

# **The Global Harp, a transcultural journey**

**Exploring the role as a harp player and collaborator in diverse musical contexts through a transcultural music-making process**



Photo by: Jari Flinck

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# Table of contents

1 Introduction	2
1.1 My background	2
1.2 Aim of the paper and guiding questions	5
2 Framing the master's project	6
2.1 Defining the key concepts	6
2.2 Duo collaborations in the center of the master's concert	9
2.3. Inspiration from other duo collaborations	10
2.4 Other practices included in the master's project	11
2.4.1 Fieldwork experience in Colombia 2017	11
2.4.2 The global harp, a transcultural journey: A documentary	12
3 The Process	14
3.1 Six duos as part of the final concert	14
3.1.1 Case: Duo I	16
3.1.2 Case: Duo II	19
3.1.3 Challenges	20
3.2. The master's concert	22
4 Reflections	23
4.1 Transcultural collaborations	23
4.2 Cultivating interpersonal skills through music-making practices	24
4.3 Social connections in the music making process	25
4.4 Improvisation as a process to listen, discover and create	26
4.5 Music making as a meaningful act and encounter	27
5 Conclusions	28
References	30
Appendix 1: Concert program and pictures	32
Appendix 2: Pictures fieldwork Colombia 2017	39
Appendix 3: Documentary	42
Appendix 4: Video excerpts	42

# 1 Introduction

In this final written work I will reflect upon the influences that have inspired this journey as a harp player and collaborator by being part of multicultural, intercultural and transcultural music-making processes. I will discuss how the development of this collaborative work (on different levels: musically and personally) has shaped my musicianship, led me to explore diverse approaches and ways of playing the pedal, lever and llanera harp as well as cultivated values such as awareness, understanding, respect, social connections and their influence in a transcultural arts practice.

I will also share the process, inspiration, challenges and outcomes involved in the construction of my final Glomas Master's concert "The Global harp, a transcultural journey" which was held as part of Global fest 2017 and which consisted of six duos of harp and: Bansuri flute, kora, keyboard and voices, cello, electronics and cuatro together with guest musicians from Finland, Senegal, Denmark, Colombia and Peru.

## 1.1 My background

I grew up in a family where music has been a "valid excuse" and a "good reason" to get together to celebrate, share, laugh, sing and play music. My grandfather was a well known folk musician in La Merced, Caldas (Colombia). My uncles still play folk instruments such as: Bandola, tiple, requinto, guitar, maracas and together with my aunts they all sing Latin American music. Hence I could say I've been surrounded by music since I have memory.

After having played the guitar and sung in choirs I decided that the harp should be my main instrument. Very often when you talk about this instrument in Colombia it is easy for people to relate to the *llanera harp* (harp from the plains) which is the folk harp played in Colombia and Venezuela. I also thought I was going to learn how to play the *llanera harp*, however what I was offered to learn was the pedal harp which I started studying at the age of 17 at the *Fundación Nacional Batuta* (Sistema of youth and children's orchestras in Colombia inspired by "El Sistema" in Venezuela ).

From 2008 to 2015 I worked as a harp and music teacher at the *Fundación Nacional Batuta*. This experience has been extremely important in my life, both as a musician and as a person. The kids I was teaching music to (for the first time in my life) were mostly victims of violence and forced displacement, living in poor conditions. Music would be a way to spend their free time, learning songs and games, making new friends and working as a team. Likewise it became part of my musicianship to consider interpersonal skills in the music-making process and connecting with people by seeing them as humans first and, from that starting point, making music together.

My life as a classical harpist in Colombia on the other hand was mainly focused on spending many hours on my own in a room practicing, taking care of my technique, rehearsing repertoire for solo harp and orchestra and having orchestra rehearsals with many people who I would not necessarily interact with. This might not have affected the result of a classical music concert but it affected the way I wanted to experience a music-making process. My life as a music teacher on the contrary was much more active and interactive with the kids and their parents. We would constantly have a rewarding habit of exchanging and sharing.

Furthermore I also became interested in exploring the sound and qualities of a smaller type of harp and playing in smaller groups. I bought a lever harp which meant that I was out of the symphony orchestra world and it also ‘invited’ me to take a different approach to this familiar and yet unfamiliar instrument still called harp, but with different features from the harp I had been playing before.

I played mostly in duos and trios such as:

- Lever harp and double bass (Jazz tunes)
- Lever harp, violin and vocals (Klezmer music, pop, Latin American Music)
- Lever harp, oud and flute (Improvised music and collective compositions)
- Lever harp, cuatro and maracas (Llanera music)
- Lever harp and koto (Japanese and improvised music)
- Lever harp and cello (Contemporary music and experimental improvised music)

These experiences were certainly opening doors for me to discover an important part of my musical path through the process of making music together, blending the sounds of our instruments, our backgrounds and sharing a common goal.

Later in 2015 I started the Glomas program (Nordic Master of Global Music) in Helsinki, Finland and I felt musically “at home”. By learning to observe other cultures, habits, backgrounds and diversity I started to be interested in interacting and playing music with different musicians. I also discovered plenty of approaches and possibilities in how music could be transmitted and learned during my Glomas studies. We would play music together through improvised exercises, sheet music and various other possibilities.

During these few years in Finland and six months in Denmark I have played harp in duos, small ensembles and also I have taken part in projects with dancers, actors, poets and visual artists where I have been discovering and building my artistic path and role as a harp player, musician and person.

Furthermore, I have noticed that my background as a classically trained harp player, a music teacher with a great interest and influence from Latin American music, world music and

experimental improvised music has shown me different perspectives and roles that have influenced the features of my musicianship.

This combination of my influences has brought up the following questions: What could I “offer” to other musicians? What do I expect to get from a collaborative process? What can result from the mixture of my background and someone else’s background?

In considering these questions I have reflected upon my own musical background and its relevant outcomes in my musical path:

-Latin American music: Has inspired me to see and feel music as a way to bring joy to life, has made me recognize the ‘beauty of the simple’ and has shown me how smoothly it brings people together.

-Classical music: Has allowed me to acknowledge and develop the discipline and technique skills required as a musician.

-World music: Has allowed me to appreciate diversity, to see music as a way of connecting with other people ( musically and personally) and to cultivate interpersonal skills.

-Experimental improvised music: Has allowed me to experience freedom, to create in real time, to cultivate awareness, trust, open-mindedness and listening to myself and others; to see ‘mistakes’ as opportunities to create and find honesty within myself.

-Working as a music teacher in Fundación Batuta: Has shown me the strong value of music as a tool of social transformation and has cultivated my awareness and importance of seeing people as humans (being aware of their feelings, showing respect, empathy and appreciation) before trying to make any musical activity.

This “mixture” might sound too difficult to narrow down into one single thing. I have therefore asked myself how these practices together could complement one another instead of them being isolated and separated features?

## **1.2 Aim of the paper and guiding questions**

This final written work aims to investigate with a self-reflective approach the development of my musicianship as it has been shaped by the interaction and exchange with others as part of transcultural collaboration in music-making.

This aim will be addressed through the following questions:

1. In what ways has transcultural collaboration in music-making shaped and developed my musicianship?
2. How are values such as awareness, respect and understanding cultivated in transcultural collaboration?
3. How can transcultural music-making processes contribute to a more aware, respectful and responsible world?

## 2 Framing the master's project

### 2.1 Defining the key concepts

Collaboration, diversity, multicultural, intercultural and transcultural are terms that became more important to me along the way during my Glomas studies, where people from different parts of the world gathered together every day and tried to find a new home musically and personally. I felt I was constantly aware and attentive. I also observed that understanding, respecting one another and appreciating our hybridity were also keywords in this “transcultural journey”.

The term “transculturation” was introduced in 1940 by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz to denominate the transformative process encountered by a society in the acquisition of foreign cultural material and the fusion of the indigenous and the foreign to create a new, original cultural product (Taylor, 1991, p. 91).

Furthermore Schippers (2010) has distinguished four basic approaches toward cultural diversity: monocultural, multicultural, intercultural and transcultural:

- Monocultural: One dominant culture which is the only frame of reference.
- Multicultural: Different peoples and musics lead largely separate lives (cultures and musics that exist together without much contact between them).
- Intercultural: This represents exchange between cultures and includes simple forms of fusion (meeting between cultures).
- Transcultural: This refers to an in-depth exchange of approaches and ideas. Many different musicians and musical approaches are featured on an equal footing (using deeper values). (Schippers, 2010, p. 30-31.)

These definitions have encouraged me to reflect upon the distinctions of the different terms and their impact on my musical and personal path through the roles I have faced in the multi-inter-transcultural processes during the past few years: For instance as a Colombian in Finland who is part of a multicultural environment where ‘various cultures exist together without much contact between them’, studying in Finland and Denmark at the Glomas program that gathers together culturally diverse people through an intercultural practice by ‘a voluntary meeting of cultures with a focus on product’ and establishing deeper connections socially and musically through a transcultural practice with ‘a total merging of content and underlying values approaches’ (Kors & Schippers, 2003, p. 6).

Moreover Homi Bhabha's work and Third Space theory have strongly inspired my personal reflections regarding how to observe and perceive the different features that this journey of six duos brought up during the process. Bhabha states: 'The theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 56).

When I started to build the six duos with harp and bansuri, keyboard and voices, kora, cello, cuatro and electronics (in 2016-2017) with six musicians from various backgrounds I would notice not only how these diverse formats inspired us to search for a kind of music that would be a result of the fusion of our musicianships but also how we became more aware of our differences regarding our goals and expectations as a duo, our working methods among others. In some cases one of the two backgrounds tended to be "more dominant", therefore we needed to allow some conversations and negotiations as well as cultivating a more constant social interaction, understanding, and other interpersonal skills to face certain challenges.

These values would become eventually features and part of the music making process where our 'cultural hybridity could give rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation' (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211) and also where 'the boundary would become the place from which something begins its presenting' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7). According to this we started to see our challenges as opportunities to acknowledge our similarities, differences, hybridity, learn from them and from one other to the extent of being able to create a "Third Space" where our uniqueness and creativity would emerge.

This space became our common ground to freely find our own voice as duos and it helped us to develop a shared interest in establishing deeper connections with one another. Our process of playing music together became more intensive in terms of how often we would meet, we would have a chat and talk about life before playing, we would ask the other person "how are you feeling today", we would share stories about our countries, music and life. This way of sharing and fusing deeper values besides the music-making itself made me observe that our work showed the features of a transcultural practice having found a third space where we would 'elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 56).

In addition Nathan Thomson's role and approach in the construction of the Glomas program has been a great example to follow. Studying at this program has also encouraged me to get more interested in the outcomes of transcultural collaborations, the roles that we take as humans and musicians and their impact on the musical process and result.

Likewise our duo work developed through observing the features of our instruments and trying out diverse repertoire, arrangements and improvisations, we got to constantly share experiences about our culture and habits, we got more confident with each other, we would play more often and we started to make our own compositions and to understand and share our background. In other words we also considered the features that Tendera and Rubiś suggest in transcultural practices: ‘translating and arranging with the use of the instruments given, understanding and perceiving a given culture, adapting to the musical territory given’ (Tendera & Rubiś, 2016, p. 5).

I also noticed how the more we would meet the more we would set a “closer” connection with one another. Our third space became a “safe environment” created simultaneously by our musical work, interaction and exchange. Besides the musical outcome we were taking care of each other as human beings. This closeness emerging from our duo work made me feel a big responsibility of being aware, understanding and respectful with the other person, her/his and our culture, background and ideas.

Furthermore Hendrickse and Thomson tell us that ‘collaborative approaches are practical ways to facilitate music-making, which allow participants to focus on the process of interaction and exchange’. (Hendrickse & Thomson, 2005, p. 391).

I am interested in the practices of ‘interaction and exchange’. These practices have played an essential role while working with the six different duos for my final concert. The practices have encouraged me to be a more aware person who cared about the other musicians involved in my master’s concert and have made me observe other features of collaboration besides the music-making context. Values were also part of the process and they contributed strongly to the musical outcome. In other words our work involved ‘interpersonal skills’ and our collaborations were strongly supported by creating empathy, trust, openness and responsiveness, listening to and acting on other points of view, ability to work collaboratively in a team with interchangeable roles and having the confidence to share ones vulnerability (Renshaw, 2010, p. 68-69).

For instance even “simple things” like having a small talk before our rehearsals, going for a walk or a coffee afterwards or bringing snacks to the rehearsals would generate stronger connections between us and would make a difference in our musical outcomes. That being said a musical encounter was a stepping stone to cultivate values, interaction and exchange and to define our collaborative approach as a ‘process in which the artists work together equally to exchange ideas and create new work’(Hendrickse & Thomson, 2005, p. 384).

One of the reasons I found myself interested in collaborating with musicians from different backgrounds was my interest in people, their stories and what they wanted to share with me. Later on curiosity and interest led me to explore my instrument in different ways according to the interaction with the other musician/instrument involved in each of the duos. Instead of

seeing myself as a harpist who plays music from different traditions, I saw myself as a collaborator whose musicianship is the result of ‘developing flexibility and creativity within my core performance skills, rather than becoming a specialist in another field’ (Hendrickse & Thomson, 2005, p. 386). This collaborative process therefore gave me the chance to explore and develop creativity on my instrument by playing with people from different backgrounds instead of being an expert in West African music, Latin American music, jazz or pop. Their influence, their instruments, skills and values fostered and shaped my musicianship.

## **2.2 Duo collaborations in the center of the master’s concert**

When practicing on my own I used to create and record some short melodies and patterns on the harp that I thought would eventually become my own compositions. On many occasions I would introduce to the duos some of those patterns and they would be a source of inspiration for instantly composed tunes or they would even develop into a song. On the other hand how I would improvise with someone else (from my experimental approach) would consist of meeting the musician before the actual performance, without any previous plans or rehearsals and just listen, respond and enjoy the moment. Then I thought: Why not combine some of these two ways of making music by using the “small patterns” I constantly recorded and also give some space for improvising without plans, recording the sessions and see where it takes us?

In 2015 I started to “jam” with other musicians. Kamilla, the pianist of my duo Kaminá asked me to jam together. Somehow I thought I needed to be a jazz musician in order to be ready for that. However I “took the risk” and we jammed together. Over the years I was playing, improvising, jamming with other people and trying to observe the “effects” our interactions would have on me. Renshaw (2013) states in the following paragraph of his paper *Being in Tune*:

*“Within an organisation a culture that respects ‘conversation’ and shared critical reflection is likely to encourage the process of making inter-connections, of cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices. This is not achieved in isolation... but by people choosing to work together, celebrating how their different talents, perspectives and insights can create something that transforms their practice and ways of seeing the world. It is through interaction, with its unique chemistry, that creative ideas and leaps of imagination begin to fly.”* (p. 53-54.)

Renshaw’s ideas proved to be accurate in my work. I noticed that the musicians I jammed with were more respectful, open minded, kind, supportive. They listened deeply and were those who constantly triggered and encouraged my creativity and my interests to the point of contributing to my musicianship, seeing our duo collaborations as lasting projects and celebrating our different talents through our interaction.

### 2.3. Inspiration from other duo collaborations

I have taken inspiration from the kora and cello duo formed by Ballaké Sissoko and Vincent Segal in order to reflect upon the features of a transcultural music-making process and collaborations in other duos. Their work is presented in the Songlines article “Conversations in the night” which presents the features that have contributed to their transcultural collaborations and have inspired mine.

Ballaké Sissoko is a Malian kora maestro who has worked with Toumani Diabaté, Taj Mahal, among others, as well as a soloist. Vincent Segal is a classically trained French cellist-turned-world music adventurer who has collaborated with Elvis Costello, Cesaria Evora, Sting, Maya Andrade, Susheela Raman, the trip-hop electronica duo Bumcello, among others.

Regarding their experience working as a duo Sissoko says: “We seem to understand each other without talking. It’s about respect. ” Segal says: “There’s a lot of love that goes into what we’re doing and the music comes from a lot of practicing together. But there aren’t any arrangements. One starts and the other builds on the melody and then we go. That’s how we play. There’s no pre-planned structure” (Williamson, 2015, p.26 ).

According to their statements I notice that their work involves not only references and inspiration from other musicians but also other collaborative works they actively take part in, which strongly relates to the work I have developed during the past few years in Finland collaborating with different projects and expanding my musicianship as a result. Also they seem to have developed values like trust and respect for one another which certainly enhance the collaborative work.

Sissoko’s and Segal’s way of working therefore strongly relates to my own work. Similar processes like Segal’s background in classical music, their work inspired in improvising as a tool for “discovering each other” and even as part of the performance itself as well as cultivating values like trust, respect, openness and friendship have certainly contributed to their and my transcultural collaborations.

I also wanted to observe the features of a collaborative process in a duo work that would involve an experimental approach and its outcomes. I found the duo KUBOV formed by Jess Aslan and Emma Lloyd.

Jess performs using computers and synthesisers, and also works in film and theatre as a composer and sound designer. Emma is a violinist and violist specialising in experimental contemporary music and improvisation who also performs as a soloist and in small ensembles, working often with live electronics, and collaborating regularly with composers.

In their paper “Breaking Boundaries of Role and Hierarchy in Collaborative Music- Making” they describe their process beginning with ‘discrete roles’ as a composer and performer, their working relationship which progressed naturally into one of equal authorship, and equal performative contribution. Also by exploring this creative relationship they have found how building and extending their instruments affected the hybridity of their sound and contributed to the development of their musical language. In addition they observe the importance of improvisation to their development as a duo, in the generation of ideas and the discovery of new sounds and potential in their instruments. (Aslan & Lloyd, 2016, p. 630).

According to their experience and comparing it to my own work with duos I observed a strong sense of openness when two instruments, backgrounds, cultures meet for a music-making process. The importance of creating a third space plays an essential role where hybridity encourages and encounters creativity. I have also noticed that the experience and values I have gained from my background in experimental improvised music has allowed me and the musicians I have worked with to trust each other, to create a space of freedom, to explore our creativity and expand the techniques and sounds of our instruments.

## **2.4 Other practices included in the master’s project**

### **2.4.1 Fieldwork experience in Colombia 2017**

Having the opportunity to travel somewhere else and engage with diverse traditions of my interest would definitely enrich my musicianship and this written work. I had many countries in my mind and it was difficult to decide where to go. Finally I realised that first I wanted to go “home” to do my fieldwork there and see whether I would connect in the same or a different way with my own culture and the musics of my interest after having been living abroad. In February and March 2017 I went to Colombia and I decided to get closer to the llanera music (music from the orinoco region of Colombia and Venezuela with Spanish and Indigenous influence) and also to the Afro Colombian music (music from the south pacific coast of Colombia with African influence). This was a great and meaningful opportunity which allowed me to be more aware of the diverse cultures within my own musical culture and to integrate these experiences into my own musicianship.

Hildo Ariel Aguirre was one of my teachers during my fieldwork studies. He is a harpist from the *llanos* (plains) of Colombia who is the producer of the international harp festival called *Encuentro Maestros del Arpa* which gathers harpists and harps of the world. His work has been inspiring to me because he is not only an important representative of folk music for harp in Colombia but also because he is a great facilitator, promoter of intercultural and transcultural practices, educator and person. His role has been very inspiring and similar to

what I have been searching for and experiencing along these years: A harp player and collaborator involved in diverse musical contexts through transcultural music-making processes.

I went to study llanera music for one month at Academia *Llano y Joropo*, the school he formed around 30 years ago in Bogota where students (from an early age) learn to play the llanera harp, cuatro, maracas and bandola. I learned some llanera music tunes that would give me an insight into its rhythms, allow me to understand how this music is transmitted, its challenges on a lever harp and how to apply some of its rhythmic elements from the folk Colombian harp into the lever harp.

Moreover, I took an intensive course on music from the southern pacific coast of Colombia, where I learned some tunes on the marimba de chonta, percussion and vocals. I also took private lessons of marimba music with Adrián Sabogal in order to find inspiration from the techniques and sounds of the marimba de chonta and implementing them on my own harp playing.

Adrián Sabogal is a Colombian multi-instrumentalist (he plays guitar, marimba de chonta and percussions from the pacific coast of Colombia) and educator with a jazz background who has been interested in researching and sharing the music of the southern pacific coast of Colombia on the *Marimba de chonta* and percussions. He has also been a great example of inspiration for my musical path. He applies techniques from marimba music to his guitar playing, brings the sounds of the marimba into world music and jazz and he also organises and teaches intensive courses (called *Marimbea taller*) in music from the southern pacific coast of Colombia in diverse cities in Colombia and other parts of the world to share the history and rhythms of this afro colombian music.

The lessons and interaction I had with Adrián have strongly influenced my musical path. Likewise our talks and shared experiences have had an impact in my harp playing, development and compositions of some pieces for my duo *Kaminá*. The more I played with Adrián the greater my interest and “appetite” became towards the music of the Southern Pacific Coast of Colombia. In his work he states that ‘interest and passion’ have also been the starting points that have led to his research, analysis, arrangements, techniques, contexts, compositions and interpretations of this music and the development of his career as a musician. (Sabogal, 2010 p. 33).

#### **2.4.2 The global harp, a transcultural journey: a documentary**

If I would have to describe my musical work in one word it would be very difficult since I am not only a harpist, a teacher or a musician. I am a combination of all of them and the processes and practices that being a harpist, teacher and musician share in common are

collaboration. That being said if I would need to narrow down my work in a word I could see myself as a collaborator.

According to this at some point I felt the need to share the impact of these different features in my musicianship. Also since I have close friends in other fields of art and we try to make projects together, I had this “crazy idea” and I asked my friend and ethnographer Eduardo Mejía if he would like to make a documentary (partly in Colombia and partly in Finland) of this transcultural journey of me playing the harp and collaborating in diverse projects. His response was immediately positive so the adventure began.

We had Skype meetings two months before I went to Colombia and made a schedule and a plan for what I wanted to include in the documentary. During my two months stay in Colombia I had someone who was filming lessons, concerts, interviews and the process of being in my own country creating a space of transcultural arts practice through interaction and exchange and the inspiration from the Marimba music from the Pacific Coast of Colombia and llanera music from the plains.

Then we decided to collaborate with Rogelio “*nomo*” Santana who wanted to share through a rap song the issues of the community of the slum of San José in my city Manizales. San José is a special place to me. I used to work there as a music teacher at the “Colegio San Agustín” with “Fundación Nacional Batuta” for a few years, so that place and some of its community are familiar to me. It was a great idea to go back there and start a collaborative work to transmit through Rogelio’s rap song the voice of the 25676 inhabitants who live mostly in poverty. When we started to film some of the community members were so excited because they felt that their story was going to be heard, not only in Colombia but also in Finland. They were participating actively, offered us food, brought us chairs, encouraged people to support and look after us. It was one of the most powerful moments of my fieldwork studies.

At the same time some questions came to my mind. Seeing the conditions of poverty they live in I started questioning what was/is going to be my contribution after our collaboration? If they have been so open to me and eager to share their stories about what I am going to share with them? Is this work I am doing going to be relevant for them? Am I going to contribute to changing their situation? How am I going to show the respect I am trying to promote and get out of the collaborative work? How can I compensate for what they have shared with me and their approval to share their reality? Is this documentary going to make a meaningful change in their lives/situation? How?

I talked with my friend Eduardo Mejía who helped me produce this documentary. He is an ethnographer, photographer, audiovisual maker, social communicator and founder of *üelkom brand* (for more information see the link <http://www.uelkom.com/index.php/en/>) After our talk and his feedback regarding previous experiences working with communities I realised that with this documentary I do not want to just inform about the situation these people are

facing in this slum in my city but in fact I want to expand this collaboration to somehow contribute to the community. It has not been easy and it will take time to achieve it. We are now in the process of finding a grant for Rogelio to study at university. This means that there is still a lot of hard work to do and the collaborative process with this documentary does not stop here.

On the other hand this documentary also tells my story as a harpist and collaborator and how these years have inspired my musical path. I collected a lot of material from my experience in Colombia and when I was back in Finland my friend Paola Guzmán filmed some parts in Helsinki (a very important place in my career where I have grown as a musician, person and developed my musical path). It took us 11 months of sending emails and whatsapp audios with Eduardo and Paola to get our final 6 minutes version of the documentary (see Appendix 3) completed.

## **3 The Process**

### **3.1 Six duos as part of the final concert**

The six duos for my final concert were created over the years spent studying at Glomas. Some of them were born by jamming and improvising, not even with the intention of building my final concert in advance. I played three different types of harps: Pedal harp, lever harp, llanera harp and I also sang.

The duos in the concert were:

#### **Natalia Castrillón & Kaisa Siirala (pedal harp and bansuri flute)**

Duo formed during our semester in Aarhus, Denmark in 2016. After having attended a workshop on extended techniques for saxophone Kaisa and I decided we could try something out on our instruments using improvisation and experimentation as a source of inspiration. We both found a connection in our tunes influenced by meditating and breathing.

#### **Natalia Castrillón & Cheick Cissokho (lever harp, kora, vocals)**

Duo formed in Helsinki in 2016. We started playing some West African tunes as well as Cheick's compositions. Later on we would also use improvisation in our process. We also played some Latin American tunes and we arranged and composed tunes together. We still continue playing and working together, discovering the similar and diverse combinations of our instruments.

***Kaminá*, Natalia Castrillón, Kamilla Haugaard (lever harp, keyboard, vocals)**

*Kaminá* was formed in 2015 within our Glomas studies in Helsinki, Kamilla asked me if I wanted to jam with her and we started with some of her tunes and some Latin American songs that we arranged. We also used improvisation to “get to know each other” better musically. We played our own compositions in my final concert. We have performed in Finland and Denmark and we are working on our first album inspired by our backgrounds and life stories.

**Natalia Castrillón & Alejandro Olarte (llanera harp/vocals, live electronics)**

I took part in this by singing in an installation by Outi Korhonen and Alejandro Olarte called (UN)REST lullaby installation. Alejandro and I agreed that it would be great to do something together in the future for harp and electronics and voice and electronics. Then my interest in collaborating with live electronic musicians encouraged me to arrange some sessions with him. We did a collective composition using improvisation for harp and electronics and we also made a piece for voice and electronics inspired by a Colombian song from the Pacific Coast.

**Natalia Castrillón & Sergio Castrillón (pedal harp, llanera harp, prepared cello)**

Sergio and I have been playing since we were kids. He is my brother and our music nowadays is either improvised or composed in real time. Our trust, our background in classical, contemporary and folk music inspires our sonic outcomes. We played a set of instantly composed pieces in my final concert. We still play together as a duo and also in interdisciplinary projects with actors, dancers, painters, poets and visual artists.

**Natalia Castrillón & Camilo Pajuelo (lever harp/ vocals, cuatro)**

Camilo and I share a common interest in Latin American music. He plays the guitar, charango and cuatro. After my fieldwork studies I asked him to arrange two of the llanera pieces I learned in Colombia, therefore Camilo and I formed this duo inspired by Colombian music. We took workshops on cuatro and llanera music in Helsinki with cuatro player Eduardo Ramírez and we also worked (via internet) with harpist Hildo Ariel Aguirre in order to have some guidance regarding our arrangements and interpretations of these pieces.

All in all, it was a remarkable experience to work with all of them. They are not only wonderful musicians but also wonderful people. This experience also showed me different challenges, ways of engaging in conversation with different instruments and making music together through collaboration.

### 3.1.1 Case: Duo I

#### **Natalia Castrillón & Cheick Cissokho/ Harp + Kora**

The first time I heard the sound of the kora was back in Colombia in a yoga lesson. I felt that it was like an “impossible dream” to get close to a kora one day. I thought I would need to go to Africa, however Africa came to me when I was in Finland.

I thought the procedure would be to learn how to play the kora first in order to understand the instrument better and then I would have the tools to transfer the techniques and knowledge to my own harp playing. I noticed that for me to learn the basics of kora playing I would need to start from scratch. I also realised it might require a different ‘mindset’ regarding how this music and techniques were going to be transmitted, among other challenges.

Kora player Toumani Diabaté describes very well in an interview (Morgan, 2014, May 22) what I faced at the beginning of this process (which seems to be more common than I thought)

Diabaté says:

*"I get lots of mails from people sitting in Europe, in America or Asia saying: 'Yes, Toumani, I love your music! I've decided to make a kora for myself and I wanted to know the names of the strings,'" "But I say: 'Hang on a minute! That's not how it is.' I'm OK for people to learn how to play, but you have to come to the source to learn. You have to go into one of the families who guard the tradition of the kora, and follow the lines exactly."*

In accordance with Toumani’s thoughts and my own experience (when I saw the kora at first) the excitement was a great starting point, however it was not enough in order to understand the process, the instrument and techniques. I needed to step back, observe, wait, repeat and find my own way to become more familiar with this music.

I would start jamming with Cheick on some West African tunes that for my ears sounded “not very complex” (when coming from his hands). I would realise how different it was when I tried to quickly transfer them on the harp. We spent hours at the beginning trying to play tunes together. Those tunes were familiar to Cheick and totally new to me. This process at the very beginning felt like a strange combination of equal excitement and frustration.

I decided to film and record most of our sessions and after hours playing one tune together I would still practice it on my own and I would try to figure out the melodies, accompaniments and improvisations on the song. I was also very interested in his story as a musician and person and I found out that he is a griot (storytellers and musicians who preserve the oral traditions in West Africa). I still remember how he appreciated my interest in the history of the kora and his background and life before I wanted to get closer to the music itself.

Our connection started there. He became my teacher and our lessons would consist of him playing the tunes and me trying out and transferring some of his patterns, accompaniments and phrasing on the harp. This was more difficult than I thought. I have found kora music rhythmically quite complex, the bass lines, melodies and improvisations around it create unique layers of rhythms which felt quite challenging to translate to the harp. I once again had to step back, observe and reframe what I wanted to gain from this process, the input I wanted to contribute with as a harp player in our duo and how I should approach this music at my own pace instead of just trying to exactly imitate his way of playing.

The way I learned to approach this collaboration with Cheick and kora music made me reflect on what Schippers (2010) defines as ‘settings for music transmission and learning’ (p. 90). As a classically trained musician I had been strongly influenced and used to a *formal* way of learning (through a program and structure in which the institutional environment is a strong influence). My lessons with Cheick also occurred in a formal setting in terms of the institutional environment within my Glomas studies, but I also noticed that it took us a while to find some structure to our lessons. That was something we found together along the way. Therefore in that transition I noticed that his knowledge was also transmitted in an *informal* setting (characterized by an absence of consciously organized structures for music instruction). (Schippers, 2010, p. 90)

This was an interesting process where even if I was a student we were contributing together in order to find a way for me to learn the elements from kora playing I wanted to explore on the harp. Consequently, I felt I needed to “unlearn” my formal way of approaching a piece of music and instead cultivate awareness, respect, patience and a non-judgmental attitude towards the informal way this music was presented to me by Cheick in a formal environment. This was a revealing process that encouraged me to receive openly the knowledge as it would come from him. It took a long time, but little by little I got to learn the bass lines, melodies and slowly put them together on the harp. Cheick was very patient with me. He was constantly encouraging me to keep on trying. I still remember he would gently say: “*It’s coming, it’s coming.*”

We decided to meet up once a week to have a lesson and also to start working with our duo of harp, kora and voices project. I started learning *Djarabi*, one of the most popular Kora tunes. We also learned another tune called *Suaresi*. There I started to have a clearer idea about the melodies and accompaniments.

Cheick and I would start to see each other quite often and our connection would get stronger. We were also excited about blending our instruments together and seeing what would come out from that. We then started to search for repertoire to perform. He showed me some tunes and I also found that we could play a Colombian tune together that would fit our instruments. Through that he would also get an understanding of this music and we could exchange and

collaborate together. I learned a lot from this process as well when I was the one introducing him a *Pasillo*, a genre from the Andean region of Colombia.

We also played a tune composed by Cheick, a really beautiful one called *Tunga* which talks about journeys. We did not set any instructions on how to play the tune, he just started to play it and I improvised around it. He looked at me like asking me to join him with the vocals and he told me at some point: “*Let’s go*”, meaning that the next part would be a harp solo. This piece flowed naturally and smoothly. Playing this piece really showed us what path to follow: Playing our collective pieces, listening to and trusting each other. With this piece I felt we were both completely free to experiment and try to incorporate our own inputs and have a unique outcome where we could blend our musicianships and learn from one another’s backgrounds.

I also realised that by that time our encounters were not only about the music making itself and that if we really wanted to develop our music and friendship it would take time. There were many stories underneath the surface that I felt the need to acknowledge and respect and also I wanted to get to know Cheick better, both as a musician and also as a person.

We experienced challenges regarding the structure of our arrangements. In rehearsals we would make decisions, however when playing the pieces we did not necessarily follow our “agreements”. As I mentioned earlier the idea of this collaborative duo work was strongly connected with finding the third space out of our uniqueness and at the same time avoiding one of us being dominant. Somehow since it felt “easier and safer” for me to have a form and structure with our tunes I proposed that but this also frustrated me a lot and made me feel I was the one “dominating” in trying to follow a structure. Then we tried to be completely free of form which felt sometimes strange but on the other hand it allowed a closer approach that suited us both. I noticed that my need of having a strict form was stopping the music to “flow”. We then found a way to make our arrangements in a way that they had a planned introduction, freedom to improvise in the middle of the song and an end that sometimes was or was not the same as planned. It took me a while to get used to this new approach which required a lot of practice on my own to understand the tunes well, being open for “not following the agreements”, improvise around them, compose some intros to them and allow myself to appreciate and give back the signs of trust that Cheick was handed to me.

As previously mentioned we also faced challenges when tuning our instruments. It was a long process to find a common tuning. We learned to develop patience, appreciation and embrace the situation if sometimes we were not equally tuned after having tried several times. It also allowed us to find this repetitive event as part of our process and even as part of our music. Therefore we learned how not to get disappointed about it and instead embrace it.

This transcultural collaborative work with Cheick Cissokho through the practice itself showed us the path to follow in order to encounter our third space, starting from traditional

West African tunes (helping me to understand the kora's features and techniques) to some Latin American rhythms (helping us to share our backgrounds and put ourselves in each other's position) and finally find a way to collectively create our own arrangements, compositions and improvisations.

As described in this study case this experience has certainly been rewarding to me and so it has been to Cheick. This is what he said about our collaboration:

*“Working as a duo with Natalia was extremely rewarding. Especially the improvisation part, we complement one another. It flowed. We found a starting point and found a direction together. And I felt like we created something quite magical. Chemistry was evident. Our personalities worked well together. Even when at times we were missing words. We spoke with our music.”*

### **3.1.2 Case: Duo II**

#### **Kaminá Duo**

#### **Natalia Castrillón & Kamilla Haugaard/ harp+keyboard+voices**

Kaminá was formed in 2015 within my Glomas studies with my classmate Kamilla Haugaard. The duo was born through free improvised sessions and also by making our own arrangements from some Colombian music and pop tunes. We had a course called “Global Rhythmics” and we had a task that consisted of composing a rhythmical pattern/idea for a song. Kamilla and I created a rhythmic pattern for our Global music course which turned out into our song called “In the end” (See excerpt of this song in Appendix 4).

Forming this duo with Kamilla also gave me the chance to sing more. We found out that our voices blended well together, therefore we decided that our duo would consist of two voices, keyboard and harp. We performed together the first time at Etnosoi jam in Mascot café in 2015 and we got such a great response from the audience that we decided that we wanted to continue playing together.

We were studying one semester in Helsinki (Autumn 2015) and one semester in Aarhus (Spring 2016). That year we rehearsed regularly, started to think of what kind of music we wanted to play and thought of our plans for the future since Kamilla would stay in Aarhus and I would go back to Finland. Our first challenges included how to continue our work whilst living two different countries, how to find ways and resources to meet for composing sessions at least twice or three times a year and how to keep the interest and our project alive.

We started to book gigs in order to gather funds that would allow us to travel to see each other (to Denmark or Finland), to rehearse and have concerts. Regarding our background and

what kind of music we wanted to share we sat down to reflect upon what could come out of the combination of our backgrounds. Kamilla is a skillful pianist and singer influenced by jazz, songwriting and rhythmic music, especially from Brazil. On the other hand my musicianship is inspired by my classical background, experimental improvised music and Latin American music.

In our process we have faced several challenges. Many times I felt I was out of my comfort zone when Kamilla asked me to find certain sounds on the harp that I could not relate to even though I had been exploring different extended techniques on my instrument. We were searching for something that would “sound like us”. We needed to discover how to blend our musicianships in a way that we would still feel ourselves using our individual creativity together.

I also realised that Kamilla was not very comfortable on some occasions where I wanted to go “experimental”. We realised then that we needed to create our third space which would allow us to develop our creativity and a unique combination of our duo work. We needed to cultivate patience and find ways to learn from our disappointments. In our rehearsals we would record 20 minutes of free improvisations. Afterwards we listened to the recordings and this started to be one way of composing our music: Recording an improvised session, listening to it, finding (or not) potential patterns or melodies and developing them into songs.

So far we have composed songs using lyrics in English and Danish and we have recorded an EP between 2016-2018 in Finland and Denmark. We have constant meetings via skype in order to compose, develop our project and book gigs. Our duo is a result of blending together our musical backgrounds, cultivating values as respect, awareness, support, patience, constant negotiations, acceptance and a wonderful friendship. In our music we take inspiration and write lyrics about events, places and feelings that we have been involved in together. This duo is a good example of how a collaborative process that began in an informal jamming session can become a long lasting project.

### **3.1.3 Challenges**

Even if these collaborations have been great experiences many unexpected events and challenging situations occurred. The musicians and I had to find ways to deal with some frustrations during the process.

I have listed some of the most challenging situations experienced and what was learned from them:

- I found it difficult to define the order of the pieces of my master’s concert taking into consideration that the program consisted of diverse musical territories. The idea was

to construct the concert around the concept of a journey, therefore it was challenging to decide an order which made the concert coherent, the space inviting and engaging. After talking for hours with Sergio Castrillón, my concert supervisor, and changing the setlist for months I finally trusted my very last decision. I simply felt it was “appropriate” and I trusted that inner feeling.

- In our duo with Cheick Cissokho finding a common tuning for the kora and harp was one of the biggest challenges. It was very difficult to have a similar tuning and it was frustrating how we sometimes would spend a lot of time trying to tune our instruments together. Sometimes we even did not try to insist on the common tuning and we somehow developed the capacity of not being too mad when our instruments were not properly tuned together. I tried the lever harp and also the llanera harp (which has a very similar sound to the kora) to compare which one of them would provide a sound that we thought would fit into our music and also in order to see which one was easier to tune together with the kora. We tried both several times and I remember asking Cheick to be patient when I was switching-tuning-switching from one harp to another with the aim to find which one would suit us better. After many sessions trying we both agreed that the lever harp would work nicely and we needed to learn to be patient with the tuning “issue”. We even learned to accept it if sometimes we were not equally tuned.
- Finding a “transportable format” for our Kaminá duo with Kamilla Haugaard was also a challenge. When we started playing together Kamilla would play the piano and I would play the lever harp. The piano was much louder than the lever harp. Therefore I decided to use the pedal harp. Then when we started to have concerts outside the school we realised it was not really practical to use such big instruments like pedal harp and piano, consequently it took us a few months to “detach” ourselves from the great acoustic sound and resonance our instruments and instead use more portable ones as a keyboard and lever harp. Furthermore we still needed to maintain the “intimate” spirit of our music. We missed some features that piano and pedal harp would give us such an incredible resonance and strong bass lines, however we gained freedom and this change of our setup resulted being a great idea. They were more practical instruments to transport and more suitable to our music that did not need to be played with classical instruments. We started to explore new sounds and techniques according to this new format and since we needed to amplify our voices as well it then became our actual format: harp, keyboard and voices, all of them amplified and yet keeping the “acoustic feeling” that was created when we first formed our duo.
- With both duos we also faced challenges on how to equally distribute the work between us such as booking gigs, applying for festivals, and other practicalities. This sometimes got difficult when one of us was busier than the other. We were constantly discussing these issues and making sure that one person would invest more

“networking hours” and the next time the other person would catch up so that the workload would be equally divided. Even having discussed it, on many occasions it was one of us investing more time in arrangements, booking gigs, writing emails, applying to festivals and sometimes we were disappointed with each other.

- With both of the duos we needed to be aware of avoiding one of us having a dominant role or having a passive role in the creative process when composing or arranging our tunes. We were aware of the importance of allowing our creativity to flow and accepting that depending on our day or mood one of us would come up with more ideas than the other person. We decided then that we could try to negotiate our inputs and be as open as possible when giving feedback and express it whether or not we liked each other’s ideas. Sometimes one of us would be excited about a new musical idea and the other person would say: “I don’t like it” causing disappointment and frustration to the other person. We learned to appreciate the work and effort it might take to come up with an idea and how discouraging it could feel if the other person immediately rejected it. We then recorded any musical ideas we found interesting without judging them as “good or bad ones” and we would get back to them some other time if we were not very sure of them at the beginning. This was a great way to appreciate more of each other’s work, cultivate patience and avoid being judgmental and being more open to give and receive feedback from one another.

### **3.2. The master’s concert**

My final concert took place on December 7th, 2017 in Black Box, Musiikkitalo within the Global fest. It was an exciting and rewarding experience to share these transcultural duo collaborations with these six musicians and to bring a broad audience interested in diverse musical territories.

Description from the program of Global fest 2017:

*“The sounds of the pedal harp, lever harp, kora and Colombian harp intertwine and engage in conversation with diverse musical languages and territories. Together with special guest musicians from different cultural backgrounds, Natalia Castrillón guides us on this journey from traditional Colombian and African harp music to electronic soundscapes, experimental pop and improvised music.”*

At first I presented my documentary “The Global harp, a transcultural journey.” I had planned to do so as a way to welcome the audience and introduce myself as a musician and person. This had a very positive response, therefore it gave me good vibes to go on stage and play. I felt great support from the six musicians I played with and also from the audience. It was an

amazing feeling, but it is difficult to express it in words. The room felt full and safe, intimate, familiar, beautiful, full of good energies cheering us up. It seemed to me we were all celebrating.

During the concert I could feel how we trusted each other in our duos and how safe it felt to play with them. We still used improvisation in the performance itself which not only made our music different from our rehearsal situation but also showed the result of our collaborative work based on trust, acceptance, openness, listening and supporting one another.

I also faced a challenging situation. The day of the master's concert the soundcheck lasted five hours due to the different instruments used for the performance. I had already been there two hours before the sound check tuning the three harps. What I learned was that in such a situation where unexpected events happened and there was not much I could do, it was important to embrace what I wanted to express with my music while also trying to make things less stressful. That was not easy to do. I would say the awareness, patience and values that I had developed through the construction of these duo collaborations for my concert gave me the skills to stay calm and confident in this situation and just try to enjoy that unique moment of the concert. Once I entered the challenges were left behind.

## **4 Reflections**

As I started to work on the construction of the final concert and the masters project I observed the aspects that would facilitate this collaborative process inspired by the duo works with musicians from diverse backgrounds. Transcultural collaborations, cultivating interpersonal skills and social connections in the music making process have played an essential role in our work.

### **4.1 Transcultural Collaborations**

Living in Finland and studying in the Glomas programme have developed my awareness of being in a multicultural environment. This experience has brought constant wonders, has enhanced my values, has also brought challenges in my way of thinking which have encouraged me to cultivate interpersonal skills to relate with others. In other words, interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds has become a lifestyle full of emotions which have influenced my musicianship and my approach to the duo collaborations.

In terms of music-making these years living abroad have inspired me through the encounters and collaborations with artists from different backgrounds. Our interaction and exchange has influenced the way I play the harp and experience music. As Nathan Thomson states ‘we are living in a time with greater access to music and traditions across the globe having the possibility to borrow ideas, techniques and even instruments from each other’ (Thomson, 2013, p. 22). When having a wide range of possibilities to make music and interact with culturally diverse people excitement and frustration can also be equally experienced during the process. I have had the opportunity to make music with six musicians with a diverse background and it has enriched my perspective on music making while simultaneously showing me the challenges involved depending on the level of depth of these collaborations.

This journey of working in the duos for my final concert made me reinforce my strong interest in diverse musics and connecting with people as musicians and as human beings. During these years I then noticed I was interested in deep musical encounters where I could get to know the other members of the duos better, through his and her music, through his and her instrument and stories. At that moment (perhaps even unconsciously) I was already feeling I was interested in a fusion of deeper values, in other words in a transcultural approach where our collaborations would aim at breaking out boundaries and finding ways to understand, mutually respect each other and develop a creative space inspired by our shared interests.

## **4.2 Cultivating interpersonal skills through music-making practices**

When designing the structure, repertoire, rehearsals and the concert with six musicians coming from Finland, Senegal, Denmark, Colombia and Peru I noticed some similarities and differences regarding our communication, agreements, reactions and attitude in general. Even if we came from different parts of the world, I felt I did not want to “label” them in terms of the country they were coming from but instead cultivate interpersonal skills that would help us to deal with our differences and that would provide us with tools to face the challenges during the process.

Scholars in the field have stated that the emotional connectedness that binds a group together can be distinguished by a sense of shared motivation, shared purpose, solidarity and even by knowing that fear, vulnerability, self-doubt and marginality can also be shared (John-Steiner, 2006, p.124; Renshaw, 2013 p. 54). The more encounters I had with these six musicians, the more freedom we gained to share our feelings and support each other. We became aware that creativity, disposition, frustration, tiredness, fear, and vulnerability would be part of the process and would influence our rehearsals and music. Our work became a musical process based on emotional support and shared motivation and values.

On the other hand Thomson (2013) suggests that ‘from a larger perspective, qualities such as respect, listening, openness and non-judgement, which are essential in collaborative music making, are also basic qualities needed to live peacefully with others in this world’.

Thomson’s thoughts make an important point that relates to my work. I noticed how meaningful it was to create this awareness in a musical context and how useful it is to consider these qualities in my everyday interactions with others. Additionally, the more I got to know these musicians personally while making music together, the better I got along with them. I observed we were not only creating music. We were also developing social connections. I had the constant need of becoming more aware, observing, open and consequently getting closer to them. For instance by seeing them more often outside the musical environment and getting to know them better as people.

### **4.3 Social connections in the music making process.**

While I was getting to know the musicians better, their personalities, habits, perception about life and music, I appreciated the importance of “connecting” with them. Simple things like how they would say hi to me (with a kiss, hug or just with a smile) and also our perception of “being in time” or “being late” for our rehearsals played a strong role in this process and made me feel the need of cultivating awareness and understanding. I started to realise that I could not expect them to see these aspects as I do. However, we needed to set an environment where we would equally commit. These observations encouraged me to cultivate dialogue between us, avoiding judgment in situations and, on the other hand, discovering how different we were and how to build social connections by appreciating our diversity.

According to Thomson ‘the quality of music making is directly linked to the quality of the connections between the people involved’ (Thomson, 2013, p. 21). In my experience when music making is based on sharing and connecting musically and personally it becomes more enjoyable and more human. If handled well the process becomes a meaningful life experience through music and the performance situation itself may not even be the main goal of the collaborative work.

It is also possible to obtain a great musical result from shallow connections. For example, I used to play in symphony orchestras where the main focus was the music and performance itself. On several occasions there were musicians whose names I did not even know and who I never interacted with. The musical result was fine, but it was clear to me that “something was missing” and the experience even showed me that my expectations as a musician were not only inspired by playing music. In fact my musical path has been highly encouraged by human interactions based on sharing, connecting personally and creatively.

#### **4.4 Improvisation as a process to listen, discover and create**

Improvisation has played an important role in most of the duos I have developed and built for my final concert. It has been part of my background as a musician since 2006 and it has become a method to create a third space between the other musician; her or his instrument, the harp and me.

As Jackie Walduck (1997) states ‘improvisation offers a live exploration of sound during music performance in which performers can play with musical ideas or respond to each other’s material in real time’(p. 16). ‘Playing with musical ideas or responding to other’s material in real time’ has become part of my musicianship and it has also encouraged me (and the musicians I have worked with) to take inspiration from other’s sounds and techniques and to develop skills and values beyond the ‘music material’ itself such as listening, trusting, cultivating acceptance, awareness, respect.

Improvising in duos has been one of the most rewarding and useful practices along the construction of my final concert not only because of the free environment it has created but also because of the way the other musicians and I have reacted and responded to one another and how these encounters have certainly shaped my musicianship. In other words, improvising and playing with a kora player, a marimba player, a pianist, a cellist, a llanera harpist, a saxophonist, a bansuri flutist, a cuatro player and an electronic musician have inspired me to expand the technical possibilities on the harp through the exercise of finding some of the sounds on their instruments on the harp. This practice has influenced how I approach my instrument in a way that would not have been possible without it.

Furthermore improvisation has encouraged me to cultivate awareness, the capacity of being open to unexpected situations, deep listening, observing the different moments that emerge (for example if someone has a more dominant role or if the process feels equally distributed) and also to be present and focused when practicing and performing. I have a diary where I have registered some of the most rewarding musical works I have taken part in with musicians, dancers, poets and actors. In the diary I am analysing how the feeling of “achieving the goal” after the rehearsal or performance has been the result of a conscious collaborative process. I am extracting here a short paragraph that describes how it felt to be involved for the first time in a contact improvisation jam (partner dance form based on the physical principles of touch, momentum, shared weight and following a shared point of contact) and how this event contained the features of a collaborative work through improvisation:

“Having participated in a contact improv jam showed me from the very beginning the features of a collaborative process through an improvisational approach. Trust, awareness, non judgmental attitude, listening, being present and focused were part of the process that certainly had a strong impact on the outcome and response of the dancers and me.” (Personal diary, 2018.)

One of the participants told me at the end of the session that what she enjoyed the most was the concentration we created in common (dancers and me) and how she noticed that “the dancers were not dancing my music and at the same time I was not playing what they were dancing.” This feedback encouraged me to analyse the different outcomes of an improvisational process through collaboration. Depending on the experience and level of depth it might present an equal exchange of ideas, it could also show one more dominant element as well as the search for a common ground, a completely contrasting way to respond to a given material and a constant exercise of listening and reacting.

On the other hand approaching improvisation from a different perspective (for example improvising on a chosen chord progression) has allowed me to find a source of inspiration to compose repertoire for some of the duo projects, especially pieces for Kaminá and the duo with Cheick Cissokho. Back in Colombia, when having classes with Adrián Sabogal, I felt strongly connected with currulao music (from the South Pacific Coast of Colombia) and its fascinating rhythms. We would spend many hours improvising around some of the patterns of this music, Adrián was playing the marimba, I was playing the harp. In addition I was in an ensemble where we got to learn currulao music on percussion and voice. This music just got “stuck” in my mind and due to repetition and later internalisation of these rhythms (on percussions, voice and harp) I felt I really wanted to transfer some of the percussion patterns on the harp, and explore the harp in a more “percussive” way as well as some sound qualities of the marimba on the harp. I was using then some of these short patterns and chord progressions in our rehearsals with Kamilla Haugaard (piano, voice) and Cheick Cissokho (kora).

#### **4.5 Music making as a meaningful act and encounter**

I have observed that this transcultural collaborative work for my final concert and final written work has been strongly inspired by experiencing music making as an act, as a social and meaningful encounter with people who take part in the process, in the moment, in their contribution to make it happen in a certain place, time, context. In other words this process has been the result of “musicking”.

Christopher Small has coined the term musicking (to music) which means ‘to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing’.

(Small, 1998, p. 9). The act of musicking suggests a human activity which lies in action, in what people do. I could therefore say that I have been musicking for several years finding ways to connect my experiences as a harp player, music teacher and human being with making music through human values, as well as the importance of the relationships created in this process ‘between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world’ (Small, 1998, p.13).

## 5 Conclusions

For many years I had wondered if it was possible to develop a musical path where my diverse roles as harp player, music teacher and human being interested in connecting with others could be combined in one context or situation. I have found that through collaborative work these features have strongly related to one another and facilitated the processes of music making. In other words these tools that once were seen as separate features of my musicianship in different contexts have finally gathered together to support the work I have developed over the past three years: A transcultural and collaborative journey with six musicians from diverse backgrounds as well as the construction of my master’s concert and this final written work.

The most relevant outcomes of these transcultural collaborations and final written work are:

1. Acknowledging the existence of my multicultural background and how it has served me well not only to develop into a transcultural journey but also to re-discover the features of my musical path as a harp player, music teacher and collaborator.
2. Seeing the great potential of improvisation as a practice to facilitate transcultural collaboration, cultivate values and enhance music-making processes and connectedness.
3. Discovering that my musicianship (the way I play the harp and experience music) has been strongly shaped by the musical/social interaction and exchange with the people I have collaborated with.
4. Recognizing the importance of social interaction in my musical encounters with others. It constantly reminds me that we all are “human beings” first.
5. Experiencing how a collaborative process cultivates interpersonal skills such as awareness, respect, understanding, listening, shared meaning and values that facilitate not only a music making process but also any other individual or collective goal.

6. Understanding that cultivating values in a music-making process demands commitment and at times facing great challenges. However, if handled well, the experience of building up a music project based on shared responsibility and values can certainly contribute to making this world a more responsible and empathetic place to live in.

This final written work has also encouraged me to reflect upon my musical path from the very beginning of my career as a musician. A musician born in Colombia in a multicultural environment who, thanks to living in Finland and Denmark, has had the opportunity to embrace and appreciate diversity more. This process allowed a third space to emerge. All these encounters and shared experiences have shaped my musicianship by giving me the opportunity to apply technical aspects borrowed from other instruments to my harp playing to the extent of finding a versatile approach on my instrument, discovering new artistic territories and opening up new possibilities for music making.

On the other hand transcultural practices, collaborative work and improvisation have been the key features in the development of my work with these six duos. As Schippers states: 'Eminent musicians from Yehudi Menuhin and Yo-Yo Ma to Paul Simon and Peter Gabriel have argued and demonstrated that practical contact with other musics and cultures deepens one's own understanding of music' (Schippers, 2010, p. 32).

I am glad to say that my experience through this transcultural journey has strongly deepened the way I see and experience music. This collaborative work has also brought the necessity of looking for a space for honesty and awareness as a musician and person by constantly asking more questions such as: What is the message I want to transmit? What is the next step? What feels honest or not to play and to do? I certainly could have not achieved these goals and perspectives through practicing on my own in a room. I am happy I had the chance to re-discover and nurture my musical path through collaborations facilitated by my Glomas studies. I am looking forward to seeing how future collaborations will continue inspiring the musician I will become in the future and I hope this work encourages further studies on this topic.

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## **Appendix 1: Concert program and pictures**

### ***THE GLOBAL HARP, A TRANSCULTURAL JOURNEY***

***NATALIA CASTRILLÓN, 7.12.17 Black Box***

The sounds of the pedal harp, lever harp, kora and Colombian harp intertwine and engage in conversation with diverse musical languages and territories. Together with special guest musicians from different cultural backgrounds, Natalia guides us on this journey of duets from traditional Colombian and African harp music to electronic soundscapes, experimental pop and improvised music.

Natalia Castrillón (COL) Pedal harp, lever harp, Colombian harp, vocals.

Kaisa Siirala (FIN) Bansuri flute

Cheick Cissokho (SEN) Kora, vocals

Kamilla Haugaard (DEN) Piano, vocals

Alejandro Olarte (COL) Electronics

Sergio Castrillón (COL) Cello

Camilo Pajuelo (PER) Cuatro

### ***PROGRAM***

#### ***1. Meditation for Bansuri and harp (2016)***

Kaisa Siirala/Natalia Castrillón.

#### ***2. Tunga (2012)***

Kora piece by Cheick Cissokho.

Adaptation for Kora and harp, Cheick Cissokho/Natalia Castrillón.

#### ***3. Here is quiet (2015)***

##### ***In the end (2015)***

Kaminá: Kamilla Haugaard/Natalia Castrillón.

#### ***4. Two pieces for harp and cello (composed in real time)***

Sergio Castrillón/ Natalia Castrillón.

#### ***5. In a foreign land (2017)***

Piece for llanera harp and electronics.

Alejandro Olarte/Natalia Castrillón.

***Velo qué bonito***

Traditional song from Southern Pacific Coast of Colombia

### **6. *Quitapesares & Pajarillo***

Traditional Joropo music from Colombia and Venezuela.

Adaptation for lever harp Hildo Ariel Aguirre.

Adaptation for lever harp and cuatro, Camilo Pajuelo/Natalia Castrillón

**Natalia Castrillón** is a harpist from Colombia interested in sharing the sound of the harp in any artistic context. Inspired by world music and improvised music she works actively in multidisciplinary projects with artists from different backgrounds/disciplines such as theatre, dance, visual arts and experimental improvised music.

**Kaisa Siirala** is a saxophone and flute player from Finland interested in free expression and inspired by different world musics. Her background is mostly in jazz and all kinds of afro american music. She has also studied bansuri flute and hindustani music in Mysore, India. She plays regularly with Kokko Quartet, a Scandinavian jazz group drawing influences out of different ethnic musics.

**Cheick Cissokho** plays and sings traditional West African music. Cheick comes from a family of kora players with many generations of musicians. Cheick was taught kora playing as a child by his father Solo Cissokho and grandfather Diali Kemo Cissokho. In Senegal, he has played with many amazing musicians such as Solo Cissokho Maher, Sousou Cissokho, Mamadi Keita and Seckou Keita. In Finland he plays in Sila Fato group and has played as a guest musician with ES-OW and the radial band and on Aino Kurki's Koralleja album. Cheick also teaches kora and percussion playing.

**Kamilla Haugaard** is a pianist, singer, songwriter and performer inspired by jazz, world music and theatre. She has graduated from the Global Music Masters program at the Royal Academy of Music Aarhus, Denmark and works actively in theatre performances and also as a piano and singing teacher in Copenhagen.

**Luis Alejandro Olarte** is an electroacoustic musician devoted to pedagogy, live performance and digital lutherie. He is a lecturer of Electroacoustic Music in the Sibelius Academy and a doctoral candidate developing pedagogical tools for live electronics and improvisation at the Center for Music and Technology of the Helsinki Arts University supervised by Dr. Andrew Bentley.

**Sergio Castrillón** is a Colombian composer, cello performer and improviser based in Helsinki. Currently he carries out his doctoral research called NEW DIRECTION IN THE CELLO TIMBRE in the Musicology department at the University of Helsinki. His work as a composer, performer, improviser and researcher has been presented and performed mainly in

Europe and Latin America within different arenas ranging from underground to academic scopes. Over the last years Castrillón's main interest has focused on expanding his musicianship to sound art and multidisciplinary. Therefore he has been strongly involved in collaborations with dancers, poets, performers, actors and projects with new technologies.

***Camilo Pajuelo*** is a musician and researcher. Has studied guitar performance at the National Conservatory of Music of Lima, and has received his Master of Arts from the University of Helsinki. He is currently working towards his doctoral degree at the Department of Musicology at the University of Helsinki.

Pictures Global fest 7.12.17. Black Box, Musiikkitalo



Natalia Castrillón & Kaisa Siirala. Black Photo by: Jorma Airola



Natalia Castrillón & Cheick Cissokho by: Jorma Airola



Kaminá: Kamilla Haugaard & Natalia Castrillón. Photo by Jari Flinck



Sergio & Natalia Castrillón. Photo by: Jorma Airola



Natalia Castrillón. Photo by Jorma Airola.



Natalia Castrillón & Camilo Pajuelo. Photo by Jari Flinck



(From left to right) Alejandro Olarte, Kamilla Haugaard, Kaisa Siirala, Cheick Cissokho, Sergio Castrillón, Natalia Castrillón, Camilo Pajuelo. Photo by Jari Flinck

## Appendix 2: Pictures fieldwork Colombia 2017



(From left to right) Manolo Sevilla, Rogelio Santana, 'nomo', Natalia Castrillón, Víctor Caicedo, Eduardo Mejía. Photo by Arturo "Volatil". Fieldwork studies. San José, slum. Manizales, Colombia 2017.



(From left to right) Rogelio Santana, 'Nomo', Víctor Caicedo, Sebastián Castrillón, Martín Cardona, Natalia Castrillón, Eduardo Mejía, Kevin Toro, Darwin López, Andrés Isaza. Fieldwork studies, filming session for documentary: The Global harp, a transcultural journey. San José, slum. Manizales-Colombia 2017.



Adrián Sabogal, Natalia Castrillón. Fieldwork studies. Bogotá-Colombia 2017. Photo by Juan David Ortíz.



Natalia Castrillón , Hildo Ariel Aguirre. Fieldwork studies, Bogotá-Colombia. Photo by Juan David Ortíz.

### **Appendix 3: Documentary**

#### **Documentary: The Global harp, a transcultural journey**

Directed by Natalia Castrillón, Eduardo Mejía and Uelkom brand.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p7yFdvVEh74>

### **Appendix 4: Video excerpts**

#### **“Video excerpt of ‘In the end’”.**

By Kaminá. Natalia Castrillón, harp. Kamilla Haugaard, keyboard.

Performed at Global fest, Black Box Musiikkitalo, Helsinki 2017.

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

#### **“Tunga”, original for solo kora by Cheick Cissokho.**

Arrangement for trio by Cheick Cissokho, Kora/vocals. Natalia Castrillón, harp/vocals. Kaisa Siirala, saxophone/vocals/percussions.

Performed at Global fest, Black Box Musiikkitalo, Helsinki 2016.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NjDfZYRf2Uw>

#### **“Impromptu” by Natalia & Sergio Castrillón**

Improvised piece for cello and harp. Natalia Castrillón, harp. Sergio Castrillón, cello.

Performed at Forum Box Gallery, Helsinki 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=auUOcg6uBnQ>