spangled Banner” (SSB) originated from a poem drafted by Francis Scott Key that was later called “The Defense of Fort M’Henry” (Abril, 2007:70). It was published complete with a note indicating that it should be sung to “The Anacreontic Song,” an 18th century British melody that became quite popular in the United States (Abril, 2007:70). The verses of what we now know to be the American national anthem describe the bombardment of Fort McHenry during the War of 1812 (Coleman, 2015). Key had witnessed the attack and its aftermath, and was moved to write about how the American defenses had withstood it, the Star-Spangled Banner still waving. Key’s elite southern Federalist perspective is evident in this piece; over the course of the war, he had become increasingly convinced of the threat northern Federalists and partisan obstinacy posed to the need for a unified sense of American patriotism (Abril, 2007; Coleman, 2015). The SSB “speaks to the partisan context of his musical efforts,” as well as Key’s intent to “educate the public on the proper duties of being a republican citizen” (Coleman, 2015:624-5). In this way, political strategy emblematic of elite southern Federalist sentiment motivated and continues to inform the SSB.

Not only was the SSB born out of a desire to project and perpetuate particular patriotic ideals onto a collective nation body, but it signifies the conscientious use of music by Federalists to affect politics at the time. As Coleman (2015) explains, Key’s use of musical meter to convey

a southern Federalist viewpoint “links him to a long line of Federalists who had considered music an especially desirable way of influencing political debate by ameliorating rather than exacerbating factional conflict” (625). It is also reflective of elite American Anglophilia, demonstrating an attachment to the English melodies chosen for American political purposes (Coleman, 2015:606). John Adams himself discussed the Federalist musical ideal, writing letters to his wife, Abigail, and son, Charles, about his frustration with debates regarding the Jay Treaty and desire for the compelling powers of music (Coleman, 2015). He was cognizant of and sought its ability to unify and soothe as well as moderate public opinion (Coleman, 2015). As such, the SSB is not only indicative of intergenerational elite Federalist thought, but of elite Federalist musical employment’s success. (This tactic did, in fact, gain popularity, becoming common practice within both Federalist and Republican politics [Coleman, 2015:627].) Through the SSB, we may understand and interact with ideologies and practices of the past.

Paolo Jedlowski (2001) identifies collective memory as the need for each human society to “establish its cultural heritage and transmit it from generation to generation to its members so as to preserve itself” (p. 33). Music, capable of both capturing the past and bringing it back to life, maintains and relays such history (Edgar, 2018). As memory is both biased and flexible, and amnesias are therefore inherent to it, music also preserves the process of forgetting and erasure (Anderson, 2020). As Anderson (2020) asserts, nations do not remember their own histories; they are written in retrospect, relying upon narratives to shape citizens’ understanding of themselves and their homes. This is crucial to recognize as we interrogate the inherited identity national anthems uphold and uncover the motivations behind their production; musical memory provides insight into the myths people commit to, and, in doing so, provides the tools for resistance and solidarity.

In this section, I experiment with decontextualizing licensed audio recordings and thus shifting and/or erasing their significance. The first implementation of these audio samples occurs midway through measure 7 and features the Polish national anthem, "Mazurek Dąbrowskiego," sung at Old Market Square in Poznan on November 11th, 2018 to celebrate 100 years of Polish independence (*Freesound*). Imposed throughout and proceeding this is the cheering captured on September 11th, 2014 at "V" rally in Barcelona at which "Els Segadors," the national anthem of Catalonia, was performed (*Freesound*). Both the brevity of the clips I use and abrupt adjustments in volume and panning fail to orient or center these audio samples. Often layered on top of each other, distinguishing features aren't readily apparent; more often than not, these recordings serve as background noise, a choice that negates their distinction. The Catalanian and Thai national anthems, for example, are practically unidentifiable in this piece. One of the few moments in which a clip *is* perceptible occurs in measure 17; the score pulls back enough that "Himno Nacional Mexicano," the Mexican national anthem, can be heard. However, five measures prior (in measure 12), this same recording supplies the cheering that, with several volume modifications, provides rhythmic surges of entirely dislocated noise. Concluding this section, clips of "The Star-Spangled Banner" sung by Cornell choir on July 4th are discernable throughout the organ's own interpretation of America's national anthem (*Freesound*). With the help of panning and volume adjustments, especially, I juxtapose elements of the SSB with separate scenes and textures, further removing them from the contexts they reflect.

In thinking about the decontextualized, I also wanted to explore the unfamiliar. As such, I play with deviance from the expected. For the first time, I use instruments that color and transform the melodic pattern I have adopted and adapted from the SSB. Establishing a two measure unit - the pedal tone progression of B to a B \flat - makes evident how a change in tambour

and our associations with various instruments affect our conception of similar melodic concepts. The use of piano, and gradual implementation of electric bass, violoncello, horn, electric guitar, drums, alto saxophone, and later organ are meant to demonstrate this. One of the first notable shifts in this piece occurs in measure 14, halfway through the aforementioned progression. The musical phrase is interrupted by the introduction of the horn, which mimics the melodic line of the cello. The sound and feel of the music change notably; the muted, brassy tone and its jazzy connotation allow for an animated turn. Percussion and guitar follow and introduce excitement and drive, though the cello is quick to bring out a melancholic aspect of the music in measure 21. The combination of these unique instruments allows for a build in melodic range, timbre, and volume before yet another change: the transition to the organ in measure 27. The instrument typically prescribed to hymns and dirges returns to a parody of the melody accompanying the lines:

Oh say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed

Throughout this section, I attempt to call attention to the sounds, tones, and patterns we expect through atypical musical choices.

In removing and confusing musical indicators that allow for orientation and familiarity, I have added embellishing tones that color an otherwise simple piano chord progression, tweaking the voices in each repetition to prevent comfort. The cello, in what would be its second repetition of a play on the opening line of the SSB, remains on the E ♭ instead of resolving on the fifth of the scale (the F) in measure 11 just as it maintains the B ♭ in the following phrase - a note in tension with the B natural previously established in this pattern. In measure 14, the French horn echoes the same rhythmic, cascading motif that the cello performs the measure prior, yet the notes fall out of place, substituting an F ♭ and D ♭ where the F and E ♭ sounded. The bass,

which largely grounds this section, supplying the root of the chord, disappears in measure 25 and therefore fails to provide balance especially as every other instrument lends itself to the culmination of the piece. Rhythmic changes produce further inconsistency, as does the addition of licensed audio samples to the mix and the correlating rapid, jarring shifts between clips, particularly with regards to panning and volume. "Mazurek Dąbrowskiego" - and the chiming of the bells within this recording - for instance, oscillates between listeners' left and right ears. In fact, none of these audio clips remain stagnant; they relocate constantly, highlighting and contributing to the swirling, erratic movement already inherent to the crowd noise in the recordings themselves. This uprooted effect denies the stable placement of sound, used to both interrupt and complexify steadier, predictable pieces of this section, and to further the dramatic shifts and instability of others.

Section III

Reimagining: Improvisation and the Personal

This section is unique in that I did not start with a score, but instead improvised and later notated what I had created. Improviser and composer Wadada Leo Smith claims improvisation to be “an arrangement of silence and sound and rhythm that has never before been heard and will never again be heard” (Fischlin, 2020:3). Involving intuition, an opening up to uncertainty and attuning to difference, improvisation relies upon the reactionary and the embodied (Fischlin, 2020:6). Its regenerative potential “involves the readiness to remake things out of a paucity of materials, limitations, the crisis of having to risk in the here and now the immediacy of a decision” (Fischlin, 2020:11). The potential for refiguration challenges conformity, allowing for the interchange of knowledge and ideas, particularly regarding (im)possibilities.

Improvisation designs alternate ways of knowing and being known. The unscripted, creative decision making inherent to its practice is linked with pluriversality and reimagining, with complexity and nuance. As Dewar Macleod so perfectly puts it:

Improvisation resists the co-optation of mass culture and gives form to the basic impulses at the heart of scenes, connecting individual expression and virtuosity to community, with deep historical roots, as a kind of “empathetic communication across time.” The music gives voice to alternatives, possibilities, and utopian impulses that emerge in daily life and social relations within the scene. (Macleod, 2020:6-7).

This is particularly vital when considering ideologies within academia. With a revolutionary approach to language, power, resistance, change, and academia itself, *Smagliature digitali* emphasizes the need for unstructured and nonbinary knowledge and methods at the center of mutual learning, decision-making, and self-organization (Cossutta, 2018). Carlotta Cossutta, Valentina Greco, Arianna Mainardi, and Stefania Voli (2018) assert that we must prioritize

chance and unrepeatability, rejecting consistency and regulated forms of learning. As a collaborative, responsive practice, improvisation upholds this approach, embodying the freedom in dissonance and co-creation.

As such, my third section centers my own improvisation. With a starting point but a lack of regulations and determined direction, my intention was to open up to reinterpretation the musical and ideological themes I had spent so much time with - to sit in and realize their transformation. I prioritized intuition rather than polish, recording everything in one take regardless of how unfinished the final product felt. Incorporating the “mess-ups,” and therefore allowing them to be a part of the music - to generate their own beauty - embraced the reactive approach to music that improvisation encompasses. This was certainly easier said than done; it was and continues to be very challenging to listen back upon my work. I experience both disappointment and distress upon hearing that which inevitably falls outside the narrow constraints of acceptability - most notably “perfect” tuning - and still fight against the urge to redo or tweak or perfect that which disappoints and distresses. I am still attempting to embrace the imperfections within my piece - to let them take up space on their own rather than distract from or overshadow them. Yet what arose from this undertaking is something unplanned, chaotic, responsive, and utterly unlike anything I have done before. I actively avoided a regimented creative practice; I recorded and took breaks when I wished to, striving to evade obligation and allow my music to stem from inspiration. I have not determined a finite conclusion to my piece. I prefer, in fact, that it remains unfinished and therefore capable of further generation - of shifts and growth.

In transitioning to a fully vocal section, I made this reinterpretation personal. I chose the instrument I have always been the most comfortable with - the instrument which allows me the

most intention. The conscious choice to utilize the personal felt especially important given the privileging of objectivity and rationality within academia. *Smagliature digitali* calls for engagement with research through claiming personal experiences and one's body as objects of study, resisting the pressure of impartiality (Cossuta, 2018). Cossutta, Greco, Mainardi, and Voli (2018) challenge conceptions of objectivity within education, determining that academic involvement can and should interact with and be brought into other areas of individuals' lives. Music, which embraces the personal and insists upon connectivity, combats practices that prioritize distance and removal within learning. In discussing challenging these damaging practices accepted in and inherent to academic spaces, I felt it necessary to interact with knowledge in a way that was more inclusive and accessible - through music. In researching the radical practice of improvisation, I felt it crucial to practice it myself - to embed the personal within reactionary creation. In identifying national anthems' abilities to unite, indoctrinate, represent, and erase narratives, in addition to demonstrating the revolutionary possibilities that arise from (re)imagining, it is my hope that music be understood as its own unregulated form of knowledge, carrying with it the capacity to combat exclusivity within embedded hierarchies in systems like academia and access spaces of growth and collaboration.

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