

Music Department
New Audiences and Innovative Practice Music Master.

Reanimating Bach

Connecting visuals and musical interpretation

Research paper for the NAIP European Music Master
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Abstract

There is a great need within classical music today to make an effort to connect to new audiences. Only then can the profession survive in a changing world. In my search for innovation within my practice as a performing musician and while reconnecting with my past as a visual artist I created *Fantasy on Sarabanda*. It was an attempt to become a more complete artist by embracing previously separated talents and disciplines of mine.

I started out researching the different historical approaches to combining visual material and music. I then experimented with various different media before arriving at claymation¹.

In my search for the right music, J. S. Bach was a natural choice given his interpretative freedom.

Fantasy on Sarabanda is a visual fantasy in claymation on the movement *Sarabanda* from J. S. Bach's D-minor partita for solo violin. The piece is a video of an animated sculpture which interprets the expressions in the music like in a ballet, pantomime or a silent film. The piece itself has been successful enough to be screened in a competition of animated short films at an international animation film festival.

While making the video I assumed the role of director, animator, cinematographer, choreographer, editor and musician. The whole process of creating the film was incredibly time consuming and demanding but also extremely educational and enlightening. To have had a glimpse into all these different roles is very eye opening and makes me want to work with people in different fields of the arts in the future. I also feel like I have developed insight into other roles and discovered different sides of the dice when it comes to musical performances and performance production in general.

This whole journey, the research behind it and how I deepened my knowledge of early music as a performing musician, has empowered me and brought me closer to becoming the 360° artist I aimed for in the beginning.

¹ Stop-motion with clay. One form of animation.

Introduction

We live in times where there are a lot of different types of entertainment available and the audience is constantly searching for new experiences. It becomes relevant to ask yourself the question if it still makes any sense to go on performing the same pieces from the baroque/classical/romantic era over and over again without much change and expecting the modern listener to be interested. Are we prepared to make changes? Like mentioned in Peter Renshaw's article *Being in Tune* these questions are not new at all:

“How far are they [conservatoires, colleges etc.] preparing their arts practitioners to respond creatively to the massive changes taking place in society? these questions, though fundamental, are not exactly new. They have been raised in different forms since the 1960s”²

Of course there is always this small circle of audience that really appreciates it. Often musicians themselves. And that brings us to the ‘ivory tower’ theory mentioned in the same article. That the culture of contemporary classical music has become far too specialized and lost a great part of the connection between music and everything else and thus becomes an insular community of specialized audience listening to specialized performers, trapped together in their ‘ivory tower’.³

Unfortunately it has come to my attention that a lot of people just find it hard to relate to classical music in general. They are filled with prejudice towards it and find it stuck up and boring. The question is why? Maybe it is stuck up and boring. Maybe it is far too specialized. Maybe it is because people simply lack the experience to be exposed to classical music. Or is it perhaps because the 19th century concert etiquette doesn't meet the needs of a modern listener? The answer is probably a mixture of all these things. Maybe we need to take a few steps backwards and remember that the standard concert setting and etiquette, that now seem like sacred rules, only became popular in the 19th century. Before that time the “concert” form was much more free.⁴ This really proves to me that the concert form is malleable, that nothing is written in stone and that today's audience is calling for a change.

This makes me, as a performing musician, want to find new ways to reach out to people that on the other hand might not go to classical concerts at all. I don't think we have to necessarily sacrifice the repertoire or the quality of the performance. Maybe we just need to find new ways to portray it, present it or even “explain” it to the listener. I think that the traditional concert

² Renshaw, Peter, *Being in Tune*, London, Guildhall School of Music, September 2013, page 4-5.

³ Renshaw, *Being in Tune*, page 42-43.

⁴ Christopher Small, *Musicking*, Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University Press, page 43-44.

form can be limiting and that it can keep us separated from the audience. And I think that it is healthy for us performers to rethink how we want to present ourselves as musicians and present the repertoire we choose to play. I think searching for new audiences should always be part of our goal because only in that way our repertoire can survive.

Before I started my Bachelor in classical violin playing I already had some education in visual arts. I have always had a difficulty deciding where to place myself. Visual arts or the violin. When I was 19 years old I had graduated from the fine arts department of the gymnasium Fjölbrautaskólinn í Breiðholti. I was also studying the violin at a high level at the music school Tónskóli Sigursveins. Now I was at a fork in the road. Was I going to choose visual arts or the violin? I wanted to do both. I even had a meeting with Mist Þorkelsdóttir (the principal of IAA at the time) to ask if it was possible to study BA and BMus at the same time at IAA. She convinced me that it would be impossible because the schedules would clash and it would be too much. I applied for the visual arts department and got accepted. I accepted the invitation and went on with my musical studies at the music school to see where that would take me. After an amazing first year at the IAA, making great contacts and true bonds and learning some great skills as a visual artist I somehow felt like the violinist part of me was missing out on something. I realized that the violin was now or never. If I wanted to reach my full potential as a violinist I had to focus fully on it. And I had to do it now. At that point I took the difficult decision to quit the BA program at IAA to focus on my musical studies as a violinist. That led me to Holland and the Utrecht Conservatory where I studied for four years and continued for two years at Fontys Conservatory in Tilburg. At this point I said goodbye to the visual arts world hoping that I would someday be able to return to it but there were moments in this 6 years of intensive violin training that I didn't think I would ever do any visual art again and that I had said goodbye to that part of myself for good. Sounds dramatic but true.

These 6 years of intensive violin training in the conservatories in Holland were a wonderful experience but they were also difficult for me. The conservatory studies are very dry and single minded and moving towards this one direction of gaining the skills to become a professional violinist. Becoming skilled in the art of auditioning for orchestra jobs and performing music in a certain way where there isn't a lot of room for creativity. I always see music visually in my head, in the form of shapes and textures and I have a wide visual and textural imagination when it comes to music. But I could never find a way to use these talents of mine within my studies. What was really happening in my head while I was processing music none of my teachers ever asked or really cared about. There was never any space for embracing the fact that I was a multi

talent within the violin studies and figuring out ways to explore and integrate these different wells of my mind. I think in their own way my teachers appreciated my creative mind but they didn't know what to do with it. I had my indie pop band Seabear⁵ on the side, disappearing on tours and doing recordings every now and then, and I was lucky to have support from my teachers to do that. They really understood that it was important to me so I could blow off my creative steam.

In the MMus program at Fontys Conservatory in Tilburg I had proposed some ideas to my new research coach (not my violin teacher) as a potential master research and one of them was "exploring my talents in both visual arts and music and finding a way to combine them in one". My research coach really had to push me in that direction and convince me that this was the most interesting and original idea. It was the first time in my musical studies that a teacher showed interest in my visual background. But I was afraid. I was afraid of failing. I was afraid of not reaching my own expectations. I was afraid that I couldn't do visual arts any more, that I had lost it. I started researching the topic and doing some experiments and to my surprise it turned out to be quite interesting; a stop-motion visual fantasy on a Bach Sarabanda, but by the end of the year I had been offered a job on a world tour with the Icelandic rock band Sigur Rós for 18 months. So I quit the master in Tilburg, moved all my belongings to Iceland and left my project half made on a hard drive.

We toured the world three times around, USA, Europe, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia etc. playing over 140 concerts. Some of them for a crowd of about 20.000 people and others for about 3000 people. We played in famous concert halls like Madison Square Garden, countless outdoor festivals like End of the Road Festival and Coachella and TV shows like Jimmy Fallon and Jay Leno. During this time it was like I took a break from myself and disconnected with the classical violin student that practiced for hours a day. It was not a creative period but it was a time of rethinking and new experiences. Living in the moment and not having to make any decisions. It was a time of living in a bubble, sucking in the excitement of the crowd and trying to savor these precious moments of being on stage bathed in stage lights listening to the roar of the crowd through my in-ear monitors. You see the world in new context. The world seems smaller and everything seems to be within reach. After these 18 months of living in this bubble I felt like reconnecting to myself again. Who was I after all these years of studying violin?

⁵ Seabear was an Icelandic indie pop band that I was a creative member of in the years 2005-2011. <https://open.spotify.com/artist/6hLIT4e0yUtIa8DXwst4mi>

And who was I after all these years of touring the world with pop music⁶? What were my qualities and were did I want to project them? What was it that I really wanted to do with myself and my skills?

This is where I was at when I entered the NAIP. I saw the NAIP as a great opportunity to reconnect with my inner musician and artist. Also to complete my unfinished music video project and to dig deeper into that field. But first and foremost to reconnect to these other artistic sides of myself and figure out a way to become the whole 360° of the artist/musician I truly was instead of compartmentalizing these aspects of myself. Another reason for why I have chosen this subject is in relation to what I have discussed earlier about the changing world and the new audiences which is a topic often discussed within the NAIP program. I find it interesting and important to do new things and finding new directions as a performing artist both to reach a broader audience and to widen my own perspective. I hope this will also be interesting for fellow musicians, inspiring them to open their minds to different ways of experiencing and performing music.

In this essay I will explore the history of combining visuals and music, the methods available and my journey on creating *Fantasia on Sarabanda* a visual interpretation of J.S. Bach's Sarabanda from Partita No. II in d-minor for solo violin. I will also touch upon other musical projects I have created while in the NAIP and my growth as a musician.

⁶ Like mentioned earlier, this was not my first time touring the world with pop music. It was just by far the biggest. I had also toured USA, Europe and Japan with other indie pop bands like múm and Seabear.

The love affair between music and visuals

When I started out with this project I had no idea where it would lead me or how I would combine these two different artistic disciplines, visuals and music. I started out with searching my background and trying out different things, sketching and experimenting. I also started searching libraries and the internet for what other artists had done in this field before. There is a long history of combining visual arts with music, experiments with visualizing music and musicalizing visuals. In the following chapter I will touch upon a few different ways where these two art forms have been merged together.

Chromesthesia - Color Music

Within the art world combining pitch with color is often referred to as *color-music*. But there is a neurological phenomenon called Synesthesia in which stimulation of one sensory pathway leads to automatic experiences in a second sensory pathway.

Chromesthesia is a common form of Synesthesia where people automatically and involuntarily associate pitch with color so when they hear a certain pitch they can see in their mind a certain hue of color that is forever linked with this particular pitch. Artists that are involved in creating *color music* often have chromesthesia.⁷ I first came across this phenomenon while reading *Musicophilia* by neuroscientist Oliver Sacks. In his book he describes many different stories of people and artists with Synesthesia.⁸



A caricature of Louis-Bertrand Castel's "ocular organ" by Charles Germain de

I was surprised to find out that as early as in 1742 a French jesuit monk, mathematician and physicist, Louis Bertrand Castel, built *Clavecin Oculaire*, a color-light-organ as a new musical instrument which would simultaneously produce both sound and the "correct" associated color

⁷ Robertson, Lynn C., Noam Sagiv, *Synesthesia: Perspectives from Cognitive Neuroscience*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, bls. 3.

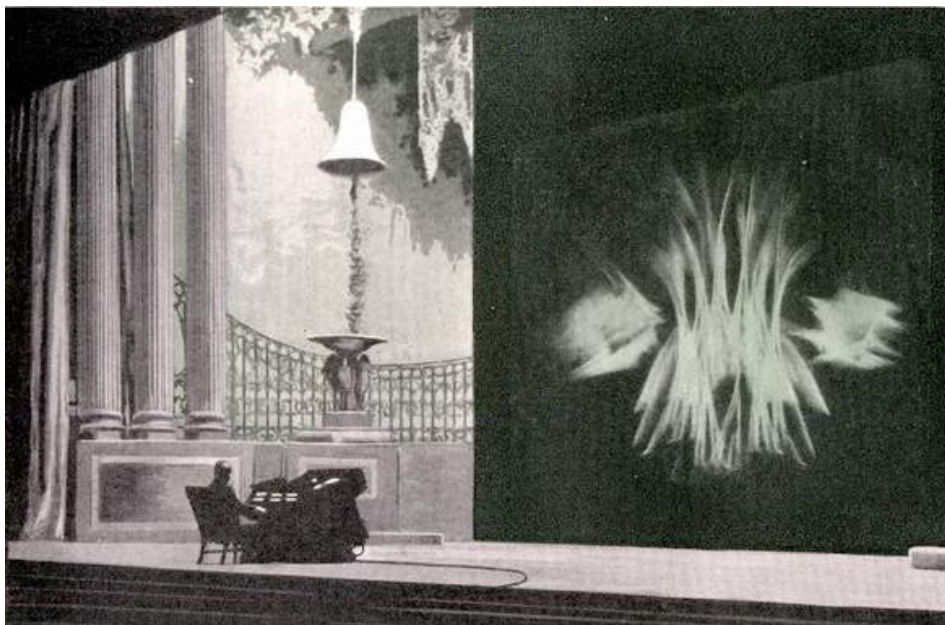
⁸ Sacks, Oliver, *Musicophilia*, New York: Vintage Books, 2008, bls. 177-197

for each note⁹. He clearly had chromesthesia and wanted to express what was going on in his mind while playing or hearing music.

Later in history many other artists and composers like Scriabin, Messiaen, Rimsky Korsakov and Frans Liszt have made experiments to map colors to pitch but each artist/composer feels or considers the pairing of color to pitch differently so there is no one way of doing this. I find the similarities still surprising to see f.ex. 8 out of 11 artists/composers consider the pitch E to be yellow and 8 out of 11 found C to be reddish (different hues of red)¹⁰. Personally I can agree to E being yellow but to me C is white and A is red so it seems to be a very personal thing. On the other hand I don't really feel such a strong connection between color and pitch so I don't think I have chromesthesia at all although I find this phenomenon highly interesting and inspiring.

Music and Light

Another great example of transcribing music to visual material is the *Art of Lumia*. The artist/inventor Thomas Wilfred tried to paint music with light. He invented the *Art of Lumia* and he later became known as the father of multimedia. Around 1920, Wilfred created the Clavilux which was a color light projection gadget designed for audiovisual shows. Clavilux was a kind of organ that produced fluid light forms instead of music, and it was created to enable the silent compositions of Lumia.



Tomas Wilfred with his *Clavilux* around 1920

⁹ McDonnell, Maura, *Visual Music*, October 2014 (2002) <http://homepage.eircom.net/~musima/visualmusic/visualmusic.htm>

¹⁰ McDonnell, *ibid.*

“Light is the artist’s sole medium of expression. He must mould it by optical means, almost as a sculptor models clay. He must add color, and finally motion to his creation. Motion, the time dimension, demands that he must be a choreographer in space.” —Thomas Wilfred¹¹

I find this so interesting and inspiring. What a visionary! I really feel like I can connect to these ideas. Motion being the “time dimension” and choreographing the projected shapes in the space. Although I’m not sure I agree with light being the sole medium of expression I love the idea of music being a spatial art form. Of course, scientifically, light and reflection is the core to our ability to see but I feel like the possibilities are definitely more diverse than simply working with light. That being said I love these color light organ projection gadgets and I find their projections absolutely stunning especially given the time they were created.

Visual Arts and Music

In my years of study I have heard both art history teachers and musicians talk about how the 19th century impressionist composers like Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel were inspired by impressionist paintings, and although this theory cannot be proven it is easy to imagine while listening to their work how they were perhaps imitating the impressionistic flow of colors and lighting. On the other hand some cubist and abstract painters at the beginning of the 20th century such as Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso were deeply inspired to paint the movement and magic of music¹² A good example is the picture *Man with Violin* on the right by Georges Braque. One can really see the movements in the painting and one can also



Man with Violin, Georges Braque.

imagine the echoing of sounds. I find it fascinating to see how paintings can inspire composers and how music can inspire painters. There is always this mirroring between the two art forms throughout art history.

In the 1940s concept artist Marcel Duchamp and composer John Cage collaborated with audio/visual art pieces creating kinetic sculptures and video’s where they combined visuals with

¹¹ Rezende, Mariana, *Original Creators: Thomas Wilfred, The Father Of Multimedia*, Jun 18, 2012 <http://thecreatorsproject.vice.com/blog/original-creators-thomas-wilfred-the-father-of-multimedia>

¹² Guðrún H. Sigurðardóttir, verbal source, Lecture on Cubist art, Fjölbrautaskólinn í Breiðholti, 2003.

music¹³. They really delved into this concept of music as a spatial art form. For example one could mention Marcel Duchamp's composition *Erratum Musical* featuring three voices singing notes pulled from a hat. This act then had an impact on the compositions of John Cage, who in 1952 composed *4'33"* a musical score of four minutes and thirty three seconds of silence.¹⁴ I find their collaboration and influences on one another very inspiring and I have always been a big fan of Duchamp's kinetic sculptures and their simple but mesmerizing flow. They fit perfectly with the repetitive minimal music of Cage at the time.

Music and Choreography

In this context of music as spatial art it is hard not to also mention Cage's collaboration with choreographer Merce Cunningham. And that can also in some way be connect us back to Wilfred's ideas about motion and the time dimension demanding choreography. I find Cunningham's work highly inspirational as my visual work also involves a lot of choreography but their collaboration is thought to have had a huge impact in the development of modern dance. Cunningham's palette of body language is incredibly expressive and mind opening. I have a great respect for his work.

Graphic scores and animated notation

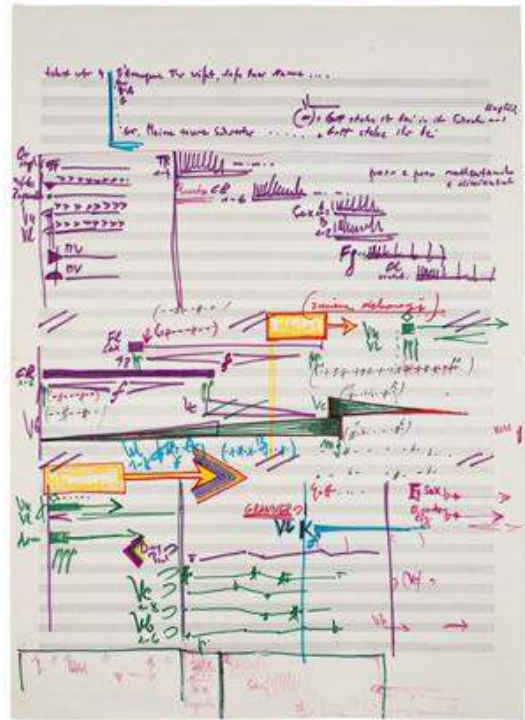
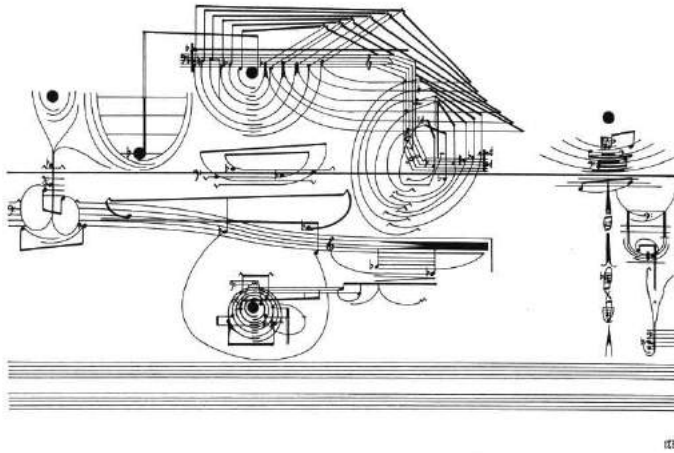
More 20th century composers like John Cage (again), Cornelius Cardew, Krzysztof Penderecki, Morton Feldman and Earle Brown used visuals in their compositions in the form of *graphic scores* or *graphic notation*. Today many composers still use graphic notation and even *animated notation* like the members of the Icelandic composer collective Slátur¹⁵. These artists are definitely first and foremost composers who use visual material as a tool to compose and perform their pieces. Graphic notation is very inspiring to me and it questions the authority of the standard musical notation which pushes composers to rethink how they approach composing. When you look at ancient Byzantine notation, for example, it is much more graphic and it supports the thought that there are more ways to explain and document music.

¹³ Richter, Hans, "Dreams that Money can Buy", Duchamp's fragment from the film with music by John Cage, 04:02, Nov. 29th, 2014 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJ5Cl30_KvE

¹⁴ "Introduction to Sound Art", Tate, 2016. <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/s/sound-art#introduction>

¹⁵ Smith, Ryan Ross, "Composers", *animated notation dot com*, Dec. 30th, 2013 <http://animatednotation.com/composers.html>

Graphic scores by Cardew (below) and Penderecki (right).



Sound Art

Sound Art has been described as “Art which uses sound both as its medium and as its subject”¹⁶. John Cage and Duchamp were among the first influential artists in search of something new that later became this genre. A good example, and one close to me, is the Icelandic minimalist and sound artist Finnbogi Pétursson. The sound waves in Pétursson’s work and their deep vibrations are a tool to create stunning visual forms. The sound in his work is an essential part of the visual piece and does not stand alone. I’ve always been a great fan of his work. I find it stunning and breathtaking, these bass vibrations really draw you in another dimension. Other examples are Laurie Anderson, Susan Philipsz, Richard Garet, Florian Hecker. And one could also mention the contemporary performance artist Ragnar Kjartansson but he also often uses music in his work. Unlike Pétursson, Kjartansson often uses music that is pre composed (classical, opera or pop music) or has composers compose something new for him. He then puts it into new context and makes the music an essential centre to his work. His work is very entertaining and has a lot to do with storytelling.

¹⁶ “Introduction to Sound Art”

Animation and music



And now to a totally different scene: Animation and Stop-Motion. Cartoons are maybe not the first thing that comes to mind when discussing visual music and many might argue their artistic value. Clearly cartoons are in many cases not meant to be artistic in that sense rather first and foremost entertainment. Nevertheless the animation and stop-motion techniques are the same whether you are using them to create a piece of visual art in the present or for a cartoon in 1920's. Like I mentioned briefly in the introduction my final choice of method was to combine music and stop-motion (a form of animation). Therefore I want to touch a bit on the long tradition of combining visuals with animation/stop-motion and the different methods of doing so in context of the history of visual music.

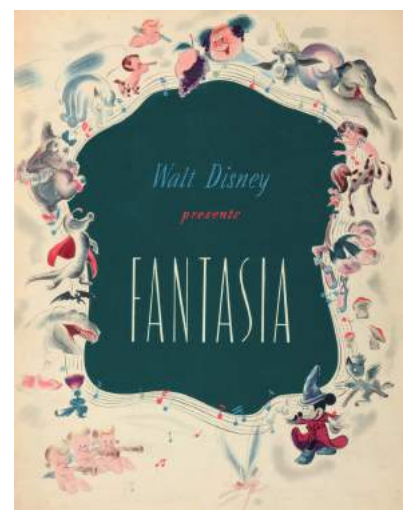
Tempo - Movement - Music

Although a very commercial example Walt Disney was the king of the early 1920s cartoon business. His cartoons that were often silent had specially composed music to them that helped describe the storytelling. Similar to the silent films of that time. To make it easier for the composers to time the music to the animation the cartoons were animated to a meter click track with a pre-decided tempo. All the movements of the characters were then moving in the tempo of the music that later was added.

The tempo comes first, animation second and in the end music is composed to fit both. This tradition went on for decades and with this method music has brought life to many “silent” cartoons like Mikey Mouse, Tom & Jerry and many more.

Music - Visual Fantasy

In 1940 Walt Disney in cooperation with conductor Leopold Stokowsky attempted to visualize music by many great composers like J. S. Bach, P.I. Tchaikovsky, Igor Stravinsky and more with his film *Fantasia*. *Fantasia* is probably his most artistic production to reach a commercial audience. One might say that it is like a visual fantasy on the music. I find this film of his very interesting, of course the visual material is mostly figurative although sometimes abstract and it clearly is meant to be entertaining but I



really appreciate his way of allowing the audience into his imagination and expressing his love for music in his cartoon language. I can really see this as an experiment to reach a broader or new audience. Fantasia also has an educational value, reaching to children's minds through cartoons by introducing classical music to them through entertainment they relate to. Technically and methodologically this is a different approach to the traditional way of combining music to animation (explained above). Here the music comes first and inspires the animation. The pre-composed music decides the tempo and movement of the animation which needs to be precisely calculated to fit the music.

Visual Improvisation - Music

There are also many animation and stop-motion artists later in history who use the free approach where neither music nor tempo is decided beforehand. This allows for a lot of freedom and improvisation with the visual material and then afterwards music is added, inspired by the visual material. Great examples are Jan Svankmajer¹⁷, The Brothers Quay¹⁸, Bruce Bickford¹⁹ (and his collaboration with musician Frank Zappa) and many more. This is the type of stop-motion I had done before on my first year in the BA at Iceland Academy of the Arts. With those pieces I had started out with some sketches, clay, set and a camera. No precisely calculated storyboard is needed so I let each movement lead me to the next in an improvisation in slow motion. When the video clip was ready I assembled music to fit the video. Most often there was no real tempo in the music more of a drone with layers of improvised phrases I had recorded on my violin²⁰.

¹⁷ example of his Jan Svankmajer's work, *Dimensions of Dialogue* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGp8xiB2-sg>

¹⁸ example of the Brothers Quay's work, *Street of Crocodiles* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNOfsJz4TjA>

¹⁹ example of Bickford's work *Baby Snakes* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjXiEqxvfqI>

²⁰ example of my work can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/111444699>

My journey through creating *Fantasia of a Sarabanda*

Choice of Music

Since this started out as a master research project within a musical master program I felt like this time I should start with the music and not the visuals. I knew it would be more challenging since I hadn't done it before and it required precisely calculated and well thought out flow of movement. But I was up for the challenge besides I would be able to make a deeper connection to the music if I started out with the music and made the visuals fit the music in this way. So the question then came down to whether I was going to use a pre-composed piece of music or make my own composition? I thought about it for a while but since I wasn't doing a composition master but a violin performance master I soon figured it was best to connect the music to my repertoire as a classical/baroque violinist. Besides it was kind of mandatory in this master research program at the Fontys Conservatory, although the research part was pretty free, that we had to make a connection to our practicing repertoire one way or the other.

I soon made the decision to narrow the repertoire down to a violin solo piece. That way I could be in control of everything, like timing in the performance etc. and also because I've always had a soft spot for solo pieces without accompaniment. After listening to many recordings of countless different solo violin pieces I always came back to J.S. Bach. I think the reason is that most of the more modern solo pieces were too virtuosic for my taste; more about the performer while Bach is all about the music. Bach is so deep, there are so many layers of emotions and stories but still in a very modest and distant way. That was exactly what I needed for this project.



My final choice was the third movement, *Sarabanda*, from J.S. Bach's Partita in D-minor for solo violin. It is the ideal length and it is very expressive, also, one of my favorites.

A few words about J. S. Bach and Baroque music in general

In the Baroque area music had a purpose. At that time nobody talked about music or art as beauty or aesthetic. That idea didn't come until in the middle of the 18th century. Music and art was to deliver a message²¹. This idea comes from the Renaissance interest in ideas from ancient

²¹ Samama, Leo, verbal source, Lecture on Music Philosophy, Fontys Conservatory Tilburg, February 2012.

Greece and Rome. The Greeks and Romans believed that music was a powerful tool of communication and could arouse any emotion in its listeners²². I find this very interesting to keep in mind while working on the piece because it kind of reassures me that it was worthwhile to dig up a message or a story within the music. If all music from this time was a way of communication, and since music in general is a nonverbal communication like dance or pantomime, it really made sense to me to use these art forms, visual choreography and music, together while interpreting J. S. Bach's work.

This idea of music having purpose brings us back to how to communicate music to our audiences today, like I discussed in the Introduction. Maybe the key is to search deeper to find *the* or *a* message and deliver it to our audience in the performance. Perhaps we need to figure out, in general, what the purpose of music is today. Again this is nothing new but these are questions we need to keep asking ourselves. We also need to be brave and make some risks in order to find something new like Peter Renshaw put so nicely into words:

“creative innovative practice can only flourish in an enabling environment that encourages collaboration and risk-taking”²³

While discussing artistic philosophy of baroque composers we should temper down our expectations little bit. It is important to bear in mind the reality of these composers lives. They did not have the artistic freedom of many composers today. Throughout much of the baroque era composers only earned a living writing music if they were fortunate enough to be on the payroll of a political or religious institution. The musical needs of that institution, therefore, dictated the music the composer produced. So the artistic inspiration and message of the work was not the starting point of the work. Instead the message was carefully hidden within the structure of the piece. For me this makes it even more appealing because it is in a way hidden and a bit mysterious. In my lessons on Music Philosophy with musicologist Leo Samama he talked about how the baroque composer strikes the posture of an emotion instead of exploring it within himself. For example Bach is never directly in his music, always safely outside somewhere, pulling the stops. The emotions are therefore generalized and not personal. They are expressive by proxy.²⁴ These ideas are so inspiring to me “expressive by proxy” makes me feel like the expressiveness is bursting to be revealed but is forever doomed to be covered. Maybe that is very romantic of me to think like that. But this is one of the reasons why I find it so relevant to dig

²² Samama, *ibid*.

²³ Renshaw, *Being in Tune*, page 4-5.

²⁴ Samama, *ibid*.

deeper and explore this music in different ways. I feel like Bach's personal detachment creates freedom and in some way a permission to find your own interpretation and take it to another level. There is so much information and so much expression and emotion but still at the same time not really anything to get a grip on and I feel like this opens up a world of possibilities.

Many composers have been fascinated, blown away and deeply inspired by J. S. Bach's work for solo instruments. Here are some words from Johannes Brahms which he wrote about the Ciaccona (a movement from the same solo partita in d-minor for violin) in a letter to Clara Schumann:

"On one stave, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings. If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived the piece, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth-shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind.." ²⁵

In this context of discussing the distant and modest Bach this statement of Johannes Brahms sounds very romantic. It is funny but I really get where Brahms is going and in some way this reflects my impression of Bach's music but that's probably the romantic I pretend not to be.

Some theorists and musicologists such as Walter Benjamin, believe that these sonatas and partitas are expressing a bigger message about death and judgement in an allegorical view:

"Allegorical art thus has an eschatological character quintessentially manifested in works such as the French "free" preludes and Bach's *Sonatas and Partitas for Unaccompanied Violin*. According to which a more complete, fulfilled version of the work lies beyond what can be realized immediately in sound according to the written notes." ²⁶

I think that it is quite likely and it makes sense that he would have used the opportunity to be more expressive than usual since there is no record that these sets of pieces had been ordered by anyone. It seems like the solo sonatas and partitas might have been a pet project of his and that means that he might have had more freedom than usual. But we cannot be certain. The idea is appealing.

I also find Eric Chafe's take on Theodor Adorno's theory extremely interesting and in some way reassuring for my work in general, that Bach's work was in some way intended for a future generation of musicians to realize what his own time could not.

²⁵ Berthold (editor), *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, 1853–1896*. Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1979, p. 16.

²⁶ Eric Chafe, "Allegorical Music: The "Symbolism" of Tonal Language in the Bach Canons", *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol 3, No. 4, Oakland, California: University of California Press, 1984, page 342.

"Adorno gives a new twist to the "eschatological" aspect of Bach's work in his suggestion that the "abstract" instrumentation of late works such as the Art of Fugue, seen as an extension of the "static" character of baroque instruments, was intended by Bach as a form of "waiting" for a future that could realize what his own time could not."²⁷

Maybe we are the future generation and maybe the time is now to dig in and drag out a message and discover new territories within his music. At least I made an effort to use this new authority by making an "emotional analysis" and not a common tonal analysis. For this project it was much more useful and more inspiring to have the emotional analysis to build a story upon. My emotional analysis is the heart and core of my project *Fantasy on Sarabanda*.

Dance

The oldest music found in our history is dance music. Dancing to music is probably the most natural thing for us to do. My young daughter, for example, danced to music before she learned how to walk and talk. Nobody had to teach her what to do or how to do it. Pure instinct.

I followed a practical course in Baroque dance at LHI last fall and it was extremely eye opening and interesting to learn how to dance all these dances that I have been playing on my violin since childhood. Especially to finally learn how to dance the Sarabanda was very interesting and fulfilling having spent so much time fantasizing about the movements and searching my own imagination for choreographed movements.

Partita in D-minor, by J. S. Bach follows the traditional 17th century French dance suite. It is court music in dance form but in fact not necessarily intended to be danced to. Theorists keep debating over the purpose of these compositions or what exactly they were intended for. Nevertheless the feeling of a dance is always present and that is probably why movement and choreography is so prevalent in my video piece. The Partita in D-minor contains five movements:

1. Allemanda: Originally a German dance in double meter. It's a dance of moderate tempo. A serious dance and ceremonial.

2. Courante: A triple meter dance. This one is in an Italian style which is faster than the French courante but it is still a slow and majestic dance.

3. Sarabanda: originally from 16th century Spanish culture and Latin America was a triple meter dance with emphasis on the 2nd beat. Around 1583 it was thought to be too erotic and controversial and therefore banned for some time in Spain.

²⁷ Chafe, "Allegorical Music: The "Symbolism" of Tonal Language in the Bach Canons", page 343.

4. **Giga:** originates from the British jig. It is a lively dance with accent on the 3rd beat.

5. **Ciaccona:** originally derives from 16th century Spanish culture. It is a triple meter dance variation on a repeated short harmonic progression. This movement is thought to be quite possibly a tombeau written in memory of Bach's first wife, Maria Barbara Bach (who died in 1720).²⁸

Sarabanda being the the movement of my choice is a very mysterious dance. There are so many things unknown about it like for example it's origins. Theorists disagree on weather it originates from South America or Spain but it is known that they existed in both parts of the world. The things that are known suggest that it was somewhat like a forbidden fruit. Here is what musicologist and dance historian Ingrid Brainard wrote on the Spanish Zarabandas:

“recited or sung, or they could be danced, or both together; they were frequently, if not always, danced with castanets; they could be couple or group dances, passionate and erotic in nature, characterized by the supple motions of arms and hands, intricate footwork, a flexible torso, and mobile hips. Small wonder that the Inquisition punished the singing and dancing of zarabandas with two hundred lashes of the whip, with expulsion from the kingdom for women, and six years of servitude on galleys for men”²⁹

I don't think that in my imagery I was very focused on the erotic part but more on the forbidden fruit take on the passionate erotic nature. This dance is loaded with expression already within the structure and the emphasis on the 2nd beat. Then Bach adds on to that and I dive into this pool of emotional material and express my visual imagination through a clump of clay.

I was very pleased while reading Brainard's thoughts on the Sarabande that it already had a tradition to pantomime. So in some way you might say that I was only rediscovering an old tradition.

“In the French ballet de cour, where the Spanish heritage is emphasized, sarabandes are relatively scarce, while they appear in considerable numbers in the works of Lully and Rameau, more often than not for ceremonial occasions, sometimes in pantomimic scenes”³⁰

²⁸ Stowell, Robin, *Bach's Violin Sonatas and Partitas: Building a Music Library*: 5, London: The Musical Times Ltd., Vol. 128, No. 1731 (May, 1987), pp. 251-255

²⁹ Brainard, Ingrid “The Sarabande in Dance and Music” *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2000), pp. 193-199, Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

³⁰ Brainard “The Sarabande in Dance and Music”

Choice of method

Mapping out the elements

Music and visual arts can be thought of as comprising of many different elements, such as pitch, color, texture, narrative and tone. When combining these two forms of art, the first thing to think about is how these elements should be paired with each other. Pitch to hue, dark/light colors to deep/high pitch, music timbre to texture, nuances, tone to shape, etc. When doing this, it can be helpful to create a map of all the different elements of sound and visuals. It is also important to bear in mind that tone and visuals can have many adjectives and nouns in common although the meaning can differ: hue, timbre, dark, light, deep, thick, thin, nuance, transparency, rich, full, landscape, contrasts, shine, silky, texture, volume, etc.

Another important thing to keep in mind before making choices is which forms are available. There are countless forms, ranging from two dimensional pieces such as paintings, three dimensional pieces such as sculptures, installations, mechanical pieces such as kinetic art, interactive sound-sculptures/installations, video art, to stop-motion or animation and so on. In short, everything that is both visual and aural or an interpretation of one or the other.

In the beginning I pretty soon realized that the combination of color and pitch was not really my thing. I could leave that to people with synesthesia or chromesthesia since I didn't have that connection. For me, form, shape, texture, timbre, nuances are more naturally interpreted from music into visuals, so I focused on that to begin with. Also character development and storytelling are things that often come up in my mind in connection to musical interpretation. I decided to try out ink and water on paper since that was material I was familiar with. I started to make some different brush strokes, sort of tests with ink feather pen and paintbrushes. My idea was to make a mapping of the elements that connected the different elements of music and visuals together and then use that as a material for a bigger artwork or a visual interpretation of the score. Somehow it didn't flow and it didn't seem to fit to the music and especially my feelings for the music. I simply didn't feel the connection so I soon figured out that a two dimensional piece wasn't really the right medium for me, not for this piece at least. So I figured that what I am good at is creating a story behind the music or listening to "the story" behind the notes. I had the good luck to have some teachers encourage me to tell a story with music when I was younger. I guess it was a tool to get students to be more expressive with their music and think more carefully about phrasing. I took this very seriously as a young violin student and made a habit out of it. A habit that will probably stay with me forever. This was a huge stimuli for my visually

thinking brain. In a way I think this has really been a strong way for me of connecting to music. Music has never come as naturally to me as visual material. I really had to work hard to learn music but for a stubborn hard worker like me I finally got there.

I first thought “yes of course now I need to make an analysis of the music” and as soon as the idea struck my mind I knew that a tonal analysis of the chord progression wouldn’t be much help for me. What I needed was a story so I decided to start making my own kind of analysis and use that as a starting point. An analysis without musical theory. An emotional story telling analysis. This term is of course something I made up, or at least I haven’t heard of this before but it somehow seemed so natural and easy for me to do. In fact I didn’t even think much about it, I just did it because it felt like the right thing to do for me. I probably do this all the time in my head without noticing because I never write it down and I’m sure I’m not the only one.

I went through every note and sought what it called for visually, character wise and emotionally; how it could be expressed in visual form, feeling or movement. Making a story out of it. What was the music saying? what images did the music ask for? And in this way I made a script that even looked a little bit like a poem. This is what finally got me going and became the core of my storyboard. (see photo of emotional analysis and story board, on page 37-39)

I think this movement is a bit sad. I find it mildly sorrowful and nostalgic. I feel like the piece starts with a short intro of a sad surrender, then an upbeat to bar 5 it starts to tell the story of why all the pain and what happened recalling and telling the story of old memories. Bar 6 is very expressive like a glimpse of a good memory that is almost there but you can’t really put your hands onto it or it falls through your hands like sand when you’re pulled back to reality which seems to be filled with gloom. This is how my story begins (see score on page 37).

After finishing my analysis it was pretty clear to me that I was working with musical narrative and in my mind that called for visual narrative. So what better way to portray that then with a video that works in parallel with the music? Having given up on the two dimensional interpretations I came to the conclusion to make a stop-motion video piece of an animated three dimensional sculpture which would be interpreting the expressions in the music like in a ballet, pantomime or a silent film.

I chose this method firstly because a video is a work in time just like music. That means that the listener’s brain works in parallel with the piece while listening or watching. Secondly, stop-motion does in some way resemble real life to me because it is three dimensional and the animated figure moves “on its own” like it is somehow magically alive. Thirdly it also has a

connection to theatre, choreography and dance. Fourthly because it reflects the solo voice of the music and Sarabanda being a solo dance. Finally because I have used this medium before and I find it easily expressive although it is terribly difficult and time consuming.

Prior work in animation



Særa sig Græða 2005



Ilgari 2004

I have done a few short stop-motion film clips with music before by animating clay and using sounds from my violin. These short video works I did in my first year of the Art Academy of Iceland 10 years ago. When I did these claymation videos the visual material is in fact just improvised in slow motion (12 frames per second) and then I composed music to fit the film clip by recording improvised violin sounds, phrases and drones and fitting them together like collage to fit precisely the mood and movement of the piece. The visuals then came first and inspired the music. This is like the free approach method I described in the chapter *Visual Improvisation - Music* on page 7. No math or calculation before shooting the frames, just complete free time space.³¹ But with the *Fantasy on Sarabanda* I am doing the complete opposite for the first time. This time I already have the music; Bach Sarabanda and I have to make the movements of the clay figure fit exactly to the already composed piece of music. This is most similar to the method I described in the chapter *Music - Visual Fantasy* on page 7. This was a completely new thing for me to learn and tackle.

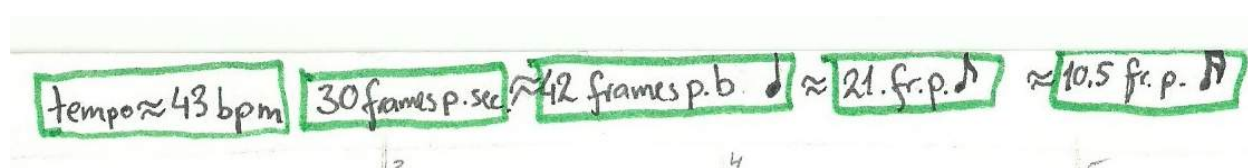
³¹ example of my work can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/111444699>

The steps to put theory into practice

The first step was of course to work with the music. To have an idea of how I liked to interpret it and play it. Where I wanted to take time etc. I worked on the Sarabanda and other movements of this d-minor partita with my teacher Kees Hülsmann for a couple of months before I started working on any visual parts. I made some recordings and performed it a few times before finishing the emotional analysis (page 37) in order to have a clear idea of what I wanted to do.

The Storyboard and the challenges of timing

I used the emotional analysis as guidelines while making the storyboard and it was incredibly helpful. The storyboard is like a visual plan of how I wanted the clay figure to look like on each note or millisecond of the music. Luckily I soon figured that the storyboard needed to be quite accurate so I first made a precise calculation of how many frames I needed per beat. After listening to a few recordings of myself playing the piece I decided that 43 bpm was a nice overall tempo although a tempo in Bach's solopieces can often be very elastic. I also realized that I needed to work more detailed with the timing after shooting so it would be a good idea to shoot the frames at 30 frames per second (instead of 12 fps like I had done before). That way I had extra frames and more space to slow down or fast forward the visuals to fit the elasticity of the musical tempo without compromising the quality and smoothness of the video. Of course this meant more work but I was convinced it was worth it. After some calculations, I had 10.5 frames per 16th note³². It turned out to be very practical to have the story board so accurately pinned down. Then I added extra frames on the notes I knew I would take more time in. (see photos of storyboard, page 38-39)

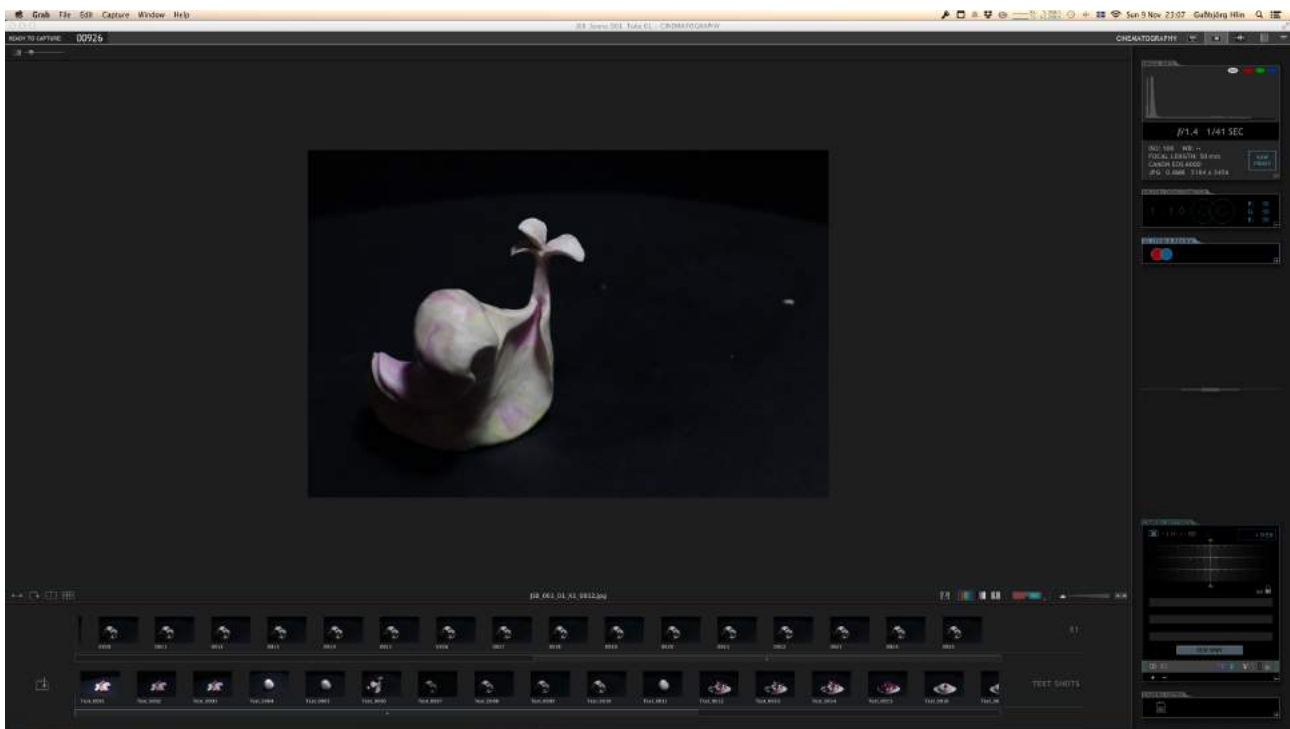


Technology

I hadn't done any work like this for about 10 years so I needed some time of experimenting to reconnect with the medium. In order to do such a precise work of visual art I had to step up my game from the older free-timed and roughly made previous animations. I also needed a

³² 30 fps x 60 = 1800 fpm 1800 fpm / 43 bpm = 42 frames per beat. That makes 42 frames per quarter note, 21 frames per eighth note and 10.5 frames per sixteenth note.

professional camera, nice lens, tripod, strong lighting and a professional computer program to aid me. I did some research and found out that the most helpful computer program for animating was a professional application also used for big budget feature animated films called Dragonframe (see appendix) and I immediately bought it. Around the same time I got a really nice Canon EOS600 digital camera for my birthday from my family and I ordered a second hand heavy tripod and an antique Russian portrait lens through the internet. Now all I had to do was to learn how to use all these things so I did a bit of experimenting and youtube learning. But mainly I learned most in the process of making the film. I just dove head first into this ocean of new technology and big ideas.



A screenshot from Dragonframe animation application.

Facilities

In order to make a stop-motion film it is extremely important to have good workspace where you have a lot of clean space to work uninterrupted. Over the period of shooting the film I had three different studio workspaces. One in my apartment in Utrecht spring 2012, then I set up a second one in Kópavogur Iceland summer of 2012 and then after a three year break from the project I set up the third workspace in my new home in Reykjavík which I used in the summer and fall of 2015 (see photo on page 26). I needed to make sure that everything was well pinned down and to take good care not to accidentally move something without purpose. That included my tripod, the camera, the stage, the lighting and the clay figure. It is almost impossible to put things back

perfectly where they were. So I need to take a lot of care not to make any mistakes. It is not possible to erase the movements. I only have one chance and have to work with whatever happens. This is why it is best to take all the photos in one go, few long marathons of shooting, and in a place where the things will not be touched by anyone else and no-one will disturb me.



This is my studio workspace in Reykjavík, where part of the shooting process took place. The storyboard is taped to the wall and the camera is weighed down and connected to my imac computer. It is also possible to see my remote control which I used to trigger the camera because it is very important not to touch or move the camera at all times. A few clay modelling tools and an extra battery recharging.

Post shooting process

After the shooting process I made some color fixing and added a tiny bit of editing in Final Cut Pro. After the visual part was ready came a period where I practiced performing it and timing my musical interpretation and phrasings to the timing of the video and I performed the piece a few times live like that. In March I borrowed some nice microphones from a friend and made a recording of myself playing the Sarabanda at the Laugarneskirkja church in Reykjavík. After that I made a portable version of the piece using the recording from Laugarneskirkja so I would have the option of exhibiting the piece without a live performance on the violin.

Performances and Exhibitions

My idea is that part of this journey, the creation of the piece *Fantasy on Sarabanda*, is to perform it and exhibit the piece within different art genres and for different audiences. I find it an interesting thing to explore because my video piece does fit into different genres of art f.ex. performing it live in a concert setting, exhibiting it at a visual art exhibition, and applying for international animation and short film festivals. I wanted to explore these different fields of art within my piece so I have made an effort to do all those things this past year.

Kvikyndi at Mengi

As a part of my research on visual music, me and my trumpet playing husband Eiríkur Orri Ólafsson, organized a project called Kvikyndi at the venue Mengi downtown Reykjavík. We got guitarist Hilmar Jensson and clarinetist Grímur Helgason along with the visual artists Rakel Jónsdóttir and Helga Björg Gylfadóttir to participate and made a performance at Mengi on the 17th of November 2015. The concept was “different ways to combine visual material with music in a performance”.

For example I premiered my *Fantasy on Sarabanda* video piece with a live performance on the Baroque violin. I think it went quite all right. People were very impressed by the piece but I thought my timings could have been better. When timing something to visuals, you need to be ahead of yourself because there is always a reaction delay.

Me and Eiríkur then performed two improvised pieces together to found visual material (archive material). The found video material was looped and served as inspirational backdrop to a musical improvisation set. I was quite pleased with how this worked and surprised at how easy and effortless it was for us to work together musically. We have worked together before countless times but always while working for someone else. This was the first time we worked together on our own terms with our own music. The music was kind of moody and experimental but quite melodic as well.

Together with Grímur and Hilmar we performed improvised soundtrack to video art pieces by artists Helga Björg Gylfadóttir and Rakel Jónsdóttir. Their pieces were very contrasting and different from one another. Jónsdóttir's piece was very short dreamy and poetic and I feel like

we captured the mood of it quite well. Gylfadóttir's piece was a greater challenge. It consisted of two lovers dancing a romantic afro-dance together and then having a disagreement. We constructed the music with different cues in the visuals triggering different tonalities and musical elements. My feeling is that it might have sounded a bit chaotic and strange at times but it is hard to say. This was a hard one.

Also together with Grímur we performed a new pre-composed musical piece by Eiríkur to music video *Janie's got a Gun* by rock band Aerosmith. We all had sheet music for this one written by Eiríkur. I think it went really well in the performance. The music was so different from the original that it really made a surreal feel combined with the music video. The music was very minimal and fragile which made a huge contrast to over the top dramatic hard rock feel of the video.

In the end of the concert we all played a partially improvised soundtrack to a horror silent film *The Haunted House* from 1914. This old silent film was very funny so I kind of wanted to reflect on that. We just went all the way in making a silly program music with sound effects (made with instruments) and plenty of "Mickey-mousing". I think it was an entertaining ending to the versatile program.

The main reason why we decided to put together this program was to make a venue for me to premiere the *Fantasy on Sarabanda*. Me and Eiki had also talked about doing a silent film concert together for a few years so this seemed like the perfect way to kill two birds with one stone. Finding other pieces that would fit perfectly with my claymation piece wasn't so easy so the program ended up being very versatile and I'm sure that was very entertaining. But I think that if I were to do this again I might try to have a bit more context musically because my feeling was that the music was a little bit all over the place. That being said this was a very nice experience and the audience was really positive.

Experimental evening of LHÍ in Mengi

I performed my *Fantasy on Sarabanda* in an experimental evening of different art disciplines from the Art Academy of Iceland, again at the venue Mengi. Although I was performing the same piece at the same venue again this was a totally different setting. This time I was not part of organizing and curating the evening. I only had one number on the program so I could really focused on that. In my opinion my performance was much better this time and I think that was

because I had less things to worry about. This time I wasn't playing in all the numbers on the program as well as organizing the event.

The program was versatile and interesting. There was a theatre performance (from the theatre department), video art pieces (from the visual department), musical performance (from the music department) and my piece (from the NAIP). It was very interesting and a different experience to perform it there because firstly this was not a concert. People didn't come only to hear music. Secondly the crowd was different, there were none of my friends apart from my sister, a few people from the visual and stage performance department and then some teachers from the IAA. I hardly knew anybody and people vanished quickly after the show so I didn't have much opportunity to speak to many. But the few who I spoke to seemed interested in how I made it and showed fascination towards the piece in general.

My piece fit into both categories musical performance and video art but I kind of felt like it fitted better with the video art pieces.

Art Exhibition Vinnslan in Tjarnabíó

On the 9th of April 2016 my piece *Fantasy on Sarabanda* was exhibited at an art festival Vinnslan at Tjarnabíó Theatre in Reykjavík. This was a very interesting event that I applied for with my piece and got accepted to.

Twenty eight artists from all disciplines exhibited or performed their latest works or works in progress in a truly inspiring program running from 19:30 - 00:00 all over the theatre. This time I wanted to exhibit the piece with a recording and without the performance so I used this opportunity as a deadline to make the recording of the Sarabanda and fitting that together with the claymation. At first I had thought of putting up a screen somewhere in a common space with the video on a loop

and have headphones attached to it in order for people to listen to the Sarabanda but when the festival offered me my own private little space where I could make an installation around my piece I changed my idea. The space had a very low ceiling and is therefore dubbed the "Malcovich space" which makes sense for those who have seen that movie. In order to get into the space you have to crawl but it is quite spacious lengthwise, so plenty of people could sit in it



once they had crawled in. I decided to make a tiny little theatre out of the space. I put our 27" flatscreen tv into one corner of it along with two very good audio monitors. On the floor I put some cushions and blackened the windows. The walls were already painted black so I tried to cover everything else with black cloth, It turned out really nicely and there were always around 4-9 people inside my theatre and many people came more than once throughout the whole evening. Since my piece was on a loop it was an ongoing event. I got such great feedback on it from visual artists, dancers, actors, musicians etc. It really made my day to hear all these kind words towards all my hard work. It made me feel like it was all worth it and that it really had meaning. It was such a fun evening and so great to have been able to exhibit my piece for so many people, and people interested in something like this.

It was a totally new experience to set up the piece, press play and leave it on a loop while people entered. It was very freeing. I felt like my piece now had wings of its own and I could just enjoy all the other events and exhibitions with a drink with friends while my piece was playing itself. It was kind of like cutting the umbilical chord. I think both versions of the piece, with performance and with recording, have their own charm. Live music always has it's charm and it's excitement, it is real and it is there right now in the moment. The piece becomes a performance piece in a concert version. On the other hand the recording is always much more accurately timed to the visual movements of the clay which can make a difference while experiencing the piece and the recorded version also has more possibilities when it comes to exhibiting it. For example it can be put on a loop in an exhibition or it can be screened in a movie theatre without me, which opens up a sea of possibilities.

International animation/short film festivals

As an artist it is important to be able to work in different fields and getting your work out there is a big part of it. Finding an appropriate scene for your work is important and it can open up new doors into new and interesting collaborations, interesting opportunities, fresh ideas and open up your mind for new possibilities.

I applied with my recorded portable version of *Fantasy on Sarabanda* to a few animation, stop-motion, art-film and short-film festivals all over the world (not knowing really in which category my piece would fit the best). 24 hours later I got an email saying:

Dear Guðbjörg Hlin Guðmundsdóttir,

Congratulations

We have accepted your submission.

We hope to see you in Cannes?

You may now use our Laurels.

Next step add the trailer to your video to our Animation Day in Cannes Channel.

I see this as a window that is open for me now to explore a new scene. Meeting up new people, having interesting discussions with people from different scenes within the film business and opening my mind to new ideas and new possibilities. This audience is totally different from the musical scene and also different from the visual arts scene. These are people from the film business and I think I can really learn a lot from them in terms of producing, directing and viewing my piece (and other projects) from another perspective. I hope in the meantime my piece will be invited to more film festivals because that will only broaden my view and open up new possibilities.

My growth as a musician

Baroque violin

While I was still studying in Holland my main violin teacher Kees Hülsmann encouraged me to buy a baroque violin. He knew that I, like him, was interested in early music and I already had a baroque bow but I never had fully gone in that direction. He had an instrument that he was trying out from a luthier and he let me try it. It was a good price and I bought it. Then I kept it in its case under my bed for 2 years.

Because I had already started a bit of my animation project in my MMus program at Fontys Conservatorium I had thought about how cool it would be to be able to perform the Sarabanda on my baroque violin but at the time it seemed like a far fetched dream. Too big of a leap. I would never be able to do that. Who was I kidding, I was not a baroque violinists.

But when I moved back to Iceland, met baroque cellist Sigurður Halldórsson and started the NAIP I went full on into the early music train. My two other classmates, Lilja and Diljá, were also interested in early music and with Siggi as our leader it was the most natural thing to do. I had private lessons with baroque violinist Halla Steinunn Stefánsdóttir and chamber music lessons with Siggi.

I am so happy today that I have had the opportunity to deepen my knowledge on early music and dig deeper into Bach and his Sarabanda. It really has opened a door for me into a world of music where I feel at home. I drink it in and enjoy every drop of it.

Umbra

Umbra³³ is a project that started in Stykkishólmur in the NAIP Music Master summer course.

Me, Lilja Dögg Gunnarsdóttir and Diljá Sigursveinsdóttir (my classmates) along with Sigurður Halldórsson and Israel, gamba player from the Hague, put together a performance with periodic instruments playing a combination of folk music and



early music. The theme was *the dark side of human nature*. Me and Lilja wanted to go on with this project and created a new event in November 2014 with bass player Alexandra Kjeld and organist/harpist Arngerður María Árnadóttir. This was our mini PIP in the course Performance and Communication on the first year of the NAIP MMus. program. This band then evolved into Umbra which is now an all female band with me (baroque violin, vocals), Lilja (vocals, percussion), Alexandra (double bass, vocals), Arngerður María (celtic harp, harmonium, vocals) and composer/violist Kristín Þóra Haraldsdóttir. We mostly perform ancient music from all over the world in our own arrangements but sometimes we have composers compose for us and sometimes we also do covers of some pop/rock songs. We always choose a theme to work on and build a researched program on that theme. Some of our upcoming events include Blóðhófnir or Bloodhoof at Reykjavík Arts Festival where we will premiere a new Music Theater piece by composer Kristín Þóra Haraldsdóttir, based on the epic telling, Bloodhoof, by poet Gerður Kristný and staged by choreographer Saga Sigurðardóttir. In August 2016 we will be recording our first album in Copenhagen, it will have a winter/yuletide theme focusing on old songs and hymns about the darkest hours and ancient yule carols from all over Europe. In spring 2017 we have a project on “The Lost Languages of Europe” where we will explore repertoire in ancient

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/tonlistarhopurinnumbra/?fref=ts>
<https://soundcloud.com/umbraiceland>

languages like Old English, Old Norse, Occitan and more exploring old troubadour songs and such.

This is a group that is very close to my heart and we are doing things that I have wanted to do for many years. We are constantly searching for lost or forgotten repertoire learning something new and digging up historical material that we then can be creative with and that makes this so interesting and fun.

Barokkbandið Brák/ Brák Baroque Ensemble³⁴

Is a project that started in the fall of 2014 when I was contacted by violinist Elfa Rún Kristinsdóttir. She wanted to start a new baroque band in Iceland with young musicians. Her idea was to promote the low profile baroque scene in Iceland which for the past 10-15 years had mostly been occupied by the two groups Nordic Affect and the longlived Skálholt Bach Consort.

She wanted to encourage younger players to participate and to make interesting projects

collaborating with young composers and artists in other genres. I was happy to be part of this and I am now a board member of the band. We had three successful concerts last summer at music festival Sumartónleikar í Skálholti. On the 10th of April 2016 we had our first concert at Harpa, Reykjavík called Barokk & Brjálsemi or Baroque and Madness and this was our biggest project yet. Despite some financial difficulties and the fact that Elfa wasn't able to come to Iceland in order to lead the group, we were determined to go through with the project. We were so lucky to get the Hungarian baroque violinist Kinga Ujszaszi to lead the group. We made an effort to present the group in a cool and current way with interesting imagery on the internet and on posters reaching out for a younger audience that otherwise wouldn't have shown it much interest. We wanted to do many innovative things with the hall that we couldn't afford so we settled down with, no stage, good lighting and audience seats around us. The concert turned out to be a huge success receiving 4 1/2 stars out of 5 from a renowned critic in Morgunblaðið a daily newspaper. A lot of people showed up and especially a lot of young people, even teenagers and



The poster for Barokk & Brjálsemi (left) and the review from Morgunblaðið newspaper.

³⁴ <http://www.barokkbandid-brak.com>
<https://www.facebook.com/brak.barokk/?fref=ts>

they loved the concert. We were super happy with the outcome and we are very excited about the future of this band. With more funding we will be able to do more innovative things in terms of staging, choreography etc.

Conclusion

What I have learned in the process of making the piece

Although *Fantasy on Sarabanda* is short I take on many different roles: director, editor, choreographer, animator, performer, musician, interpreter and producer. To have a glimpse into all these different roles is very eye opening and makes me want to work with people in different fields of the arts in the future, like choreographers, dancers, directors etc. I feel like I have developed insight into other roles and discovered different sides of the dice which also gives me confidence to think outside of my violin and more about the whole 360° production of a performance. It has also given me confidence in myself as a director and leader of projects, belief in myself as a versatile artist and independence to create and deliver interesting projects. Although I love to perform music on my violin and I wish to do as much as possible of that in the future. I can also see myself working with visual material for experimental musical projects. For a visual artist I have a really good understanding of music and I have a creative musical imagination so I think my talents could be used in creating projected visual material and perhaps stage designing for experimental concerts. Since now my video piece *Fantasy on Sarabanda* has gained recognition it might be easier for me to get funding for such projects in the future.

What next? how will I go further with my projects?

I am interested to see how the *Fantasy on Sarabanda* will be taken at the Animation Day in Cannes (and hopefully more festivals). I have applied for some interesting art festivals that I hope my piece will get acceptance to. I am also interested in performing it for children and to investigate how different audience groups react to the piece. It would be very satisfying to reach out to people who are generally more visual in thinking and normally have a hard time connecting with this kind of music but through the visual material find it easier to appreciate the music.

Reanimate, Recycle, Reconstruct

Bach usually wrote pieces for one performance job, a single goal. Then he recycled his pieces and used the material over and over in new compositions.³⁵ I am very interested in recycling the material of my video piece. Especially the visual material, chopping it up and reversing some bits, making a remix and then adding new music to it. That music does not necessarily need to have a connection with Bach but might only contain a faint idea of Bach or even be something completely different. It could even be visual material for other performers. I think I also need to learn that I don't always have to do everything. Focusing on one or two things within one production can often be more effective. Another idea would be to somehow make the visual material interactive to music or movements. That way I, or someone else could maybe be improvising musically and the video material follows. Another idea would be to work with dancers, have a choreographer make a dance piece out of it. There are endless possibilities, different ideas are floating around in my head and it will be fun when the time comes to follow them up and experiment with them.

The other stuff

As for my other projects I am very enthusiastic about promoting and breathing new life into the baroque scene in Iceland with further projects with Brák Baroque Ensemble. I feel like we have many things to explore and many barriers to break in finding new ways to perform and deliver early music.

Experimenting with visual material and choreography I now feel very confident in mixing with other fields of the art and collaborating with other artists. Umbra is already collaborating with dancer/choreographer Saga Sigurðardóttir, Composer Kristín Þóra Haraldsdóttir and writer Gerður Kristný Guðjónsdóttir for a multidisciplinary performance at Reykjavík Art Festival 2016 already mentioned. So the ball is rolling and ideas are popping up and I know now that I have the knowledge and experience. I know now that I am capable of bringing them to life.

³⁵ Jones, Richard D.P., *The Creative Development of Johann Sebastian Bach, Volume II*, New York: Oxford University Press 2013, page 109

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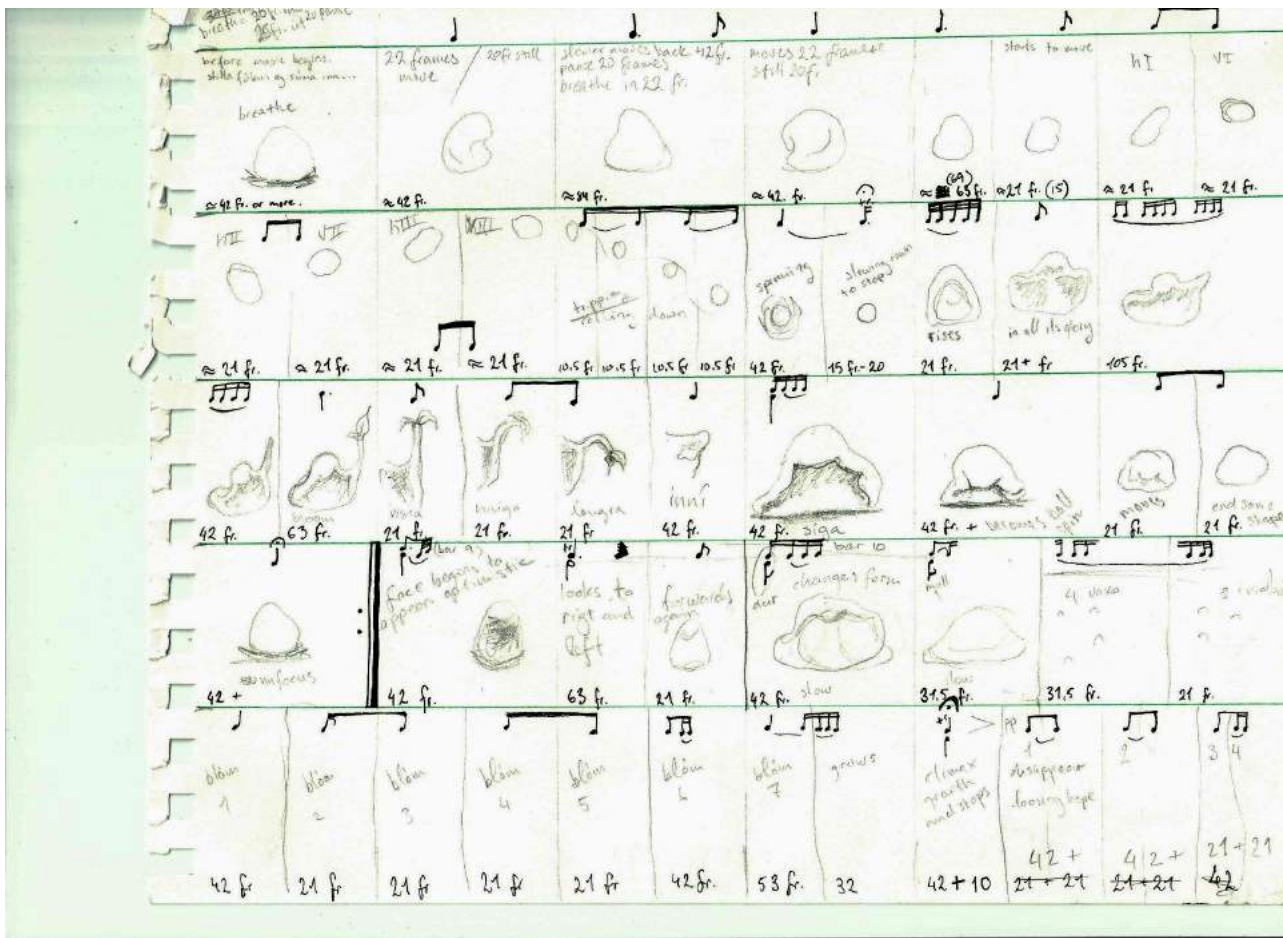
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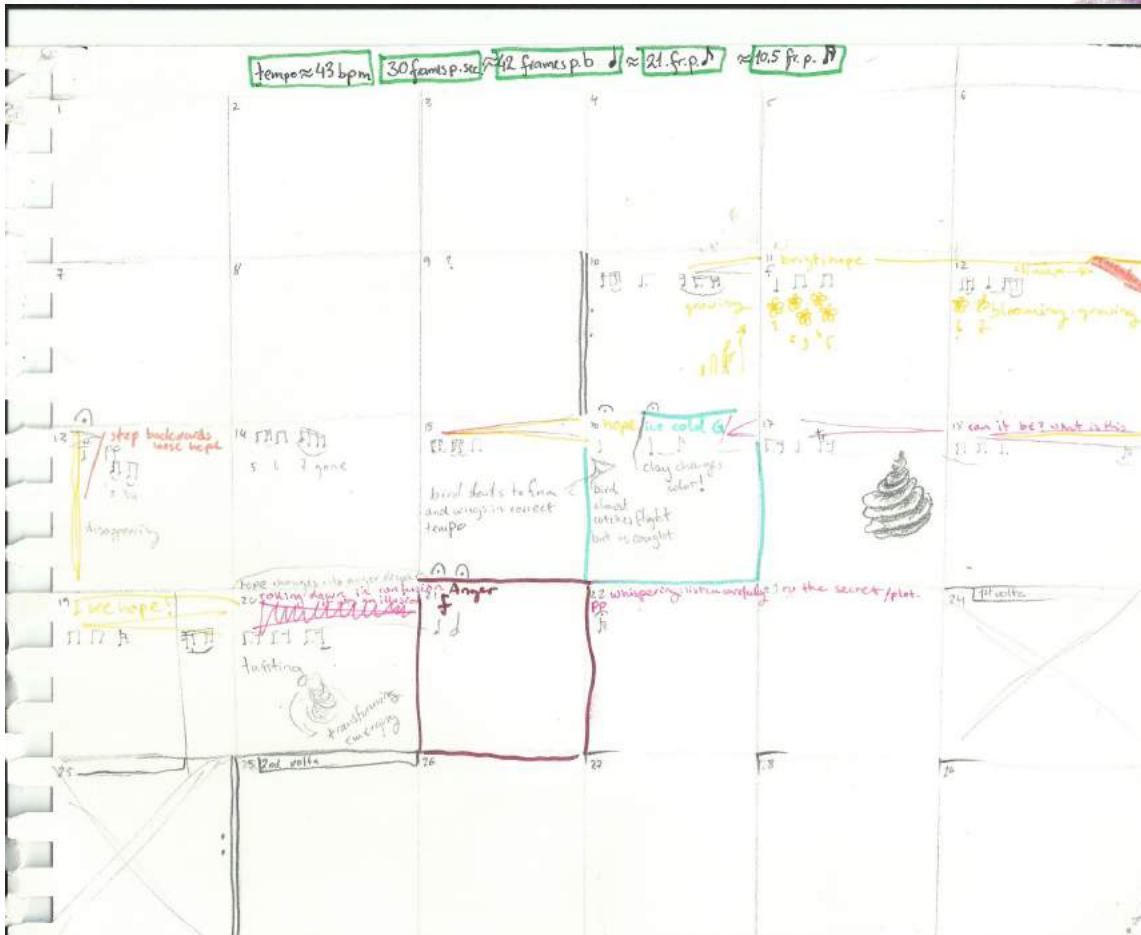
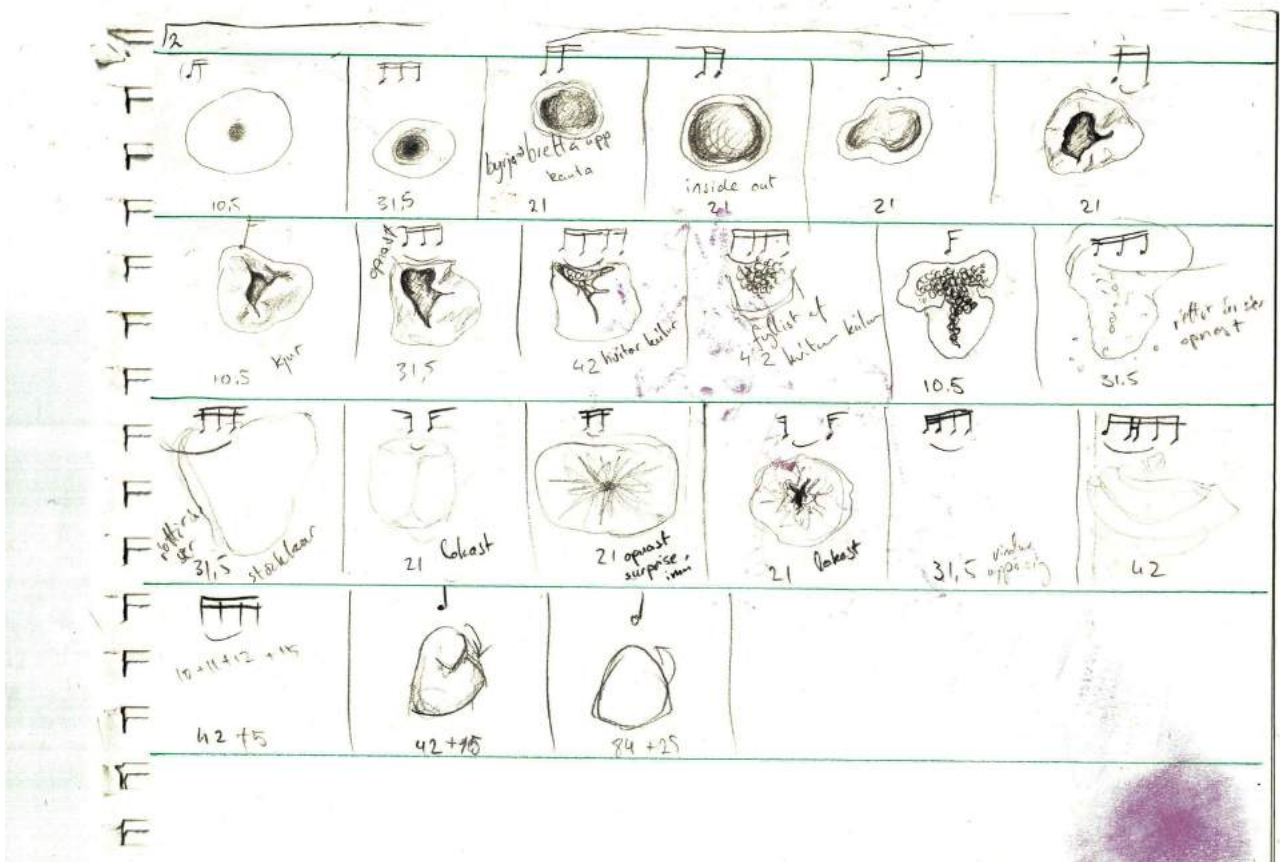
Appendix

My emotional Analysis

Handwritten musical score for a song, featuring lyrics and musical notation. The score is written on a single page with a yellowed background. The lyrics are written in blue ink, and the musical notation is in black ink. The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 5, 9, 12, 16, 19, 22, 25, and 27 marked. The lyrics are written below the musical notation, and some words are written above the notes. The score includes various musical symbols, including treble clefs, key signatures, and time signatures. The lyrics are: "banda us away towards us away walking/crawling away (leave me alone) rolling back facing us. die I'll tell you a story it wasn't always bad there were the good old days when everything was good we tried to hold what is this? but it kept us down tried to go on into the light reaching out but the darkness was always near we ignored it and went on dancing can it be? some hope? confused rolling down, can't do anything about it. back to the dark reality why? the darkness whispering listen carefully very important 1. and so this is how the story goes (acceptance) 2. whatever we may try fate always catches up (this is the story of ? ?) 27".

My storyboard





Stills from the video





Fantasy on Sarabanda official poster

FANTASY ON SARABANDA

A visual fantasy on a Sarabanda by J. S. Bach

A film by Guðbjörg Hlín Guðmundsdóttir



fantasyonsarabanda.com