

ANDA BEITĀNE

OVERCOMING SOCIAL DISTANCING: MULTIPART MUSIC FOR EAR TRAINING

ABSTRACT

La musica multiparte è sempre un processo di interazione socialmente contestualizzato, che agisce sulla vita di persone reali, durante attività musicali collettive e organizzate. Il termine 'musica multiparte' a sua volta non si riferisce a pratiche musicali specifiche o repertori ecc.; al contrario indica ogni tipo di comportamento musicale collettivo e coordinato. Questo articolo prosegue la discussione circa i vari approcci alla musica multiparte, prendendo come esempio la mia attività di docenza presso l'accademia della musica a Riga. A causa della pandemia da Covid-19, è stato necessario trovare nuove soluzioni didattiche e l'*ear training* da remoto è stato l'unico modo per poter fare musica insieme, almeno nelle prime fasi del distanziamento sociale. Si trattava di una situazione esecutiva peculiare, con specifici requisiti e procedure di interazione tra individui e gruppi, che rendevano ancor più essenziale il ruolo del processo rispetto a quello del risultato, arricchendo l'*ear training* grazie a differenti prospettive del far musica.

PAROLE CHIAVE Musica polivocale, *ear training*, distanziamento sociale, *music-making online*, *creative etude*

SUMMARY

Multipart music is always a socially contextualized process of interaction that acts on the lives of real people during their collectively organized music-making. The term 'multipart music', in turn, does not relate to specific musical practices, repertoires, etc.; instead, it refers to any kind of collective and coordinated music behaviors. This article continues the discussion concerning widening approaches to multipart music, using an example from my teaching practice at the music academy in Riga. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, new teaching solutions needed to be found, and ear training online, especially at the beginning of social distancing, was almost the only possibility to make music together. This was a specific performance situation with specific requirements and procedures for interactions and coordination between individuals and groups, which deepened the pivotal role of the process rather than the musical outcome and enriched the ear training by offering different perspectives in music-making.

KEYWORDS Multipart music, ear training, social distancing, music-making online, creative etude



1. Introduction

As underlined by Ignazio Macchiarella, multipart music is always a socially contextualized process of interaction that acts on the lives of real people during their collectively organized music-making. The term ‘multipart music’, in turn, does not relate to specific musical practices, repertoires, etc.; instead, it refers to any kind of collective and coordinated music behaviors.¹

This article continues the discussion concerning widening approaches to multipart music, as suggested by Macchiarella in his article *Multipart Music as a Conceptual Tool: A Proposal* (2016) based on his presentation during the First Seminar of the Study Group on Multipart Music within the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM),² which took place in Tallinn in 2014. The theme of the Seventh Symposium of the ICTMD Study Group on Multipart Music in Cremona (2023), namely, *Multipart music, technology and social distancing*, encouraged me to reflect on my teaching practice at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music (JVLMA) in Riga at the very beginning of the period of social distancing due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In Latvia, a state of emergency was declared by the Latvian government on 12 March 2020, following the World Health Organization’s declaration of a global pandemic. On-site study processes had to be stopped and ensured remotely in all educational institutions.³ According to the order issued by the JVLMA rector on the evening of that same day, all educational and public events at the academy were canceled from March 13 onward. The study process had to be provided remotely, using the e-studies environment, *Skype*, and/or e-mail. The teaching staff was invited to consult the IT department concerning the technological possibilities of teaching online.⁴ Initially, this order was issued for one month. It should also be noted that the situation in Latvia at the time was still not as extreme as it was in Italy and Spain, for example, and many hoped the pandemic would not affect us so much. There were many protests from the teachers and students, although they were still allowed to come to the academy to practice alone. This was a difference between the Latvian students, who only had to learn online but the rest of the time they could move around quite freely, and our Erasmus students, who really were isolated at home in their home countries.

It took a while until we learned to use, at first, *Google Meet*, then *Zoom* and other more complicated technologies. The social networks were overloaded with edited recordings made by musicians who had each performed their parts individually, and then the parts had been put together digitally. My ear-training course was one of the first attempts at our academy to try to make music together here and now. The first *Google* recording I sent to my colleagues in the IT department served as evidence that it worked. Although

1. MACCHIARELLA, *Multipart Music as a Conceptual Tool*.
2. The International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM) was renamed the International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance (ICTMD) on 26 August 2023.
3. CABINET ORDER, *Regarding Declaration*.
4. JVLMA ORDER, *Par JVLMA darbības nodrošināšanu*.

they were not very happy about the technical and sound quality, they included this recording in the presentation addressed to our prospective students in order to show that studying music was still possible at our academy. Looking back, I see that many ideas I used for my ear-training course came from the concept of multipart music. Thus, the focus of this article is on how multipart music can help for ear training.

2. Why Multipart Music?

Trying to briefly summarize the theoretical issues concerning multipart music elaborated within the framework of the ICTMD Study Group on Multipart Music, this section discusses what elements of this concept could be used in the context of musical education and why. Ear training, which is, among other things, a regular part of higher musical education, has been taught quite differently at different music universities around the world. Also named 'solfège' or 'solfeggio', 'ear training', or 'aural training', this subject has been associated with the «enhancement of general musicianship and musical understanding, the 'invigoration' of music theory, the development of musical perception, memory, literacy, and inner hearing, and the neglected role of the body in relating to music within 'aural training'».⁵

The term and the concept of multipart music have been regularly discussed in the symposia, seminars, and publications of the Study Group on Multipart Music since its foundation within ICTM in 2009. However, this discussion began already in the framework of the Research Center for European Multipart Music (EMM), established by Ardian Ahmedaja in 2003 at the Department for Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. During the process of the Study Group's establishment, the following definition of the term 'multipart music' was formulated, responding to the requirement of the ICTM board to define the area of study:⁶

Multipart music is a specific mode of music making and expressive behaviour based on the intentionally distinct and coordinated participation in the performing act by sharing knowledge and shaping values.⁷

In the Study Group's first publication, *Multipart Music: A Specific Mode of Musical Thinking, Expressive Behaviour and Sound*, its editor Macchiarella (2012) describes multipart music as a complex phenomenon, drawing attention at once to the meaning of the terms:

5. ANDRIANOPOULOU, *Aural Education*, p. 3.
6. More in AHMEDAJA, *Multipart Music*; ID., *ICTM Study Group*; ID., *Das Forschungszentrum*.
7. AHMEDAJA, *ICTM Study Group*, 292; This definition is also published in the entry «Multipart Music» in the *SAGE Encyclopedia of Music and Culture* (2019) as well as on the Study Group websites <http://www.multipartmusic.eu/> and <https://ictmusic.org/studygroup/multipart>.

We use the term ‘multipart music’ but not *polyphony* (or polyvocality or others). The terms are not synonymous, since *multipart music* intends to neutrally suggest the co-presence of parts (considered in a wider sense as roles in a music-making perspective, i.e. considering the human participation), avoiding the historical-cultural connotations of *polyphony* which immediately refer to the ‘disembodied sound’ combinations of the Western art-music perspective.⁸

Macchiarella suggests defining multipart music as «coordinated behaviours proposing to reach predicted, identified and recognized musical outcomes that are previously imagined and idealized, and then evaluated and debated by performers and listeners within the same community».⁹ According to him, all music can be considered multipart, since all or almost all music is a social act or «a social experience», in Blacking’s terms.¹⁰ As three main prerequisites for those who practice multipart music, Macchiarella mentions (1) «*availability to make music with others* (italics in original), which means working together and accepting close proximity with others, sharing time and space»; (2) «*availability to listen to the others* (italics in original) in order to learn how to join and to fit within the combined emission»; (3) and «*the acceptance of the constraints of one’s own music emission* (italics in original)».¹¹ These all not only correspond well with the goals of music education, including ear training, but also offer several new perspectives, especially for so-called art musicians, who are used to performing mostly from a score:

Scores and other kinds of music representations (fixations) give a unitary frame of the musical outcome, and they usually involve the occurrence of a conductor or specialized teaching. Oral mnemonic traces are shared among the performers (and community listeners) and work as single lines mastered by individual persons, who come together in the *hic et nunc* of the performance: every line is not rigid, but adjusts to the other ones in a flexible way. Thus, it is not an ‘inner score’ but a sort of growing relational sequence of sounds that only exist in connection with others.¹²

Thus, the concept of multipart music offers an opportunity to foster improvisation skills, make music here and now by ear together with others, and listen to others. The role of music makers and the musical outcome from the perspective of communication between individuals are also aspects to take into consideration when thinking of music education:

In this context, the personal experience of each participant, his or her current cultural profile, and one’s manner of thinking and behaving at a given moment become particularly important. According to Gerhard Kubik, these quantities are in steady transformation. The exchange that takes place during music-making processes has indeed a strong impact on them.¹³

8. MACCHIARELLA, *Theorizing on Multipart Music Making*, p. 9.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

13. AHMEDAJA, *Multipart Music*, p. 1502.

«What is this course trying to do?» asks Monika Andrianopoulou in her book *Aural Education: Reconceptualising Ear Training in Higher Music Learning* (2020) alongside such questions as

how to succeed in constructing a course that would appeal to both aurally 'strong' and weaker students; how to link what we did in class with students' wider musical activity; how to create musically meaningful experiences; (...) how to make room for enjoyment of the activities involved, when emphasis on intellectual understanding meant constantly 'freezing' the music in order to analyse.¹⁴

«Real musical experiences, rather than somewhat dry and isolated activities (...) a course that would be interesting, meaningful, relevant, and enjoyable»¹⁵ – these are the concerns of Andrianopoulou, who writes that training such skills as sight-singing, taking dictation, playing and singing short musical extracts, etc., seems «an artificial and out-of-place approach».¹⁶ Looking for parameters that could act as guides for a «meaningful 'ear-training' course», Andrianopoulou agrees with authors¹⁷ who suggest broadening the scope of such courses by incorporating a wider range of activities beside the standard work on melody, harmony, and rhythm. Experiencing music aesthetically, critical judgment, involving the ability to discuss music and compare interpretations, analytical and intelligent listening, enhancing performing, creative, and expressive abilities, and cultivating a deeper musical understanding have been suggested as changes that can increase the relevance of ear training. The use of musical instruments is advocated «as a way of acknowledging the physical experience of music, utilizing implicit knowledge, and enhancing transfer of learning».¹⁸ Such activities are proposed as a «more creative, 'hands-on' way of exploring the elements of music: namely, improvisation, composition and playing by ear»,¹⁹ noting that «improvisation alone might constitute a valuable form of aural and theoretical education in an integrated manner».²⁰

Andrianopoulou finds the literature as well as empirical research addressed to this topic very centered on Western classical music and music education. This is why she conducted interviews with nine, as she writes, non-Western musicians, meaning classical musicians who lived in Greece and «belonged to the musical domains of Greek traditional (...), Byzantine (...), and jazz (...) music, and were all recognized professionals, who practiced both performing and teaching in their respective domains».²¹ The purpose of the interviews was «to enrich this customary perspective and expand the investigation of

14. ANDRIANOPOULOU, *Aural Education*, p. 2.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. PRATT, *Aural Awareness*; ROGERS, *Teaching Approaches*.

18. ANDRIANOPOULOU, *Aural Education*, pp. 21-22.

19. *Ibid.*

20. HILL, *From Score to Sound*; ANDRIANOPOULOU, *Aural Education*, p. 178.

21. ANDRIANOPOULOU, *Aural Education*, p. 129.

‘aural training’ parameters».²² Without going deeper into her meaning of ‘non-Western’ (although it is also indicative of something), I will quote here some excerpts from the descriptions of interviews that reveal what these musicians have considered important for good ear training. Because of course, from the perspective of multipart music, what musicians themselves think is crucial:

A Greek traditional musician contended that without ‘personality and personal sound’, one has ‘no reason to exist’ musically. (...) Another commented on the improvisational character of the same tradition, noting that ‘the personal element is part of the essence of this music’, while their third colleague praised spontaneity and naturalness in music-making as a sign of musicality.

(...) interview responses can be seen as acknowledging the subjective character of the musical experience as a positive and desired element (...) through encouraging creativity, an aspect that came up repeatedly in interviews.

(...) activities such as improvisation and creative listening provide a context for exploring musical elements (e.g. melody, rhythm, timbre, etc.), and wider aspects of the musical experience (e.g. aesthetic and emotional) in an integrated manner.²³

Thus, the interviewed musicians represent an opinion that is well known among ethnomusicologists in the framework of the discussions within the ICTMD Study Group on Multipart Music that «music has to be personalized».²⁴ The importance of improvisation and individuals, as well as such aspects as spontaneity, naturalness, and creativity, has also been underlined. In my case, the book by Andrianopoulou helped me overcome my doubts that what I do in my class with my students corresponds to the content of ear training and that multipart music can indeed provide a wider perspective in this framework, and not only concerning emotion and aesthetic experience:

The performance act, as the very moment in which music exists, allows us to discern emotion and aesthetic experience in the most intensive moment of the music-making process. In multipart music practices, this happens as a rule through the coordination of individual ways of music making within a group. This necessary approach causes tension and contributes essentially to the complexity of this particular moment, in which social relationships are also performed and constructed during the very act of representing them».²⁵

A focus on the performance act, emotion, and aesthetic experience, as well as the coordinated expressive behaviors of individuals within the group, making and performing social relationships, etc. during the course of ear training means looking at all of it from a different angle. Thus, the concept of multipart music can enrich music education as well.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

24. MACCHIARELLA, *Theorizing on Multipart Music Making*, p. 9.

25. AHMEDAJA – MACCHIARELLA, *Introduction*, p. 7.

3. How Did It Begin?

In the autumn of 2019, new content for the subject of ear training was established at our academy, and I was invited to teach a five-lesson module within this framework with a focus on creative skills. Because art music students were (and still are) mostly used to performing with sheet music, and there was almost no place for improvisation in their performance practice, I decided to concentrate my teaching on making music here and now, focusing on «what individuals do when they sing/play together in organized ways».²⁶ In other words, the idea was to practice ear training during the performance act of multipart music with an emphasis on the music-making process rather than the musical outcome.

The groups consisted of students with different specialties – mostly instrumentalists but also conductors, singers, musicologists, and ethnomusicologists – who were divided into levels according to their results on the entrance exams. I named my module «Creative Instruments, or Instrumental Creativity», with the idea that each student uses his or her own musical instrument, which can also be the voice. It was like word play, meaning, on the one hand, ear training with musical instruments, and, on the other hand, a focus on creativity in music-making. The idea of using students' specialty instruments to teach theoretical subjects arose already in 2008, when I took part in a music theory lesson for folk music students and teachers from various countries at the University of Gothenburg during the annual Nordtrad conference,²⁷ where a theoretical lesson about musical scales was taught by a teacher with an accordion on his shoulders. Almost all of the participants had their own instruments with them, too, except me and my students from Riga, because we thought we were going to a theoretical lesson; therefore, we had to sing. Such a practical way of teaching music theory was inspiring. It was obvious that students could get much more from this knowledge because they did not only observe and/or analyze written schemes of musical scales but instead could use them at once in the framework of music-making. I thought to myself that one day I would like to do so in my teaching practice as well, and such an opportunity arose with this ear training module. Because my five lessons were just one part of a four-module course, I could fully focus on creative skills knowing that my colleagues in the three other modules would work on other matters that correspond more to the general understanding of what the subject of ear training usually means.²⁸

26. MACCHIARELLA, *Theorizing on Multipart Music Making*, p. 9.

27. Nordtrad is the folk music network of music universities in the Nordic and Baltic countries. Every year since 1996, it has organized a five-day conference to establish and maintain contacts between institutions both on the teacher and student level (see <http://www.nordplmusic.net/index.php?id=161>).

28. Fostering reading and listening skills has been considered a central element of ear training in addition to such topics as the musical understanding and the development of musical perception, memory, literacy, and inner hearing (ANDRIANOPOULOU, *Aural Education*, p. 3).

4. Creative Etudes

The *creative etude* has been one of the central elements in my ear training module. Each student has to create a musical idea and organize its performance together with the others. This means that students bring to class their ideas (more or less prepared), and the music-making happens here and now, on the spot. Before and after that, we talk about the role of each individual and their social and musical behaviors and interactions during the performance act. After each module, I have asked students to write their feedback, either anonymously or using their names. Several students have noted that these lessons were a totally new experience and something that they also found helpful for their further performance practice. For example, Sandra Balđina, a pianist, wrote: «It was quite challenging but very interesting for me. This was the first time I improvised with a group of people. I really enjoyed it. I wasn't scared because I wasn't alone».²⁹ The euphonium student Dairis Bahmanis described the process from his perspective: «First, I was trying to find my place in the ensemble by playing quietly and looking for the right tone. When I was playing, I always tried to listen to the others and tried to hear where the music would lead. The second part was the most enjoyable, because it's random. You do whatever comes to mind. I was unsure at first, but as the part went on, my colleagues in the ensemble made me more comfortable and I could freely improvise whatever came to mind».³⁰ Some students admitted that coordinated listening to both themselves and the others felt unusual to them. Also, talking about what happened during the music-making process was a new experience for many of the students, as was improvisation itself and making music together without any score. This is what Bahmanis said right after the improvisation session:

Improvisation in an ensemble – it's like a first experience for me. For example, when you play a piece in a classical ensemble, where everyone has sheet music, everyone has parts, and everyone is really focused on parts. It's really hard to listen to others when you're playing your own part because you're so focused on it, and it's also quite hard to listen if you're reading the sheet music for the first time, for example. But, from this experience, I think it should be nice to implement this improvisation in an ensemble, because from this experience I can hear and I can feel that we're like all connected, we can improvise and we listen to each other very well. Here you don't have to think about sheet music like you have to in a classical ensemble, because you don't have any specific notes. Whatever you play, it will be right. There are no wrong notes in this improvisation. So, in my opinion, this would be a very nice exercise before playing a classical piece in a classical ensemble with sheet music, because it makes you listen to the whole ensemble and you feel connected. This has been a very nice experience for me.³¹

29. BALDIŃA, *Feedback*.

30. BAHMANIS, *Feedback*.

31. BAHMANIS, *Conversation*.

Several students commented that this kind of music-making does not happen by itself; instead, one must learn how «to create something new and to feel free while performing»³² and to «listen carefully to what is happening around you and adapt to the others».³³ Such listening skills helped one student in her choral singing practice to pay more attention to listening to others.³⁴ Students described the creative etudes as «a good opportunity to express yourself and, by interacting together, to create something interesting»,³⁵ and «a good way to develop creative thinking and get out of your comfort zone to some extent».³⁶ Others wrote that «it is an interesting concept to promote general musical development»³⁷ and «it helps to open your ears and listen to your surroundings. It seems to me that it is very useful in my practice as a classical musician: to learn how to get out of situations where I may have forgotten the text».³⁸

Some feedback reflected on students' social experiences. For example, one student remembered «what a classroom atmosphere we had at the beginning. Now it's friendlier, more cohesive and nicer».³⁹ Someone else learned «to work in a team and lead a team, which has been amalgamated in the framework of the creative etude».⁴⁰ Another student suggested «introducing such music-making into the daily life of all musicians, as many have problems with releasing themselves both physically and emotionally. During creative etudes, a person becomes free. It's a huge field where you can express your imagination».⁴¹

5. Making Music Online

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, new teaching solutions needed to be found, and ear training online, especially at the beginning of social distancing, was almost the only opportunity for these students, and also for me, to make music together. It was the specific performance situation with specific requirements and procedures of interactions and coordination between individuals and groups that deepened the pivotal role of the process rather than the musical outcome, as Macchiarella wrote in 2016:

The basic condition for multipart music is the co-presence, at least, of two people who intentionally take part in a sound emission. This condition simply

32. DAMBERGA, *Feedback*.

33. ANONYMOUS 1, *Feedback*.

34. ANONYMOUS 2, *Feedback*.

35. ANONYMOUS 3, *Feedback*.

36. ANONYMOUS 4, *Feedback*.

37. ANONYMOUS 5, *Feedback*.

38. ANONYMOUS 6, *Feedback*.

39. ANONYMOUS 7, *Feedback*.

40. ANONYMOUS 8, *Feedback*.

41. ANONYMOUS 9, *Feedback*.

does not happen by itself and, at least customarily, is not random. In fact, it needs specific requirements and procedures of interactions and coordination between individuals and groups.⁴²

In the spring of 2020, we were suddenly forced to stay at home, and our work lives – together with the people connected to our work – gradually entered our homes as well. In the case of my ear training class, I had to decide whether to change everything I had done before, or to at least try to adapt to the new conditions. I decided to try. It turned out that *Zoom* is not a good solution for making music together because it does not allow simultaneous sound from multiple sound sources, so we stayed with *Google Meet*, because it allows simultaneous sound from several profiles. The musical outcome, however, ultimately depended on *Google*. In fact, it even gave us an extra dimension. To explain, we initially had a music-making process in which everybody played or sang together and heard the common sound from their own computer. Afterwards, we watched the video recording that *Google* had made automatically, and thus we could discuss not only what we had done, but also what *Google* had done with what we did. If at the beginning I needed to make an effort to get some of the students to turn on their cameras, they very soon realized that it is much easier to make music together when you can see the people you are making music with, even though they are on a computer screen. One student even thanked me in the last lesson for forcing her to turn on her camera, saying that ear training had been the only opportunity for her to be together with other people at the beginning of the pandemic.

The following description has been made using the *Google* video recordings of the five-lesson ear training module with my first online group (1–29 April 2020), which was the most powerful experience both for me and (I presume) also for the students, both musically and emotionally, because the pandemic had just begun. We had not met each other before in person, because the module began after the onset of the lockdown. The group included two Erasmus students from Austria and Spain, who joined us from their home countries, so we spoke in English. It was a strange feeling – we were not only each in our own home, but at the same time, we were in the homes of others, even in different countries. The world had suddenly changed, and we needed to somehow find a way to continue our life as musicians. Making music together gave us the feeling that we were very near to each other, even though it happened through a computer screen.

Meeting the group of students online for practical ear training was a challenge in itself, and not only because this was the first time in my life that I had participated in an online meeting. When we began our first lesson, I was confronted with nine students all with their cameras switched off. I explained the idea of the module and suggested that we start with a singing improvisation, first using only one pitch, then gradually adding others until we reached the pentatonic scale, thus creating a kind of soundscape. Afterwards we discussed

42. MACCHIARELLA, *Theorizing on Multipart Music Making*, p. 15.

about each participant's improvisation experience and skills, concluding that such a soundscape allows everyone to take part in music-making here and now, even if one has no experience performing without preparation or sheet music. We also discussed the ability to listen to what others are singing and whether one can hear oneself sing at the same time and how it fits together with what the others are doing. Our conclusion was that it is possible, even if *Google* causes some difficulties with this. By trying to find the positive in these circumstances, we realized that such encumbrances may even enhance ear training. During the discussion, we also realized that each of us probably experienced a slightly different sound from our computer due to our individual internet connections, and we decided to perform the improvisation again and record it. The recording lasted two minutes and six seconds.⁴³

The second lesson began with the cameras on and with musical instruments. We had one vibraphone, guitar, and trumpet player each, a composer with a euphonium, a percussionist without instruments because he did not have them at his home in Spain, and two singers. The main goal of this lesson was to reach an understanding of how to prepare each participant's creative etudes in order to perform them in the next lessons; that is, the main task of the module was for every student to create and manage a performance of such an etude. The idea for the second lesson was to prepare an improvised etude together. The initiative lay with the students. They wanted to start with the pentatonic scale again. After some time playing their instruments together, it was obvious that *Google Meet* was confused by the many sound identities and frequencies, so we tried to reduce the number of simultaneous performers. The performance began with an interplay between the vibraphone and guitar players based on the pentatonic scale. The video recording shows how carefully the two musicians tried to find themselves and each other in a very close collaboration. Another duet – with the euphonium and trumpet – continued the performance with a new theme in a Dixieland manner, and they played amazingly synchronously, considering the time lags because of the internet. One can see that they enjoyed what they were doing, at the same time being surprised that it worked so well. Using only his hands and the table, the percussionist without percussion instruments began the third part of the performance by setting the rhythmic base for the two singers. They took turns expressing themselves with solo episodes, which the other singer then tried to respond to accordingly. The final part began after the singers finished their singing, with the vibraphone player returning to the pentatonic scale and gradually joined by all the other musicians. The recording lasted eight minutes.⁴⁴

Three creative etudes prepared by the students were performed during the third lesson. The author of the first etude – the composition student with the euphonium – suggested using either the B-flat pentatonic or F minor scale as a base. The etude started with a vibraphone solo accompanied by a eu-

43. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 1 April 2020.

44. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 8 April 2020.

phonium drone. The other instruments – a flute, the trumpet, this time also a saxophone, the singers, and the percussionist – joined one after another, creating expressive melodies and listening to each other. Thus, the melodies interplayed with each other and complemented each other, resulting in something like a sound meditation as a unified whole. The word «Antisocial» was written on the sweater of one of the musicians, which illustrated a kind of attitude to the circumstances, but at the same time it was also obvious that the students were performing quite emotionally. At the time, nobody knew how long the pandemic would last and whether it would ever be possible to return to normal life again. The recording lasted four minutes and 58 seconds.⁴⁵ The idea of the second etude was to make an ostinato-based improvisation. The video shows four musicians: the vibraphone player, who was the author of this idea, the euphonium player, the percussionist, and a singer. After a short explanation by the vibraphone player regarding what each musician has to play, he realizes that it might be too complicated and says: «You can just start, guys. Whatever you want, and I'll just play something. I'll try to listen, too, so it shouldn't be very hard to do».⁴⁶ Then the euphonium player begins with the ostinato part, on the basis of which the vibraphonist makes the theme. It is possible to hear the percussionist, who has already found something in his home to use as a rattle. A rhythmic episode follows, performed by clapping hands, and then again the interplay between euphonium and vibraphone. The internet was not so cooperative this time, but the musicians tried their best and seemed to enjoy the music-making despite the sound disturbance. The recording lasts two minutes and 38 seconds.⁴⁷ The third etude was created by the trumpet player, who performed it in duet with the euphonium player in a Dixieland manner. According to the author, she took inspiration from her spontaneous interplay during the previous lesson and wanted to develop this idea further. At the end of the improvisation, the musicians seem satisfied and the trumpet player says: «We did something».⁴⁸ The recording lasts one minute and ten seconds.⁴⁹

Six creative etudes were performed in the fourth lesson. The first was prepared in the form of a presentation by the percussionist. His idea was to base an improvisation on the simple progression C-C7-F-G-G7-C, singing or playing the pitches of the respective chords and using free rhythm and different dynamics, singing/playing techniques, and forms of musical articulation, all under the guidance of a 'virtual conductor'. This meant that the performers were divided into four groups, and they had to sing or play according to the table they saw on a presentation slide, which showed what each group had to do and which changed every 20-30 seconds. The explanation of the rules by the percussionist took quite a long time, and he had some problems with the response from the performers during the preparation discussion, probably

45. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 15 April 2020a.

46. ALKSNIS, *The Second Etude*.

47. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 15 April 2020b.

48. STRAZDIŅA, *The Third Etude*.

49. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 15 April 2020c.

because the scheme was quite complicated. Nine musicians took part in this improvisation, but the interaction between them was not as successful as it had been previously, probably because, in essence, they had to follow a kind of sheet music and did not really see the people they were playing with. Instead of making music together, they were busy following the rules written out on the table, which did not differ much from what they were used to doing in their everyday practice with sheet music. The recording lasted eight minutes and 42 seconds.⁵⁰ The author of the second etude was the saxophone player. Her idea was to create a soundscape using all the possible sound effects that the euphonium, cello, saxophone, trumpet, and human voice allow. Short melodic episodes were performed by the trumpet and saxophone between atonal sounds, whistling, hissing, imitations of bird songs, etc. The recording lasted three minutes and 12 seconds.⁵¹ The third etude was based on the well-known *Happy Birthday* song. First, it was sung by the whole group together, followed by an improvisation (begun by the author of the etude) on the words «happy birthday». Initially, the improvisation consisted of the others imitating the author, but gradually they began imitating each other, as well as making new themes, and in conclusion they sang the whole verse all together again, but this time singing in three parts. The recording lasted 2 minutes and 31 seconds.⁵² The fourth etude was conceived by the cello player as a nature painting and performed in duet by herself and the saxophone player. The idea was to image the sea and a wind with rain following it, with the cello being the sea and rain, and the saxophone being the wind. The performers gradually moved from specific sound effects to a melodic interplay, finishing with the cello pizzicato illustrating the rain. The recording lasted one minute and 25 seconds.⁵³ The fifth etude, by another saxophone player, was again a soundscape in which each individual simultaneously created his or her own musical theme. The video shows that the musicians not only perform their own musical themes but also try to interact with the others. The recording lasts 3 minutes and 23 seconds.⁵⁴ The sixth etude began with a saxophone solo, joined by the vibraphone, who stayed as an accompaniment for several instrumental episodes performed either solo (flute and cello) or playing together (trumpet and saxophone). After a signal given by the author of this improvisation, the euphonium player began with a new theme in a kind of rock manner, joined by the trumpet, both saxophones, and the flute, and making a very coordinated performance despite the problematic internet connection. The recording lasted four minutes and six seconds.⁵⁵

The last creative etude of this module was performed during the fifth lesson. It started with the euphonium solo and continued in duet with the saxophone, with both musicians continuously trying to find each other. Then

50. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 22 April 2020a.

51. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 22 April 2020b.

52. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 22 April 2020c.

53. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 22 April 2020d.

54. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 22 April 2020e.

55. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 22 April 2020f.

the singers joined, one of them even singing overtones, and afterwards also the flute. During the whole improvisation, the performers tried to adapt their parts to each other as much as possible while singing through the computer screen. The recording lasted three minutes and 39 seconds.⁵⁶ Thus, ten creative etudes, one prepared by each participant of the group, represented common and different approaches to generating ideas and their realization. The average duration of the etudes was approximately three minutes, with a tendency that the longer the improvisation, the more successful the interaction. Simple ideas also tended to work better than more complex schemes.

Afterwards, while discussing about what we had done, and what each of us had achieved during the ear training module, the first and most common conclusion was connected with the social experience. That is, these weekly lessons had become something we looked forward to, not only as an opportunity to meet other people but also to make music together. Like life itself at the very beginning of this period of social isolation, this kind of music-making was something new and unusual for the students. As one of them commented, it was totally different from anything he had done at the academy up until then. What else did the students find important? They mentioned, for example, trying to find and follow each other during the music-making process, enjoying music-making in unusual circumstances, and performance as a kind of special relationship that became even stronger because of the social isolation. Someone even noted that it had been a social experience for their whole family, which had also stayed at home and followed our creative etudes with interest. The concept of multipart music was also a subject of this discussion, and we talked about our listening skills and how multipart music-making can help us widen our listening perspectives:

Multipart music needs special listening skills: each performer has to temporarily listen to his/her own emission and to the one of the people close to him/her, in order to judge the suitability of both his/her sound production and the collective performance. Inside a performing group there is a complex transmitter-receiver situation with many directional sound sources (...). Each performer has to concentrate on singing their part (thinking horizontally) while at the same time hearing the interlocking of parts (vertical suitability). This listening capability is a culturally learned behavior which is more or less developed according to different performative patterns.⁵⁷

We discussed our coordinated behavior and interaction that was «not based exclusively on criteria of previously planned sound correspondences, but [was] actually born in the *hic et nunc* of the real performance, within scenarios of mutual cooperation».⁵⁸ We concluded that *Google* had been one of our partners, too, and that coordination with it had been quite challenging. Another conclusion was that the ability to talk about music is also something

56. VIDEO, *Creative etude*, 29 April 2020.

57. MACCHIARELLA, *Theorizing on Multipart Music Making*, p. 12.

58. MACCHIARELLA, *Multipart Music as a Conceptual Tool*, p. 14.

that needs to be learned and practiced. Some students admitted that it was not easy for them to explain their ideas and thoughts during our discussions before and after the etudes, but eventually they grew to even like these conversations.

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to continue the discussion concerning widening approaches to multipart music while describing my experience of teaching ear training at the very beginning of the period of social distancing due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with a focus on how multipart music can help for this kind of music education. According to Macchiarella,

free of any cultural baggage of historical sedimentation, ‘multipart music’ is therefore more practical for allowing us to focus from a different perspective on certain characteristics of making music together, compared to the ordinary one based on the immateriality of sound. Where part has the meaning of role, ‘multipart music’ may just highlight the (too often neglected) materiality of the meeting.

My experience with students not only confirms this very important statement but also illustrates that multipart music can also be used as a learning tool. A focus on music makers, their ideas, and their understandings not only allows the teacher of a theoretical subject such as ear training to better understand the student musicians and to gain their trust; it also helps the students to delve into, hear, and analyze their own understandings and ideas while making music. It can help not only for ear training but also for performance practice as well as for the understanding of different musical practices. A multipart music approach enriches ear training by offering different perspectives of music-making, other kinds of listening, and coordinated behaviors as well other musical experiences students are not always able to accept. Some of the students indicated in their feedback that creativity is good, but that they had not had enough technical training; also, they wanted stricter conditions, greater technical challenges, and higher requirements. At the same time, they allowed the thought that perhaps these things are not always necessary, and that my ear training module was nevertheless interesting and nothing like anything they had experienced before.⁵⁹

Practicing multipart music during ear training lessons enhances creative and listening skills, interaction with other musicians, and teamwork skills by having different roles according to their parts. The students also often mentioned the feeling of having to get out of their comfort zone. The social and human relationships are important, too, which was reflected in the feedback

59. ANONYMOUS, *Feedback*, pp. 7-9.

from the early-music student Simona Jocevičiūte. After the first lesson of this module in the middle of the spring semester – which means after she had been in this group for already a little more than half a year – she said that it had felt like therapy for her, adding that she usually did not like ear training. But now, for the first time, she had felt that she was a part of this group.⁶⁰

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60. JOCEVIČIŪTE, *Feedback*.

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- VIDEO, *Creative etude*, Riga, 22 April 2020c.

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VIDEO, *Creative etude*, Riga, 22 April 2020d.

VIDEO, *Creative etude*, Riga, 22 April 2020e.

VIDEO, *Creative etude*, Riga, 22 April 2020f.

VIDEO, *Creative etude*, Riga, 29 April 2020.



NOTA BIOGRAFICA Anda Beitāne è professore e ricercatrice *senior* presso l'Accademia di musica lettone "Jāzeps Vītols". È *liaison officer* per la Lettonia dell' International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance. I suoi principali campi di ricerca sono le pratiche locali in Latvia, la musica polivocale, l'ICH tra i *music makers* e le politiche culturali.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE Anda Beitāne is a professor and a senior researcher at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. She is the liaison officer for Latvia of the International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance. Her main research areas are local practices in Latvia, multipart music, and ICH between music makers and cultural policies.