Music Department

Composition

Reflection on Final Project

Analysis of musical work "The Mouse that ate Fingernails"

Greinargerð til M.Mus.-prófs í tónsmíðum

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Introduction

When it comes to the field "soundtrack", it could mean any kind of musical format which exists to support the main media material such as film, game or literature. Since the common key point is the story, it is thematic to find places for background music, and additionally, expression of events in the plot.
With this common feature, the main thought on this project goes to the audio book format, which could save more time comparison with finding or making film.
Moreover, this audio book format with a dramatic reading of the story allows the performance of the soundtrack to elicit the listener's imagination.
By putting this project into practice, experience on composing a soundtrack and for media is expanded.

Main idea and definition of the project

This final project is focused on the musical expression of a Korean folk tale in the form of a dramatically read audio book.
Main idea of this project starts from the story itself. Listening to the reading of a tale allows the reader to imagine and draw certain images as the story goes on. After the idea to do a dramatic reading, thoughts on making soundtracks with the story follow.
Along each plot, expression of each scene with music becomes a main idea for this project to show what I imagined from this folk tale.
Therefore, this plan can be defined as an imaginary movie generated by individual images with the help of the music.
The main material for this final project is a Korean folk tale. First of all, the story is the center of the whole working process of composing music for that story. To find a way that could possibly be sources for the soundtrack, taking a look into the tale is necessary.

- ### Summarization of the folk tale

This tale is an old story for children, similar to fairy tales in western culture. Like most of tales, it has no specific author and spread by word of mouth. Because of this reason, one tale usually has several versions with different details, i.e. a character who helps a main person, punishment for villains and a solution for the main issues of the story.
The folk tale is called "The Mouse that ate Fingernails". In this story, there is one young man who lives and studies in a temple. (Introduction)
Soon he gets in trouble when he carelessly throws out his clipped fingernails, which a mouse in his room find and eats. As the young man comes back home, he realizes that an imposter who looks exactly like him lives with his family instead of him. Eventually

the young man is kicked out of his own house and has nowhere else to go.
(Development)

Eventually, a monk who also lives in the temple gives the young man a solution after listening to what happened to him. (Turn)

With the monk's advice, the young man returns to his home with a cat. As soon as he arrives home and encounters the imposter, he lets the cat out and the cat attacks the imposter.

Then it is revealed that the doppelganger was the mouse in the young man's room which transformed itself into the young man after eating his fingernails. (Conclusion)
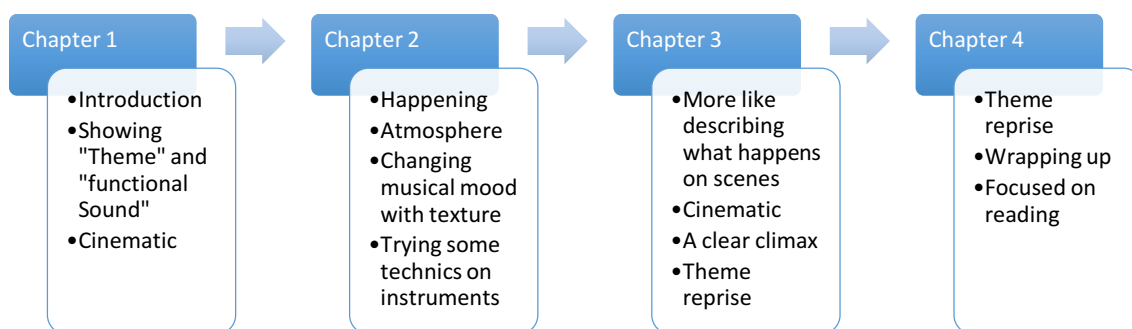
- **Approach to composition**

After looking into the tale, general points which are helpful for composing are the following two factors, the folk tale's Korean cultural aspect and unusual plot development. The first factor, that of the story having Koran cultural roots could be connected to the use of the same cultural, musical inspiration e.g. Korean scales, harmony or even instruments.

However, during the process of my working plan, a conclusion came to mind that It could be unnecessary to bring in cultural materials only because the tale comes from that country. Since such a concept might become cliché, the working plan is to avoid or use a minimum of Korean cultural influences on composing the music.

To further avoid this cliché, the main subject of the composition process is concentration on using the orchestra and making a mysterious mood by melody lines and musical gestures to put the Korean tale in western music form.

The other factor of unexpected or strange things happening in the story might be extended as musical ideas since it is a general structure of tales, no matter where they originally come from. As it was mentioned in the summarization, four steps of the main plot are connected to the composition process.

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4
• Introduction • Showing "Theme" and "functional Sound" • Cinematic	• Happening • Atmosphere • Changing musical mood with texture • Trying some technics on instruments	• More like describing what happens on scenes • Cinematic • A clear climax • Theme reprise	• Theme reprise • Wrapping up • Focused on reading

In this paragraph, general concepts of approach on music are explained. The analysis of the folk tale is divided into four chapters. Each plot, their music, the soundtracks are

composed in two general ways:1) following what actually happens on the story to describe the scenes (chapter 1 and 3) or 2) expressing/emphasizing emotional aspects. (chapter 2 and 4)

In the case of chapter one and four, use of theme to introduce the young man and reprise of it with slight changes shows the beginning and the end of the story by presenting a common musical material: the theme. This outline can be a good guide to build a form "music including plot" form. In these two chapters, another main focus point is providing atmosphere rather than describing scenes.

On the contrary, chapter two and three concentrate on reading what actually happens in the story and showing changes of mood. For instance, in chapter two, as something bad happens to the main character, music changes into deep and dark sounds. As the story gets more serious, the sound also keeps improvising the first phrase by using technics on strings.

Further describing the story has more cinematic gesture in chapter three. To express the chase and attack between the cat and the imposter, rhythmical ideas are mainly used.

With these two ways of approaches, the main goal of this project can be defined as soundtrack for an audio book which includes reading and expression of the story.

Analysis of the music

The whole music piece consists of four chapters. Each chapter has its own atmosphere by following the story. To create a certain mood for those chapters, the working process plan is divided into two directions: building up tonal sounds by using modal method and making texture by composing with atonal sounds.

Making tonal sounds in this piece means creating cinematic theme for a main character who is in the center of the story and leads the tale. By using this theme in the first and the last chapter, the approach gives the rendition a unity on letting the story begin and wrap up.

When it comes to textures and atonal sounds, mainly two composition ideas are considered: polyrhythm and extended technics on string instruments.

Through these two methods, change of plot and its atmosphere are described.

As an additional idea, a short phrase of sound is given as a signal which shows significant change or realization of the main character.

example 1) A short phrase on harp

This phrase, seen in example 1, appears in case of changing atmosphere and realization that something is an important point in the plot. By using this functional phrase, cinematic impression appears on significant events in the story.[1]

The functional phrase is mainly played by harp, glockenspiel and flute. In general, this sound has the same meaning as that of some kind of idea or appearance of another existence, but with a different context. Each example can be found in further analysis. Besides, giving an instrument as representation of each character, it is also additionally used as an idea. e.g. a young man-clarinet, a mouse-flute and trombone, a monk-bassoon. Transformation of the mouse is expressed by changing from flute to trombone. This trade of the instruments indicates the transformation of the mouse to a human being and his evil plan.

- A storyteller

Since this project is to be an audio book, the role of the storyteller has important points for discussion. In this music, the storyteller explains what goes in the plot of the story, not in the music by singing a melody or having a rhythm. To emphasize his function, acting dramatically with his voice while the reading rather than providing musical gestures is the main direction. As the tale gets tense or relaxed, the storyteller uses same tensions and releases to show the process. Though dramatic reading, the fact can be reinforced that this work is an audio book, not a musical.

Analysis of each chapter

1. Chapter 1

The first chapter is focuses on showing the main theme, which gives a general atmosphere of the whole music piece. This chapter is supposed to be a specific melody/harmony guide line for the rest of the story.

example 1) Main melody lines of clarinet and harp.

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[1] Reference: soundtrack of the film "Back to the Future" (1985), Alan Silvestri.

In the beginning, the clarinet and harp play the main melody while the other instruments show harmony and its arrangement. This short sequence with the theme tells about the main character and what he currently does. Through this tonal movement, an introduction of the first chapter can be convincing that nothing strange happens yet.

One day, while studying alone in his room, he saw a mouse.

example 2) The first use of signal sign on harp and glockenspiel.

Example two shows how the signal sign works and what it does. When something unusual or strange things happens, this gesture lets listeners know it has certain meaning which is important in the plot. This musical idea can be explained as an effect rather than melody. In this case, the functional sound shows that an unexpected creature appears, a mouse. The context of this phrase means curiosity or a sudden encounter in a good way until an ominous sign comes.

By introducing the main theme and using the effect, this chapter shows cinematic intro that summarizes the young man's status.

2. Chapter 2

For this part, musical ideas are used mainly for building textures. To express a change in the plot which is turning into another part. Main musical ideas consist of making patterns with string instruments and applying them with other instruments, such as woodwinds and brass.

Giving rhythmic sequences to strings in this chapter can be considered as trying percussive technics such as making use of plectrum, finger board slap and muted strikes.

Both at the beginning and end of this chapter, poly rhythm sequence is used for building texture, mainly with strings.

example 3) A poly rhythm texture with strings, at the beginning of the chapter 2

In this phrase, all strings play different measures simultaneously with increasing dynamics.
On the other hand, a similar poly rhythm movement appears before the chapter is finished by using plectrum on four strings: Violin 1 and 2, viola and violoncello.
This section has no certain pitch since the strings are muted by fingers, but makes other kinds of cluster with scratched sounds.
After this first poly rhythm cluster, a similar form of movement appears on woodwinds.

example 4) A poly rhythm texture with woodwinds, in the middle of the chapter 2

Although it is not a reprise with the exact rhythm as the strings had before, this part for woodwinds has its own structure. For instance, the flute maintains one phrase for 4 bars before its rhythm turns into triplets while the rest of the woodwinds plays bilateral symmetry with 16th notes phrase and half notes phrase. Not like the repetition of triplet, sextuple and septuplet on the strings, the existence of long note helps the movements on the flute.

example 5) Another polyrhythm texture on strings with using plectrum. The contrabass plays ordinary pizzicato to maintain central rhythm.[2]

To express the trouble and an odd situation, an extended technic with plectrum on strings becomes a main idea for the rest of the second chapter.
Five strings are grouped to play different roles while they are in the same rhythmic section. For instance, the contrabass plays pizzicato rhythm to maintain and lead the part while other strings play variations of muted notes with no pitch. This part is an extension of the improvisation from the beginning of the chapter but with another technic to give it a contrast from the same idea.

3. Chapter 3

After the main character gets into serious trouble, a solution to solve the problem appears in this chapter. To put this process to music, three materials are given: a short intro to describe the young man's emotional status with another character who helps him and a main music piece with tonality structure, appearance of a supportive character and a main music with a climax which means thoughts of the young man.
When it comes to the intro, the melody line from the first chapter appears again while the story shows the young man returns to the temple where he stayed in chapter one.

example 6) Comparison of two phrases with the same theme from chapter one (above) and chapter three (below).

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[2] Reference: soundtrack of the film "There Will Be Blood" (2007), Jonny Greenwood.

As the 6th example shows, the theme from the beginning and the reprised one with
different rhythm in this chapter are on oboe. This can be considered in two ways: the
young man returns to the temple, but with different reason.

When the other supportive character, the monk of the temple, talks to the young man,
their conversation can be found on clarinet and bassoon which stands for these two
men. The existence of the monk has already appeared in the first chapter and has the
same role in different melodies: giving advice to the young man. Additionally, the
functional sound phrase also comes together as the monk appears. Since this phrase in
the whole chapter represents changes, an advice comes after its sound.

example 7) A conversation between clarinet and bassoon. The functional sound phrase also comes while the story tells a significant message.

The main music of this chapter has the clearest tonality and climax. For the structure,
two chords work as main harmony: D minor and E major.

example 8) The use of D minor and E major on strings

Rather than making a cadence by using A major chord, bringing E major as a substitutional chord of A gives this phrase an extensional progression. This process could be translated as the young man who tries to think what the monk said could be.

On the climax of the chapter, the chord progression is the same as the previous one. Since the trouble hasn't been solved but the young man realizes what the monk has told him, this cadence with E major chord gives signifies an imperfect resolution and understanding of the way to defeat the mouse.

example 9) The cadence at the end of the chapter with E major chord.
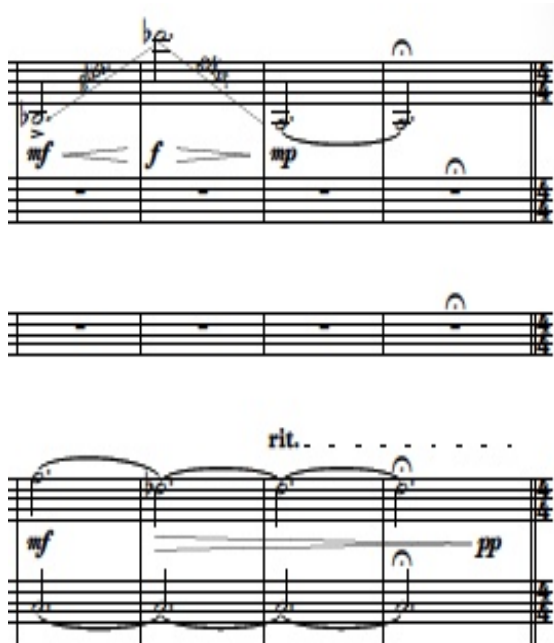
4. Chapter 4

The final chapter has more cinematic sounds to show the process of how the young man acts against the mouse and the image of the mouse being chased and attacked by the cat. Firstly, a rhythm section is played continuously until whole instruments join to become a tutti. This increasing part draws an image of the young man returning home and confronting his enemy.

Secondly, appearance of the cat is expressed by a short phrase on trumpet. As this phrase is played with trombone that representing the transformation of the mouse at the same time, the confrontation between two of them can be told.

example 10) The image of the cat and the transformed mouse on trumpet (above) and trombone (below).

Lastly, the part when the mouse is defeated by the cat other instruments besides of harp play long notes to release tension while the harp makes a gradual glissando. This short gesture works as an arrangement, which means the mouse has died and turned into his former self.

example 11) A glissando on harp

After the problem has been solved, the theme from the first chapter is used again as a reprise. This repetition could let listeners imagine the process of how the whole tale goes: an unusual thing occurs, someone gives a help, the trouble has been defeated and the whole events is finished.
Like the other reprise in the third chapter, this part also has different rhythm and tempo. Although it has been improvised, this attempt at making unified structure by using the same theme in the beginning and at the end wraps up the whole tale.

Earlier Pieces

In my earlier semesters, most of my works were mainly focused on film scoring and making an attempt on composition for atonal music which was based on building certain patterns and using technics of instruments. These two previous study goals are connected to the final project by influencing and experimenting with musical issues of each work.

Film scoring

- **1st semester – Laufey's Theme**
  This work was a theme for a main character of a short film. Making a melody line in tonal composition was an intended goal. During the working process of the movie, extending the rest of the scenes after composing a main theme gave me a clear way to maintain a working plan. This process could be applied to the final project, which is also a kind of soundtrack.
  Reading thoughts and emotions of a certain character, catching what happens in scenes and comprehending a film director's intention were most important issues for this project.

- **3rd semester – Film scoring for a short film**
  For this project, using an electric guitar and audio material were the biggest parts of the composition process in expressing the intention of the short film. Making use of virtual instrument devices, such as pad and keyboard sound, edited recording sound of a viola was attempted on the music.
  Since the main character of the film was a young boy who with autism and sensitive emotions, it took a time to look into and understand the boy's inner side, conflicts with other people and attempts at communication. Because of this complicated emotional characteristic, music was composed contrariwise. Soundtracks have minimal sounds in general, but also include a form of theme for the main character.

Through these film scoring experiences, the importance of reading the contexts of director's intention was learned. Furthermore, working by following story and plot eventually are connected to my final project. Making a certain melody line which is related to theme is also practiced through all these film scoring experiences.

Works for the orchestra and other compositions

- 1st semester – The Wailing
  An orchestra piece which was inspired by a Korean movie with of the same title. By using modes, a main intention of the composition was creating a

certain atmosphere based on the impression that I have after watching the film. Since it wasn't intended to be the soundtrack of the film but spreading and extending my ideas of images captured while watching the film, the main plot of this piece was not exactly related to the story of the film itself. Since the working process was more about transferring impressions from the film into a musical work, the music had no direct relation with describing scenes from the movie. In this piece showing personal impression was my main goal, which could be related to the final project in drawing images through the storytelling.

- **2nd semester – 2 Flows**
  To practice using modes for composition, mainly two mode lines in D were examined in this work. It could be connected to the final work in that most of melody lines are based on modes in D, which is also mainly used in chapter one, three and four.

- **4th semester – A piece for string quartet**
  Inspired by "The Joke", a novel by Milan Kundera, a Czech author. This work consists of three parts for three main characters of the story. Mainly focused on extending variations from the first movement, except for the second part which represents a person who feels inner confusion.
  Instead of an experimental attempt, making a memorable line on the first part with four strings and having unity by reprising the same line on the third part was used as an arrangement.

- **4th semester – Three short duets for alto flute and guitar: Impression of Escher's artwork (2017)**
 Impression of three paintings of Escher was a main idea for this work. To represent the geometry and fractal patterns of his artworks, building certain orders and structures on two instruments were mainly done.
  Using intervals between chord tones, free tempo movement and characteristic structure on the guitar were basic ideas which are related to the images.
  Each duet is around one-minute duration and has the same title as the paintings which gave inspirations: Up and Down, Other World and Day and Night. The following analysis describes how the concept was built and its process of approaching the artwork.

  ### 1. Up and Down
  Since the painting shows up-down reversed image, the first step of this working process was supposed to be giving the instruments two different and similar roles. The flute represents the upper image and the guitar stands for the lower image. To fix the flute as a stable ceiling, movements on the flute did not have a wide range compared to the guitar has on it.
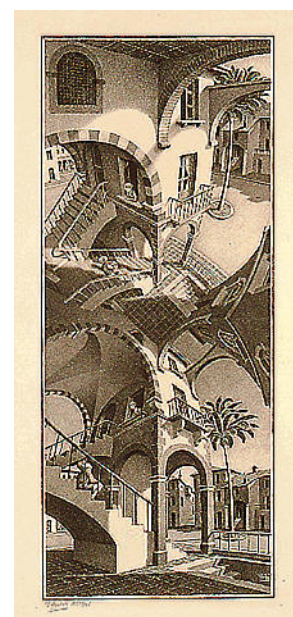
example 12) Two different movements on alto flute and guitar

In this example, notes of the flute move gradually from major 2 to perfect 6-degree range. In this range the flute plays longer notes while the guitar plays more divided phrase by 8th notes.

On the other hand, the phrase on the guitar represents the lower image, which is radically moving in comparison to the flute's. To express this contrary, chromatic sequence, finger board was used. As the same structure on the guitar moves half by half, its sound makes an ascending image that tends to start upper and come back lower.

This musical expression describes the pattern which are made by certain repetition, which could be related to the process of building texture by maintaining rhythm in the final project, for instance, the second chapter.

2. Other World

The main theme of Escher's artwork is mostly concentrated on repeated/fractal images. In this painting, its general concept shows repetitive patterns rather than fractal structure. Additionally, oval system can be found in the background of this painting. To express these two main impressions, the biggest material for the composition was using circle of fifth.

Since the circle of fifth was the basis of the whole piece, tonal sounds could make a familiar atmosphere by changing key every 1-2 bars.
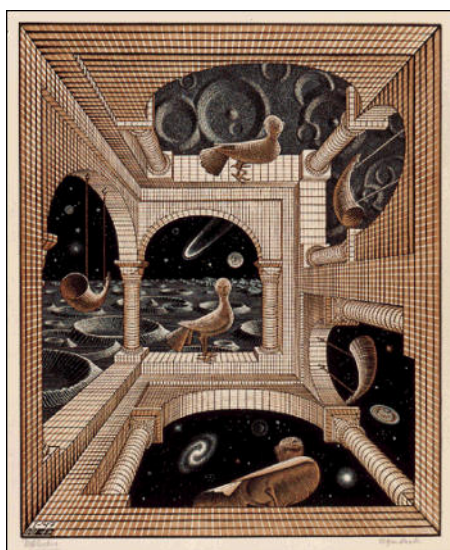
In this piece, the guitar shows stable image by playing chord while the flute plays melody. But to give a unity in the middle of the music, 2 bars represent the same notes at the same time with the same measure. This phrase describes the middle point in the painting where the repetitions come together.
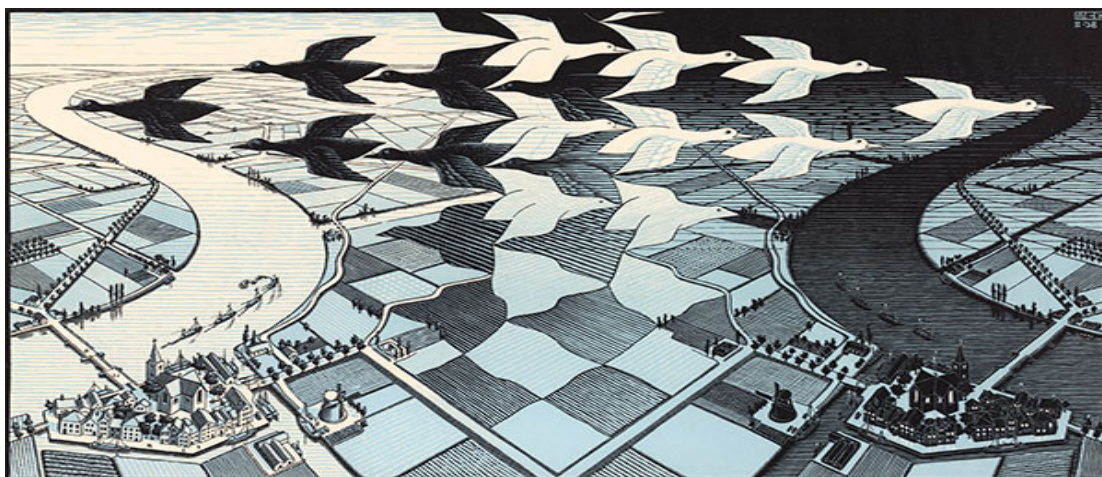
example 13) United phrase from two different lines

3. Day and Night

This artwork shows the most fractal images in the middle of the painting, by merging black and white birds in the middle.

To turn this fractal image into musical sequence, trade of two chord tones between alto flute and guitar represent either side of the birds of day and night as it is seen in the following example.


example 14) Trade triplets between alto flute and guitar

This movement describes the beginning of both sides until two instruments are merged into another rhythm with increasing dynamic, just like the middle point of the painting where the two group of birds become one.

example 15) The merged phrase with increasing dynamics

Lastly, to express the point where the birds are divided, another phrase with free tempo was tried until the music ends.
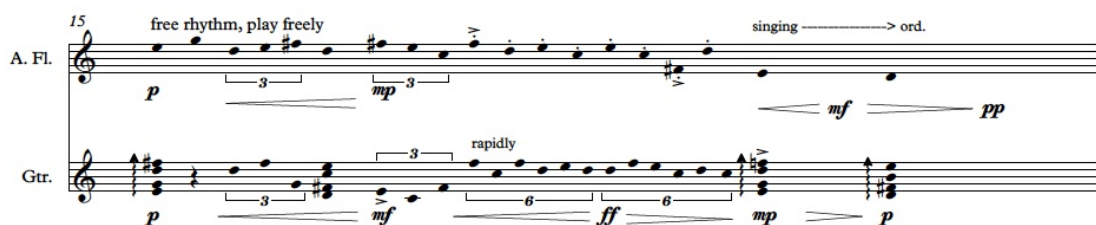
example 16) The last bar in free tempo

Through this working process, describing or drawing certain images with music was experienced before the final project. Since the general and main idea is telling an existent picture for eyes as a material for ears, the final work shares the idea of transfer by making sounds.

Relations and influences from previous works

The final project and other earlier works share two common themes: inspiration for composition from other fields of art and soundtrack for certain forms of art, such as film or tale.
When it comes to inspiration, using experimental technics and creating a motive from certain chords to present the image from another art form like painting or novels is mainly done. As has been explained earlier, these two examples can be found in the earlier Three Duets, 2 Flows and Music Piece for String Quartet.
In the duet pieces, attempt at transforming impressions from the painting from the music influenced the same process of the final work. This relationship can be found in the second and fourth chapter as descriptions of each sentence of the story. The experimental technic as a tool for expression is also practiced on the duet pieces and the other work "2 Flows" before the final project. In this case, using "play freely" articulation in the duets and scordatura on strings in

the other work relate to poly rhythm phrase and col legno tratto phrase in the second chapter of the final project as a continuation of improvising technics for making texture. An example of making a motive for a main character can be found in the two film scoring experiences, especially in "Laufey's Theme". Composing soundtrack is divided into two types: making music from the impression of something or composing music for something. These two directions are eventually come together in the final project, but are put into practice separately. Describing captured images or scenes with personal imaginations appear in the string quartet piece (The Joke) and the orchestra piece (The Wailing). These practices can be discussed as a process of understanding the story and capturing images to build atmospheres as a musical form.

The other type of composing a soundtrack is like making motives. To describe someone's status, feeling or current action in the plot, the main theme of the first chapter works for the story and effective sound tells what happens in each sentence. This consequence appears generally in most film scoring experiences. Consequently, these relationships and influences can be summarized as composing soundtracks with two directions: music from the story and music for the story.

Reflection and Continuation

During the working process for the final project, several subjects of the composition and from the rehearsal come up. Because of the difference between playing by notation program and orchestra, it takes much more time to find proper points for the storyteller and the instruments. For this matter, the functional phrase works as a cue to get in and out to the music. Additionally, tempo in some parts are modified after the discussion with the conductor and the storyteller to make the orchestra sessions more effective.

The other biggest issue is anticipation of actual sound in the concert hall. The plectrum part in the second chapter tends to be a texture. However, not like its reference, it is played by solo strings and this sounds more like an effect in the actual concert hall.

This anticipation matter also appears in dynamics. In whole chapters, expectation of dynamics has different aspect when the score is played by the program and actual players. In case of the notation software, increase and decrease of dynamics aren't gradually expressed. Because of this reason, actual volume in some parts of the work is hard to anticipate.

When it comes to expressional aspect, discussion with the conductor and the players is the most helpful part of the whole working process. Through this communication, example of notation, explanation on technics and alternative for some articulations that appears differently on the program and actual playing are learned.

By finishing this final project, whole results could be connected to continuous composition: film scoring with extended technics and working with inspirations from other artworks or field with bigger scale.