

# The Intercultural Violin in a Conservatory Context

*An Autoethnographic Case Study and Portfolio of Creative Work*

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Master of  
Music (Performance)

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## **Statement of Originality**

I declare that the research presented here is my original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

Ethical approval has been granted for the study presented in this thesis from The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol number 2020333). Participants were required to read and to sign an information document. Informed consent was given individually prior to the collection of data.

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## **Abstract**

This Master of Music (Performance) thesis describes and reflects upon my parallel practical study of Persian-Middle Eastern (incorporating Kurdish style) and Western classical violin over the course of approximately two years. It discusses my learning processes by means of a series of creative performance and recording projects that culminated in a Creative Work Portfolio of nine pieces. The study attempts to evaluate the ways and extent to which this dual approach to violin learning positively impacted my expanding musical competence over the course of the study, towards what has been termed ‘diversified normality’. The thesis sets out my reflections on the creative projects, which involved: i) taking one-on-one lessons with expert teachers in both musical traditions, ii) intensive listening and transcribing, iii) improvisation and ornamentation, iv) leading solo and ensemble rehearsals and recording sessions, and v) soliciting objective evaluative statements on aspects of the recorded outcomes from my expert teachers and analysing these with an intermusical competence tool designed for the study. I attempt to demonstrate how such experiences have enriched my overall performance practice, and ultimately transformed it into an expanded, intercultural one.

## **Creative Work Portfolio Link**

Recordings of the nine Creative Work Portfolio pieces can be found here:

<https://protect-au.mimecast.com/s/Nb59CyojxQTrmKOpjsZgkja?domain=drive.google.com>

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Background to the study

### *First thoughts*

I decided I wanted to learn to play Middle Eastern style violin after finishing my Honours year. At that time I was re-evaluating what attracted me to music and the violin in the first place, as well as the kinds of music that appealed to me. I thought that learning a new music style and system would help me to re-engage with my instrument, and the enjoyment from playing. I have always been fascinated by and drawn to ‘Gypsy’ or Romani violin music, Klezmer styles, and “old school” performers who play with great emotion, character and depth. Although I am of Greek heritage, I have spent most of my life in Australia and have not been influenced much by Greek music. Perhaps being attracted to Eastern European, Mediterranean, and especially Middle Eastern music styles subconsciously reflected a curiosity to explore this other part of my identity.

*Calligraphy No. 5* by Reza Vali was one of the first pieces I had come across, and before I actually embarked on my master’s study I had organised a concert that featured Mohammed Fairouz’s string quartet *The Named Angels*, which also inspired my musical direction. At first, I concentrated on the notion of musical orientalism (musical representations of the exotic or culturally other). I worked on repertoire that included Kreisler’s arrangement of Lotus Land Op. 47 No. 1, by Cyril Scott, Édouard Lalo’s *Symphonie Espagnole* Op. 21, *Orientale* Op. 50 No. 9 by César Cui, W. A. Mozart’s *Violin Concerto No. 5 in A Major* K. 209 (“Turkish”), Manuel De Falla’s *Suite Populaire Espagnol*, and also Ravel’s *Violin Sonata No. 2*. Most of this music was heavily Westernised - the ‘cultural’ aspects were quite caricatured, and I did not end up feeling any great affinity for it. Where the creative process began to excite me was when I started searching for Arabic style violin music on YouTube and then experimenting with some of the pieces I encountered.

Around 2018, I came across the album *Concerto of the Greater Sea* by the Egyptian-Australian *oud* player Joseph Tawadros with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, where he incorporated jazz elements into his cross-over world music style compositions. Not long before I began my Master of Music (Performance) studies at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, The University of



Sydney, I attended one of Tawadros's concerts and later spoke to him by phone about Arabic musical traditions and his performance practice. He referred me to various websites on the technicalities of Arabic playing, the *koron* half tones, the traditional instruments used, violin tuning, and so on.

Some time later, whilst on a gig, I met a violist who mentioned that she was playing for the famous Persian singer Alireza Ghorbani for his upcoming tour of Australia. She recommended I get in touch with Anna McDonald, the lead violinist of the ensemble. The concert was captivating and the violin stood out to me as the most beautiful sound in this performance - I thoroughly enjoyed the expressive and lyrical sound. I contacted Anna McDonald with the intention to take lessons from her on how to play this sort of repertoire in this style. Anna McDonald gradually channeled my interest in Arabic violin styles toward Persian music, and I began to see a correlation between Persian and Baroque lyrical traditions. What attracted me to Persian over Arabic music was its lyricism in contrast to the rougher character of the Arabic style.

In my first lesson with Anna, I played some pieces I had come across and had begun working on from Abdo Dagher's volume, *The New Egyptian-Arabic Sufic Art Music*. The pieces were "Longa Nahawand", "Nida" and "Layali Zaman". One of the first things I learnt from Anna was that I needed to re-tune my violin to Arabic GDGD tuning. Also, she recommended that I transcribe the improvisatory lines by ear. I was encouraged to be told in that first lesson that I had a good ear for this style of music.

I also contacted Nawres Al Freh, an Australian-Arabic violinist living in Queensland, and Zouhair Berrada, another Arabic violinist Anna McDonald recommended I get in touch with. They both gave me several more pieces by Abdo Dagher including "Samai Kurd". Although it was helpful to listen to and try and play in the style, I was still not quite certain of the direction I wanted my practice and hence my research project to take. I was not particularly attracted to some of the repertoire and I found it difficult at first to envision how doing this study could relate to me gaining work as a freelance violinist.

### *Workshops in Crete*

Later in 2018, I attended two successive seminars at the *Labyrinth Musical Workshop* in Houdetsi, Crete, in Greece. The first week's seminar was *An Introduction to Modal Music from a Western Perspective* run by Peppe Frana; the second week's seminar concentrated on violin and cello modal music run by Giorgos Papaioannou and his cellist brother Nikos. The first seminar gave me more of a technical explanation of modal music forms and structures whilst the second focused on sound with less English explanations. The first seminar was easier for me to follow as Peppe spoke English, whereas Giorgos and Nikos struggled a little with the language.

I left the workshops in Crete understanding more about my own playing. I came to realise that I naturally play with a very Western classical sound, which I am used to hearing and performing. Joseph Tawadros had told me this about my playing previously, however, I had not digested the comment or understood what he fully meant. From this observation I knew I needed to play with and listen to more Middle Eastern violinists. I found I preferred the Turkish folk-like pieces rather than the traditional Turkish Ottoman music. The more traditional music had an intense, grating sound that was quite stoic and static whilst the folk pieces had a lightness to them. The more traditional styles grated on me at first; I really craved the sound of Western classical music after the first week!

Another observation I made from the seminars was that I was much better at sight reading than most of the other workshop participants. However, Turkish music relies much more on listening than visual cues. Everyone emphasised the need to memorise the pieces to get a better understanding of them and the modes they were based on. The most useful learning tool I discovered was to continually listen, transcribe and compose in order to expand my knowledge and proficiency, as demonstrated by other participants in the course.

I discovered a number of things at the workshops in Crete. First, it was plainly obvious that basic violin technique was essential, and also that a Western understanding of musical structures was helpful in my attempts to mimic or play the music that was presented there. However, I also came to realise that I had to *unlearn* certain ways of approaching music and *learn new ones*. For example, I noticed that due to the oral-aural nature of modal music systems, learning and

performance, there is less concern over bowing or written precision. I found it quite hard not to become stressed about being *exact* when practicing the music. However, I also discovered that improvisation worked a lot better when I imagined what I wanted to hear rather than simply reproducing certain techniques I had learned. This gave me more freedom in my playing, an aspect I noted in later performances.

### *From interest to research*

From these early thoughts and explorations, I began to focus and consolidate the approach I would take in my masters study, since it involved both a research and creative project component. I decided to adopt an autoethnographic perspective and explore how learning music from a violin culture different from the one in which I was already proficient might positively – or negatively – impact my Western classical violin playing. That is, I wanted to document, over time through a series of Creative Work video and audio recordings, both the challenges and benefits – if any – of learning two styles of violin playing simultaneously.

The two broad aims I developed were: 1) To take lessons in and become fluent and familiar with Persian-Middle Eastern style violin playing while continuing to take lessons in Western classical violin, and so be able to integrate some of the key techniques of P-ME violin into my playing; and 2) To become a more versatile performer and better-informed pedagogue as a result of my newly acquired knowledge and expanded skill set. Overall, I hoped to contribute to the small but growing body of literature on the value of intermusicality and musical code-switching to Western classical musicians by offering a perspective from within the Western music conservatory.

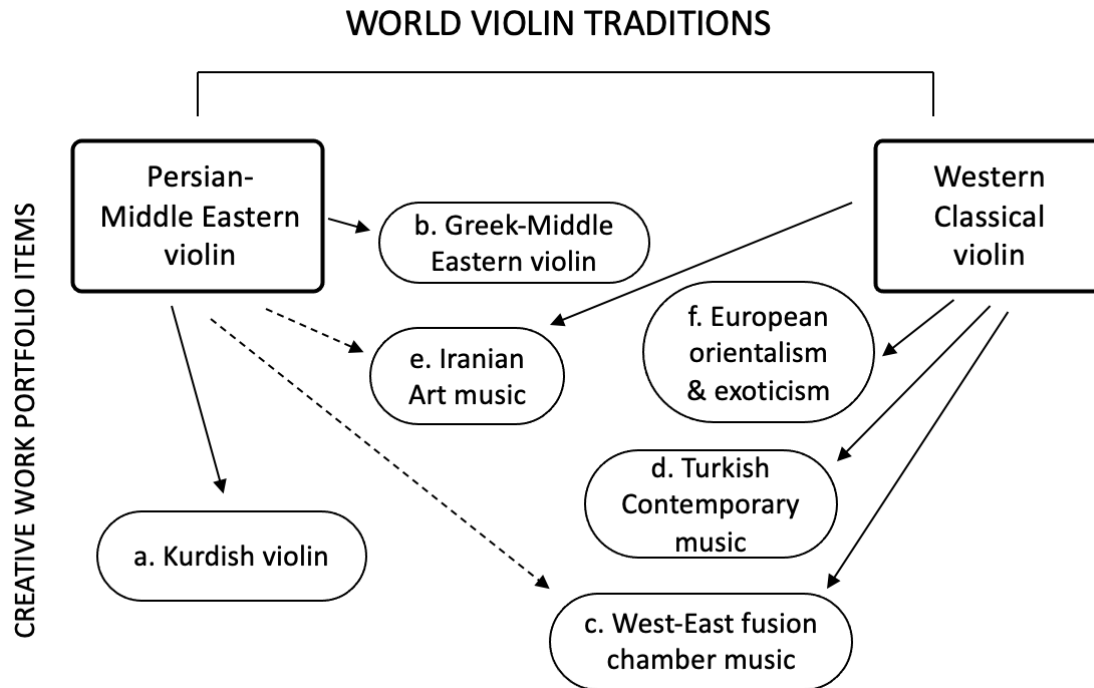
This thesis documents my autoethnographic investigation, in a Western conservatory context, of the notion of bi-musicality that was originally developed by Mantle Hood (1960), or what Stephen Cottrell (2007) refers to as musical code-switching – the ability to move convincingly between different performance styles, traditions or systems. The research it describes was based on my parallel practical study of Persian-Middle Eastern and Western classical violin and attempts to evaluate the ways and extent to which this dual approach to the violin positively impacted my developing competence as a freelance musician. It does so by trying to determine the extent to which my musical competence increased as a result of the study.

Importantly, the study is one that is concerned more with process than product or result. In producing a Creative Work Portfolio (often abbreviated as CWP in this thesis) rather than, say, presenting a public recital, my intention was to provide myself with an opportunity to be able take a step back and have my expert teachers critique my CWP, and hence my learning process. This was one way I hoped I would be able to determine whether or not my intermusical competence was progressing, and if so, to what extent. This also kept me aware of the need to avoid being satisfied with a surface level of accomplishment with regard to the Persian-Middle Eastern violin tradition.

Alison Tokita (2012) proposes three levels of musical competence - aesthetic, performative and generative-productive (163). It is easy, she notes, “to develop bi- or multi-musicality in the first level of musical competence, less in the second, and rare in the third” (Tokita 2012, 163). While such musical code-switching is becoming increasingly more common among notable violinists – see for example Gilles Apap (<http://gillesapap.com/gillesapap/>) and Layale Chaker (<https://layalechaker.com/about>) (see also Daniel Merrill [2015] on the “global fiddle”) – there have been relatively few studies on how such intermusical competence can be deliberately and helpfully cultivated, especially within a Western conservatory context.

## **Focus of the study**

In Figure 1 I have attempted to conceptualise the study’s focus in relation to the two broad violin traditions within which my learning took place and with regard to the repertoire I selected for recording and presentation as the Creative Work Portfolio (CWP) part of the study. It can be seen in the figure that the repertoire involved an extent of music system overlap and interaction, or fusion. This can be more clearly explained by considering the actual repertoire items that form the CWP. These are described in some detail in Chapter 4. Interestingly, as the diagram implies, in my case the Western classical tradition incorporates orientalist pieces by European composers as well as Western classical style works by composers of Middle Eastern or related heritage.



**Figure 1.** Conceptualisation of the study focus: Instrument traditions and related repertoire implying music system overlap and interaction

At this point, for purposes of clarity, it is helpful to link the Figure 1 style labels with the actual repertoire items, as follows:

- a. “Abasi Kamandi”; “Khak”; “Raghs e Atash”; “Kevoke”
- b. “Olasonic”
- c. “The Forgotten Athletes of Persia”
- d. *Sonata* by Fazil Say
- e. *Calligraphy No. 5* by Reza Vali
- f. *Zigeunerweisen* by Pablo de Sarasate

As will be seen, the study repertoire included more than these nine pieces, however this list of CWP pieces is sufficient to explain the violin traditions indicated in Figure 1.

## **Chapter overview**

This first chapter has introduced the study and outlined its conceptual focus. Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review and the background research into the underlying themes which prevail in my thesis, or which were a source of inspiration and guidance. Chapter 3 outlines my methodology and the way I went about transcribing the musical pieces that appear in my Creative Work Portfolio (CWP). Chapter 4 sets out in detail the various items of music I explored over the duration of the study. It provides program notes and learning process reflections on each piece. Those pieces that comprise my CWP are discussed in more detail than the rest of my repertoire. In Chapter 5 I apply an intermusical competence tool to the solicited feedback commentary I received from my two expert violin teachers. My aim here was to attempt to evaluate, with a measure of objectivity, any learning gains with respect to intermusical competence that I may have made over the course of the study. Chapter 6 is a brief reflection on the entire research process and what I learned from it.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

I have grouped the literature reviewed for this study according to the following categories: 1) definitions of bi-musicality, intercultural musicality and code switching, 2) applications of intercultural musicality and code-switching, and 3) transcription as an aural learning method. Under the first of these categories I include three key articles that deal with definitions and others that apply the concept of bi-musicality in various ways that go beyond the original understandings of the term. The literature discussed in the second section relates to the ways in which the violin has been incorporated into musical cultures other than Western art music, including a range of folk and classical traditions from around the world. The third section touches on literature that explores the benefits of musical transcription and aural learning. The idea of expanding one's aural perception and tonal memory relates back to bi-musicality, and thus it concludes the literature cycle relevant to my study.

### **Bi-musicality, intercultural musicality and code-switching**

#### *What is bi-musicality?*

Bi-musicality is a term most commonly associated with the American ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood (1960), who became interested in the “problems that confront the student who is learning a foreign music” (55) in order to determine “realistic goals to which the student might aspire” (55). For Hood, the aim of learning to perform in an unfamiliar music tradition was to sharpen one's aural perception – to foster a “more democratic approach to the world of sound” (56) – as well as to develop tonal memory and extend one's musical memorisation skills. In order to achieve these goals and to overcome aural prejudices, intense imitative and rote learning processes are necessary.

I was able to identify with Hood's point that “Persian music requires a good imitative ear to register the traditional spirit of its free meter” (57). Hood asks how far the Western musician can go along the road of learning an unfamiliar musical system, and he answers: “Just as far as his objectives take him” (58). I found this helpful since it required me to reflect on and make decisions regarding my true objective in the simultaneous study of two violin traditions. While

engaged in this study, my aim was to pursue my interest in alternative ways of playing the violin, especially those related to the Persian-Middle Eastern violin style, and incorporate these into creative performance expressions that require me to think more freely as a player, and that encourage me to become a more improvisational musician.

In a 2001 article, John Baily argued that Hood's notion of bi-musicality "should be a crucial part" of ethnomusicological research methodology "because of the potential insights it provides into musical structure" (2001, 86). Although my study is not ethnomusicological, I too am acquiring performing skills in order to increase my musical understanding and ability to play with musicians fluent in styles other than Western art music. Playing with musicians, some of whom have a Persian background, has begun to increase my social and cultural understanding.

Regarding the notion of bi-musicality, Baily raises the question of how far the 'distance' between kinds of music need to be in order for the term to be truly applicable (2001, 86). Mantle Hood, he explains, was really discussing the idea of a more broad-based musicianship, and this too relates to my own goal, which is to expand my musical understanding and skills without expecting that I will become an expert in Persian-Middle Eastern violin.

#### *What is intercultural musicality?*

In a 2005 article on intercultural music education John O'Flynn's discusses the concept of intermusicality in which, in our present "age of accelerated globalization" we are becoming increasingly more likely to encounter "crossover ideas and genres" (O'Flynn 2005, 200). O'Flynn is referring to a situation where within a single cultural setting multiple musical styles, traditions, modes of learning and transmission and so on overlap and intersect. It is no longer possible to think of musical cultures to exist as distinct bounded entities but rather as involving shared practices, style elements, instruments, and so on. In my own musical education as a Western classical violinist I have certainly encountered contrasting music systems, forms and styles that involve the violin in alternative ways of making music. In fact, it is this experience that has led me to conduct the study on which this thesis is based.



O’Flynn recommends that music instructors and educators foster “intermusical links between [various] modes and activities” occurring within a musical culture, broadly conceived. As an example, he suggests “listening to recordings [which is] widely used as a self-directed learning method across a range of musical styles [...] as an alternative to notational modes of analysis in western classical and other styles” (O’Flynn 2005, 200). This is precisely the approach I have taken, which has involved taking lessons from two different teachers, and contrasting ways of learning, from notation and through listening and transcribing. As O’Flynn recommends, I have attempted to integrate the kinds of learning I have experienced in order to expand my own practice as a musician, into an intermusical or intercultural practice (O’Flynn 2005, 200).

### *‘Diversified normality’*

A decade after O’Flynn’s article comes Carson and Westvall’s article on ‘Intercultural Approaches and Diversified Normality in Music Teacher Education’ (2016). Like O’Flynn, Charles Carson and Maria Westvall point to the ‘normality’ of culturally diverse societies in the West, and they point to the possibilities for “more interactive and intercultural processes, where meetings between people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds take place, and where a kind of cultural hybridity is possible (Carson and Westvall 2016, 40). Intercultural dialogues, “allow for richer modes of interaction”, they propose, and since beginning the present study I have certainly found this to be the case (Carson and Westvall 2016, 41). They argue for ‘diversified normality’ - a kind of expanding musicianship beyond the currently known to incorporate ideas from parallel musical cultures - in order to break down barriers or dissolve distinctions between us and them, self and other (Carson and Westvall 2016, 47). Again, this notion of diversified normality is applicable in the case of my own violin study in relation to this thesis, as I have attempted to incorporate ideas, elements and repertoire from Persian-Middle Eastern violin practice into my own broadening approach to the violin.

### *What is code-switching in music?*

In a 1979 paper, Mark Slobin explored how the sociolinguistic concept of code-switching – between languages, dialects, and speech registers for example – applied to the use of different styles of music in a performance or recording. Slobin posited that the idea of a linguistic code was synonymous with a musical style since both involved “sets of consistent rules” (1979, 3).

However, he also notes the differences and setbacks of comparing linguistics to music as most ethnographers have a limited understanding of linguistic codes. He explains that the cross correlation between the two modes of communication have been problematic. His article therefore aims to bridge the gaps and explore the ideas between linguistic and musical communication.

The French violinist Gilles Apap provided a rather straightforward example of intercultural musical code switching when he included elements of Klezmer, Gypsy, Bluegrass, Balkan and jazz music styles in his cadenza to the Mozart Violin Concerto in G Major K. 216 in a much discussed performance from 1999.<sup>1</sup> This added a richness and vibrancy to a popular and widely played Western classical piece. It also served as a kind of commentary on where music was headed.

Slobin's reference to the "ethnic component" (1979, 9) in musical code switching is somewhat relevant to my study as in all my transcriptions, arrangements and especially performances of Middle Eastern music, I have brought with it, not always intentionally, a Western art music sound. Even so, through close analysis and detailed listening I hope to convincingly communicate Middle Eastern style features. I feel like this cross pollination or fusion of sound worlds would speak well to an audience with a Middle Eastern cultural background who are familiar with Western musical sounds and performance practices.

## **Applications of bi-musicality and code switching**

### *Among Western freelance musicians*

Stephen Cottrell's 2007 article 'Local Bimusicality Among London's Freelance Musicians' highlights the contemporary demand for bi-musicality in today's freelance musical culture and gives positive insight into the effects that learning Middle Eastern music could have for my career. In the article, Cottrell relates the original writings by Slobin, Bailey and Hood back to his own experience as a freelance saxophonist working in London. The article offers a more

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<sup>1</sup> Apap's performance can be seen and heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7p2rUuE4vnk>.

contemporary perspective on the need for musicians to be able to code-switch in order to make a living in the freelance musician scene today.

Sometimes I do pop gigs, sometimes I need to improvise, sometimes I have to sight read contemporary music and sometimes I need to be able to play classical music. I need to be able to understand the result a music director desires to be able to respond appropriately on each job and get along with fellow musicians and entertain audiences today in new exciting and interesting ways. As Cottrell states, the modern musician needs to be a “sonic chameleon” to survive and thrive in the freelance scene today (Cottrell 2007, 96).

### *In music education*

In the article, ‘Bi-musicality and dialogical musicality: Influences of Javanese gamelan participation on Western instrumental learning’ (2014), Elizabeth Haddon examines the benefits gained from learning Indonesian gamelan in conjunction with formal Western classical music training. She found that participation in Javanese gamelan “can benefit aspects of Western instrumental/vocal learning including musicianship, attitudes and approaches to learning” (2014, 233). Participants in her study spoke of “transferable values” relating to both actual musical practice and conceptualisation (2014, 233).

Haddon’s research suggested that learning Indonesian gamelan can improve a student’s tolerance of pitch. This highlights the limitations that can be displayed from Western classical tonal range. By learning a new musical form, Haddon became more open to sounds other than merely those of the Western classical system. This reminded me of a transcription I was making in which I thought the notes were lower or sounded different to what I had actually played on my violin. Even though it was technically the same note, it did not sound quite the same. This pointed to the differences in sound worlds between different music traditions.

Concentrating on musical ‘code-switchers’, people who are adept at navigating multiple musical worlds, in a 2018 article Isbell and Stanley argue that “code-switching can be applied as a way to better understand the potential for advanced musicianship and increased success” in tertiary

music study (Isbell and Stanley 2018, 3). My aims in this study partially aligned with what one of the participants in their research discovered. By learning to play Bluegrass fiddle, she was able to free up her playing when performing classical music and that it “alleviated tension and long-standing injuries,” “enhanced expressivity” in her playing, and assisted in the development of her musical ear (Isbell and Stanley 2018, 9).

## **Intercultural musicality and transcultural ensembles**

Katja Heldt’s (2018) article, ‘Transcultural Music-Making in Contemporary Music Ensembles: Five Approaches in Germany, the Netherlands, Uzbekistan and Turkey’, examines the ways in which chamber ensemble groups utilise their musician’s cultural backgrounds to create new musical fusions. For the Windstreken Ensemble from Leiden in the Netherlands, incorporating improvisation into their music gives the players ‘space to participate in their own musical language’ (Heldt 2018, 47). Some musicians rely on reading scores whilst others are ear trained and write out only part of their ideas leaving room for new ideas to take shape naturally when performing in the group. Similarly, in “Olasonic” in my CWP (see Chapter 4), each ensemble member began with their own improvisation based on the original written melody, which brought a certain flavour and freshness to the performance.

In contrast, she reports on the Asian Art Ensemble, which fuses music from China, Japan and Korea to ‘unify the sonic worlds from three diverse Asian traditions and Western contemporary music’ (Heldt 2018, 47). Although representing different musical traditions, each member values ‘musical improvisations, mutual listenings, understandings of different rhythmical structures and tuning possibilities of their instruments’ (Heldt 2018, 48). Like the Windstreken Ensemble, each group member aims to move beyond the boundaries that come with the traditions of their individual musical cultures to create new creative ideas about music.

The Atlas Ensemble discussed by Heldt serves a more political-cultural function than only a sonic one. The ensemble explores issues associated with globalisation such as the ‘risk of the abolition of traditions towards a universal culture’ and the danger that ‘everything becomes the same’ under the concept of ‘globalisation’ (Heldt 2018, 50). The group also notes that cultural

exchanges can ‘respect and protect musical traditions and enable processes of hybridisation’ and these differences and commonalities give the group its ‘creative goldmine’ (Heldt 2018, 50). In the range of music included in my CWP I have fused elements of Persian, Kurdish, Greek, and Western classical music forms. A Persian musician may well look down on my lack of experience and understanding of the art form on a micro level, however someone who is less familiar with the tradition might look at it in a more positive light, one that might eventually prompt them to explore the tradition in greater depth.

### **Intercultural thesis studies**

Chloe Chung’s 2018 master’s thesis, ‘Intercultural Musicking: A Study of the *Dizi* Flute from a Western Perspective’ is relevant to my study in that it involved learning in the music conservatory two parallel instruments and music systems (Chung 2018). Although exploring our instrument’s sound world from an alternative cultural perspective, both Chung and I begin from a Western musical perspective (she originally trained as a classical flautist). Chung learned from two separate *dizi* Chinese flute teachers with very different approaches. The approach of her first Sydney-based teacher, Chai, was more in keeping with the Mongolian ‘hard’ approach whilst Dong Qiuming is more delicate in his *dizi* playing style. In her thesis, Chloe deliberates on how learning the *dizi* flute can enhance her work flow and employability in the Sydney freelance scene. Similarly, I hope to expand my musicianship capabilities and employment opportunities by engaging in this bi-cultural learning process.

Teresa Vinci’s (2019) master’s thesis, ‘Performance Practice in Hungarian Folk Music and its Relationship to the *Style Hongrois*’ in some ways parallels the present study. There are some similarities between this study and my own: the original motivation (an interest in violin styles beyond Western art music), methodology (violin lessons and an immersive research trip - in my case a formational overseas workshop experience). Vinci also studies Sarasate’s *Zigeunerweisen* and explores whether learning Hungarian folk music can inform a more authentic interpretation of the ‘Hongrois’ aspects of the piece. Vinci immersed herself in the traditional Roma music and through joining a Roma band. In my case, I joined a Greek Rebetika ensemble which has helped me become more familiar and comfortable playing within the style. Vinci focuses on the violinist

Hubay in order to delve into the musical style ‘Hongrois’. For me, violinist and composer Halo Gharib was a catalyst into the Kurdish violin world.

Kerry Watson’s creative practice PhD study, ‘Processes and Concepts in Present Day Transcultural Violin Performance practice’ (Watson 2013), examines the ways in which the violin is used in Indonesian “hybrid” music and traditional Irish music and is a symbol of a transcultural identity. Although there are many different styles and forms of Celtic music, the violin, or fiddle, has historically taken a prominent role in the dissemination of the style. However, an Irish fiddler’s technique and sound world differs greatly to that of a classical conservatory trained musician. The Celtic sound is lighter, variations and differences in bow strokes are encouraged, and a sense of excitement, playfulness and a dance-like quality prevails in the music.

According to Watson, Western notation ultimately lacks the ability to accurately preserve an original instrumental sound. Folk aspects of Indonesian and Celtic music traditions also involve a social element, being transmitted by ear and performed in non formal gatherings. By transcribing music and situating the music in a Western, freelance context, the music soon lacks the ‘subtlety and expression of a vital experience which is essentially unwritten in nature’ (42). Watson’s work provided me with insights into transcription as a method of learning. It sets out some of the problems associated with notation that I needed to keep in mind as I expanded my repertoire through the transcription process. This was particularly apt when I was adapting a piece of music from one instrument to another. In my case this involved transcribing *kamancheh* music to suit the violin.

Obeida Amer Madi’s (2011) master’s thesis ‘The violin in the Arab Musical Tradition: History and GDgd Tuning’ affords insight into the history of Arabic music and why the violin is tuned the way it is in Middle Eastern music. Madi touches on Persian musical history, how ‘music is associated with poetry and words’ (Madi 2011, 3), and the importance of violin or string sounds within the musical culture. Madi’s study puts in perspective and practice what I have learned with my teacher Anna McDonald during the course of the present research. It discusses the technical demands of Arabic violin playing in contrast to the virtuosic nature of the Western

classical tradition. Madi explains that Arabic music is less about virtuosic passages and more about ‘embellishing the given lines with ornaments, slides, trills, wide vibrato, and double stops, often using an open string drone’ (Madi 2011, 16).

Madi predominantly focuses on the tuning of Arabic violin. The lower sounds of the ‘GDgd’ tuning is ‘warm, round majestic, tuneful and intimate’ and the looseness of the upper two strings in comparison to Western classical tuning make ‘embellishments and glissandi easier to execute and more resonant’ (2011, 39). Such ideas have been helpful to me in my quest to discover whether learning this type of music can enhance my violin playing. Clearly, in terms of sound quality, it surely can. The thesis concludes by stating that a ‘better understanding of being a classically trained/educated violinist performing Arab music needs to be developed and further investigated’, with which I concur (Madi 2011, 40).

Rasheed Abubakir’s (2015) DMA thesis “Bringing Kurdish Music to the West” was most useful to my studies as it expands upon and provides insight into the two famous Kurdish-Western violin music composers, Dilshad Said and Brahim Shexo, who draw upon their Kurdish musical heritage in their Western style compositions. Of the two composers I feel a greater affinity for the music of Said because of his strong melodies. Said borrows primarily from folk song whilst Shexo draws on Kurdish elements in less authentic ways. Shexo composes in a Kurdish ‘feelings based way’ and is constantly ‘inspired by everyday life’ rather than relying on a more technical based compositional method (Abubakir 2015, 7).

The thesis provided me with a greater understanding of “Kevoke”, one of the pieces I transcribed and performed as part of my CWP. “Kevoke” belongs to a set of several violin pieces written by Dilsad Said called *Variations on Kurdish Melodies* (1995) which I find particularly attractive. Abubakir analyses the harmonic structure of the works involved in the series. His writing gave me more confidence regarding the inclusion of “Kevoke” in my CWP as information about such music in English is quite limited. It helped me to understand that it is a well-respected work within the Kurdish violin repertoire. Overall, Abubakir’s thesis has been invaluable in providing me with rich detail regarding aspects of Kurdish musical culture.

Alan Kamil Majeed's master's thesis, 'A Method for Teaching and Transcribing Middle Eastern Music' (2019) is also relevant to my research study. In the thesis Majeed outlines a pedagogical approach for teaching Middle Eastern styles of violin playing. He notes that up until now there has been 'no well established method for teaching the Middle Eastern styles of violin' (Majeed 2019, 4), and it has been useful to me in my exploration of the music. He outlines stylistic nuances and differences between the diverse types of Middle Eastern violin music, which is helpful to a musician beginning to explore the various approaches to the violin in the region. Kurdish and Persian violin music are quite similar to each other as there is an emphasis on complex left hand technique with a light bow sound generally played in the upper half of the bow, and most repeated notes are ornamented by an upper note. There is also a slight difference in the half-tone sound between the two styles. The thesis corroborated what I was learning from my Persian-Middle Eastern violin teacher, Anna McDonald.

Majeed refers to notable violinists including Dilsad Said and Mojtiba Mirzadeh, players whose music I had transcribed. A problem with learning pieces based on listening, he explains, is that everyone hears things differently depending on their musical understanding and background knowledge in music. As part of his experiment testing with his thesis, Majid gives a Swedish fiddler and a classically trained violinist the same Middle Eastern piece to learn, with and without ornamentation. Both players experienced confusion when learning the piece without any kind of score. Majeed then points out the limitations of using a score, since such music is near impossible to notate accurately and can only be mastered by 'listening to the music many times to get the feeling of it' (Majeed 2019, ). From this experiment he concludes that written out ornamental exercises can aid a player to gradually learn to fuse the written world and the aural realm.

In his second experiment, Majeed expands upon this idea and thinks more widely about incorporating a backing track, drones and different rhythmic ostinato patterns under the violinist's melody lines to improve participant's understanding of the music (Majeed 2019, 40). Challenges to learning the style include learning the correct vibrato, acciaccaturas, quarter tones, glissandos and so on. Majeed notes that whenever a student met with one of these difficulties within the genre, they defaulted to their own playing style, thus 'missing out some important



features of the style'. This definitely resonates with my experience, and it hampered my ability to absorb new musical ideas and nuances. Majeed's idea of writing out several instrument-based exercises to help vary one's sound is very useful when learning Middle Eastern violin music as it potentially offers the student a way to overcome old habits.

Michael DiBarry's DMA thesis, 'Microtonal Violin Pedagogy: Mastering the Neutral Second through Persian Dastgāhhā' (DiBarry 2020) explores Persian tuning systems from a Western perspective and aims to enhance learning strategies by applying a Western pedagogical framework to the task. The thesis begins by outlining the limitations of the Western classical tuning system and its 'scale concept' and how this can impede one's learning of the Persian music system. In contrast, the Persian classical modes are made up of tetra chords and are lineal. Pieces modulate according to note groupings rather than harmonically. The thesis is written from a Western perspective and has been helpful to me in my study as it outlines the foundation of the Persian tuning system in a way that is easier to comprehend than some sources.

DiBarry's research highlights the limitations in Western pedagogy with regard to learning fingerings for microtonal intervals. Such systems have been developed for woodwind instruments but leave other instrumentalists to 'invent their own techniques' (DiBarry 2020, 2). DiBarry demonstrates how to tighten the level of pedagogy available for learning Middle Eastern music styles. His thesis also highlights the importance of a well trained ear by incorporating singing techniques into practice as this can improve one's ability to auralise through 'pitch matching, pitch memory and solmization' (DiBarry 2020, 6). Like Majeed, DiBarry makes it clear that learning through listening without systematic explanation is simply inadequate (DiBarry 2020, 6).

## **Transcription as a Learning Method**

Durrell Jules' master's thesis, 'Popular Music and Transcription: Developing New Approaches for the Percussion Ensemble' (2016), explores the positive effects that music transcription can have on music percussion ensemble learning. The thesis relates to my study to the extent that it emphasises the potential benefits of the regular practice of transcription for music learning. Transcription improves one's memorisation skills, listening abilities, as well as the analytical

breakdown of music, and it can help create a sense of individuality in students' performances of their transcriptions.

Jules states that by requiring students to aurally work out and transcribe what they hear rather than following specific instructions that are laid out for them, their 'performances seemed to have a sense of vitality' (Jules 2016, 6). Moreover, by getting students to problem-solve for themselves they improve radically, which promotes the idea that 'students need to fail to get better' (Jules 2016, 6). Through transcribing Middle Eastern music I have noticed that my engagement with the music at the level of detail has increased, in comparison to if I merely play what someone else has notated. This personal interaction with the music as it is heard enhances my concentration and connection to it.

Jules concentrates on improvisations, most notably those of jazz musicians, and how transcribing improvisations becomes a method of analysis for a musical style. Here, transcription becomes a 'comprehensive way of learning from the inside out' (Jules 2016, 18). In a similar way, by working and writing out Persian-Middle Eastern music, I have been more easily able to perceive the parallel musical functions that were sometimes repeated in various compositions - such as drone notes and offbeat rhythms - that became a technical aspect which gave the music its drive. For Jules, by transcribing, students are able to 'learn the nuts and bolts of a work' (Jules 2016, 18). His thesis also emphasises what I had already felt, that transcription aids memory retention and is therefore a practice aid.

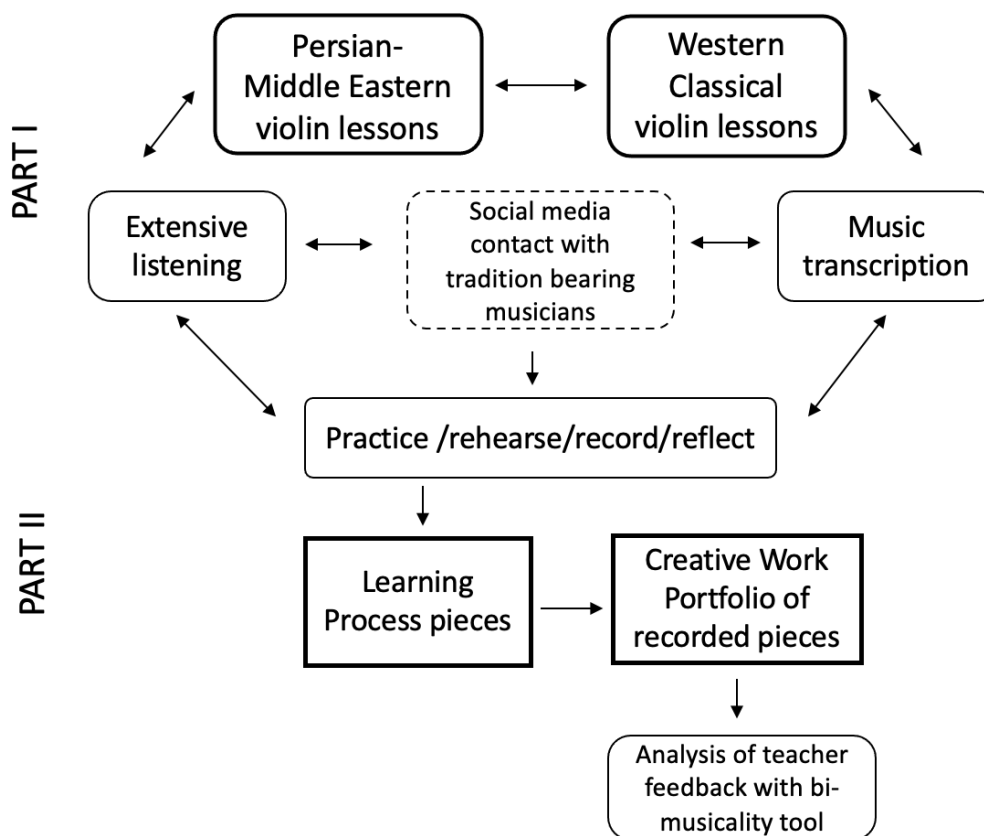
Sarah Maslen's 2019 article, 'Playing with Imagined Others: Developing a Musical Ear in Conversation with Recordings', was also useful for understanding the benefits of transcribing music in the context of my research. In the paper, she provides several examples of types of 'otherness-es' we relate to when finding ourselves or our musical voice in performance. She refers to music students relying on listening to recordings of the works they are practicing as an internal reference point to the 'mastery' or goal of what they are trying to achieve (Maslen 2019, 420). Maslen also refers to a music teacher who has a high regard for singing through the melody in the head before playing it, since 'if the student isn't hearing themselves in their head before playing, the music doesn't flow and it doesn't make sense' (Maslen 2019, 420).

Maslen also highlights the benefits of transcription as it ‘extends what is hearable’ and what might have otherwise been neglected aurally from one who had practiced the piece by just playing through or along with a recording or other musicians (Maslen 2019, 422). By transcribing, one is forced to pay more attention to articulation, slurs and phrasing. Transcription also refers to an imagined other as is a practice technique generally done in isolation, not around a teacher, which means one is criticising or analysing their flaws in relation to an imagined other. This interaction or internal criticism is essential as ‘one needs to hear the gap’ between right and wrong ‘in order to improve (Maslen 2019, 422). This theme of contrasting pairs between what is right and wrong within a musician’s imagination is the main theme of the article as it is the only factor that tells them of their falling short of the ‘imagined’.

Maslen’s final theme, which also relates to my work, is playing along with recordings in practice, in order to highlight the gap between the self and the other (in Maslen’s terms). Although this relates more to self-trained musicians, there is an interaction between what is being played, what the student is aiming to achieve, and the gap between what they can already play, versus what needs to be achieved. By addressing this gap a player is able to improve, and once the technique is mastered it can be used in another musical context as another conversation with the ‘imagined other’. I have found this to be true in my practice, whereby mastering techniques on my instrument I otherwise would not have been able to play has improved my technique and has let me apply it in other musical contexts. In musical practice and performance there is always a conversation with the other going on.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The study comprised two main parts. The first part involved taking lessons from expert pedagogues in two contrasting musical traditions, Western classical violin and Persian-Middle Eastern violin, and practicing related repertoire selections. That is, I continued to take classical violin lessons, which was the tradition of my original musical training, at the same time as I began lessons with a Persian-Middle Eastern violin teacher. The second part of the study involved a repertoire focus and the development of a Creative Work Portfolio (CWP). I developed a repertoire pool of “learning process” pieces, which entailed transcription and ensemble arrangement, and out of this I selected the CWP pieces. For the CWP, I rehearsed and directed small ensembles and video and audio recorded the performances.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual diagram of the study’s methodological procedures and outcome (after Vinci 2019, p.27)

In between these two parts of the project, I engaged in extensive, focused listening and undertook music transcription tasks. The listening and transcription activities were related to my study of Persian-Middle Eastern violin music, since this was the tradition with which I was least familiar and so had the most ground to cover. Throughout this aspect of the study I used YouTube extensively, which gave me access to repertoire that appealed to me and which was related to my growing interest in Kurdish violin playing in particular. On occasion I reached out via social media to some of the violinists I encountered in YouTube and some responded with repertoire suggestions (see Chapter 4). All of these aspects I attempt to capture in Figure 2, which also depicts the directional flow of the teaching I received and the learning I engaged in.

## **Research question**

Early in the research process I formulated the following research question as a way to guide the study:

*In what ways and to what extent does the parallel study of two musical traditions, Persian-Middle Eastern and Western classical violin, positively impact my developing musical competence in the following three areas: aesthetic, performative and generative-productive?*

This was a more formal framing of the aims of the study discussed in the Introduction, and it helped me to devise a methodology relevant to the study.

## **Bi-cultural (and intercultural) competence**

The three areas of competence I drew from Alison Tokita's study of bi-musicality in Japan (Tokita 2012). According to Tokita (2012), who writes in the context of a society with two overlapping musical systems, Japanese and Western, musical competence can be conceptualised at three levels: aesthetic, performative, and generative (or productive) competence. These are not discrete but form a continuum.

Tokita glosses the three levels as follows:

1) *Aesthetic competence* is the ability to listen to, appreciate, enjoy and understand music, including consumption of music through an electronic device. Musical literacy (the ability to read music) is another part of aesthetic competence. Intellectual analytic competence of the type developed by an ethnomusicologist also belongs here.

2) *Performative competence* is a higher level of musical competence. Performance typically involves memorization and then reproduction of music transmitted from a teacher with or without musical notation. It includes the ability to ‘sing in tune’. Many people can also perform directly from written notation. Performance may be professional or amateur; it may be singing in a choir, playing in an orchestra, solo performance, or conducting.

3) *Generative or Productive competence* is the highest level of musical competence. It involves the ability to create new original music, and the mastery and authority to be an agent of transmission. That is, to have enough mastery to be able to teach, to pass on a tradition; to improvise; to compose; to create new words for existing tunes; to adapt or alter a tradition.

#### *An analytical tool*

As will be seen in Chapter 5, I employed Tokita’s three levels of competence as an analytical-evaluative tool in order to unpack the feedback I received from my teachers in order to determine my progress or bi- and intercultural development as a violinist and musician over the course of the study. In doing so, I was aware of the subjective aspects of both the feedback and the application of the tool in the context of a study such as this, and tried to be vigilant about remaining as objective as possible, often to the point of personal vulnerability.

#### *The steps of phases of the study*

The study proceeded in four steps as follows:

##### *Step 1*

This step consisted of violin lessons taken over the span of three years between 2018 and 2020, with expert teachers in both Western classical and Persian Middle-Eastern violin (Goetz Richter and Anna MacDonald, respectively). During the isolation period of COVID-19 I proceeded with the online mode of lesson tutorship and through self-recording. Permission to record lessons was

sought and secured. Recording and playing back lessons I took over Zoom software helped me to progress in my Persian-Middle Eastern violin in particular.

Concentrating on repertoire I negotiated with my teachers, I rehearsed and recorded a series of solo, duo or small ensemble recorded projects in each musical tradition. In accordance with the demands of each tradition, this involved intensive practice immersion as well as musical transcription, adaptation, rehearsal and finally, recording. Besides myself, the study's participants were my two teachers. The small group of musicians involved in accompanying me in some of the projects were not considered formal participants.

### *Step 2*

Taking an autoethnographic approach, between August 2019 and December 2020, I documented the practice processes I followed for each project or musical item, as well as other pedagogical approaches such as musical transcription and adaptation. I explored fingering options related to a modal tuning system, explored various bowing changes, articulations, ornamentations and so on. Here, in general the approach of the Kurdish violinist Alan Kamil Majeed (2019) was helpful, in particular the series of “musical experiments” he describes in his master’s study undertaken at the Department of Folk Music in Royal College of Music in Stockholm.

Crucially, my study was premised on a detailed reflection on particular aspects of musical competence I intended to address in my study, and as already mentioned, an attempt to make an objective assessment of these based on my adaptation of Tokita’s (2012) three levels of musical competence. I undertook my own written assessment and also invited my teachers to provide critical commentary of their own.

### *Step 3*

I made the final recorded results of the majority of the projects available to the respective expert teacher (Middle Eastern musical projects to Anna MacDonald; Western classical projects to Goetz Richter), and requested written feedback commentary from them. I did not forward in-process recordings of pieces to which I devoted comparatively less attention or which for various reasons I chose not to pursue to final recording. To the feedback I received for selected

pieces, I applied Tokita's evaluative tool as a means to gain insights into developments in my bi-musical competence.

#### *Step 4*

Upon the completion of the above, I undertook a reflective written overview of the process of developing these projects, of the benefits and insights gained and the relative success of working creatively in two musical traditions simultaneously. The review forms part of the Summary and Conclusion section of my thesis. In the review I triangulated these findings with comparable findings in the literature on bi-cultural or world violin study.



## Chapter 4: Lessons and Projects

In addition to the orientalist classical repertoire mentioned in the Introduction, lessons with Associate Professor Goetz Richter concentrated on body movement and awareness, mental practice, acting out performances physically without the instrument and working on various physical dexterity exercises, studies, and preparing excerpts for orchestral auditions. The practice ideas and concepts I took from my lessons with Goetz were translatable to my practice of material recommended by Anna McDonald of excerpts from *The Radif of Mirza Abdollah*. Abdollah (1843-1918) and his brother were important Persian court musicians who transmitted the canonic repertoire collected and organised into a Radif by their father. Abdollah’s five volume set contains fast finger practice passages. Isolating the elements and using mental rehearsal (practice techniques obtained by Goetz’s tuition) were essential for solving the technical challenges I faced in learning pieces in the Persian and Kurdish repertoire.

### The study repertoire

Table 1 below lists the 23 pieces that form the repertoire of my research study. In the table the musical items appear in the order that I practiced and recorded them. Items 5-7 are an exception. They were studied at various times during the research period, however I only recorded them towards the end of the study. As can be seen, I recorded some of the items several times, which was because I felt I could improve on the earlier versions I recorded. Of the 23 pieces, the nine numbered in bold comprise the final Creative Work Portfolio (CWP) that accompanies this thesis (see the separate table below this larger table).

REPERTOIRE REHEARSED FOR THE STUDY	DATE RECORDED	CWP PIECES [# = number in Portfolio]
“Olasonic”	August 2019	[# <b>8</b> ]*
“Julie-O”	September 2019	

“The Forgotten Athletes of Persia” (My Friend the Chocolate Cake)	November 2019	[#9]*
“Abasi Kamandi” (Kurdish song)	March 2020 December 2020	[#1]* December 2020 version
“Pop Kurd”	March 2020	
“Short Kurdish Tune”	April 2020	
“Kavoke, a music piece for violin and piano” (Dilsad Said)	April 2020 December 2020	[#4]* December 2020 version
“Khak” (Kurdish)	April 2020 December 2020	[#2]* December 2020 version
“Zardasht”	April 2020	
“Laille Laille”	April 2020	
“Raghs e Atash”	May 2020 December 2020	[#3]* December 2020 version
“Kassiopeia”	June 2020	
“Ronak”	July 2020	
“Tum Hai Ho”	July 2020	
“Tolou”	August 2020	
“Eshveh”	August 2020	
“Barg-e Khazan” (Mojtaba Mirzadeh)	August 2020	

“The Silent Tavern”	August 2020	
“Kamancheh and Tombak Duet”	August 2020	
“Batman e Batman e” (Kurdish folk song)	September 2020	
<i>Zigeunerweisen</i> by Pablo de Sarasate	December 2020	[#5]‡
<i>Calligraphy No. 5</i> by Reza Vali	December 2020	[#6]‡
<i>Sonata</i> by Fazil Say	December 2020	[#7]‡

\* = Persian-Middle Eastern portfolio item (or Greek-Middle Eastern, in the case of “Olasonic”)

‡ = Western classical portfolio item

**Table 1.** The study repertoire and recording dates

What follows are notes on each of the pieces I worked on as part of the research project. The CWP program notes appear first (each CWP item is underlined - other items are not), according to the numerical ordering shown in the table. Also included are some reflections on how I went about learning and recording the pieces and how I felt about the results.

## Creative Work Portfolio

With the exception of *Zigeunerweisen* by Pablo de Sarasate (#5), all of the pieces in my CWP are of Middle Eastern origin - they are by Middle Eastern composers or contain Middle Eastern style elements or influences. The CWP programme comprises four categories of music: 1. Kurdish violin and percussion pieces (#1, #2, #3 & #4) 2. Contemporary art music that incorporates Middle Eastern elements (#6 & #7) 3. A Western classical violin piece (#5) and 4. Chamber pieces that are a fusion of Western and Greek-Middle Eastern elements (#8 & #9). Although

there is a degree of stylistic diversity within the programme, it is unified by a link to Western classical music in that all of the pieces are played on the modern violin and feature a sound that is fundamentally classical in approach.

<b>CREATIVE WORK PORTFOLIO</b>	<b>Final version</b>
#1. “Abasi Kamandi” (Kurdish; Halo Gharib)	IT* (vln), Alex Apt (perc)
#2. “Khak” (Kurdish; Halo Gharib)	IT (vln), Alex Apt (perc)
#3. “Raghs e Atash” (Kurdish; Ardeshir Kamkar)	IT (vln), Alex Apt (perc)
#4. “Kevoke” (Kurdish; Dilsad Said)	IT (vln), Jeremy So (pf)
#5. <i>Zigeunerweisen</i> by Pablo de Sarasate	IT (vln), Nadia Koudesheva (pf)
#6. <i>Calligraphy No. 5</i> by Reza Vali	IT (vln)
#7. <i>Sonata</i> by Fazil Say	IT (vln), Nadia Koudesheva (pf)
#8. “Olasonic” by Giorgos Papaioannou	IT (vln), Majid Armani (gtr), Jessica Scott (fl)
#9. “The Forgotten Athletes of Persia” by My Friend the Chocolate Cake	IT (vln), Sebastian Mansell (vc), Majid Armani (gtr), Alex Apt (perc), Will Hansen (cb)

\* In this chapter, I often replace my full name with my initials, IT.

**Table 2.** Creative Work Portfolio contents and personnel

*Program notes*

**Creative Work Portfolio Item # 1.** “Abasi kamandi”

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1j-2qcytK10>]

Recorded: 7 March 2020

Duration: 4'37"

Origin of the piece: by Halo Gharib; transcribed by IT

Instruments: Violin (IT); darbuka (Alex Apt)

Camera and audio: IT

“Abasi Kamandi” is a piece I discovered from the repertoire of the Kurdish violinist Halo Gharib. It appears that he took the melody from the celebrated Kurdish Singer Abbas Kamandi’s song, “To Chavot Na Yashe”<sup>2</sup> and set it in a violin register, while adding his personal musical touches. A number of my transcriptions are of Halo Gharib’s playing as I am very drawn to it. His style includes rapid string crossing with a repeated drone pedal and frequent double stopping. It is often very virtuosic. I transcribed the piece from a live television performance by Gharib.<sup>3</sup>

By transcribing and working on the piece I hoped to develop my own improvisatory technique, learning from this aspect of Gharib’s playing. Technical challenges the piece posed include: articulating the rhythmic variations of the main melody or motif as it recurs; negotiating the rapid string crossing sections; determining the most efficient string tunings for ease of playing; learning to analyse, notate and interpret the improvised section; and being able to correctly render the B *koron* note.

In order to become more comfortable and settled in the improvised section, I practiced along with the recording for some time. I also learnt how to adjust my fingerings to the GDAD (lowest to highest string) violin tuning. Alex, the djembe player, and I did not rehearse the piece too much before the first recording, which was completed in a single session. I later re-recorded it with a backing track, then we recorded it once more for the final CWP.

Learning “Abasi Kamandi” helped me expand my repertoire, become more familiar and confident with the Kurdish violin sound, and improved my sense of rhythm. Reviewing my performance I believe it is quite effective, especially the improvised section, which I had written

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<sup>2</sup> This version can be heard here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jT\\_pVgm0kU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jT_pVgm0kU).

<sup>3</sup> This version can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvzJEOkYd54>.

out, although I now believe that if I memorised the piece instead of relying on reading my transcription, the performance could be improved upon.

**CWP Item # 2:** “Khak” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EshJOdCTjrY>]

Recorded: 3 April 2020

Duration: 3’46”

Origin of the piece: by Halo Gharib, transcribed by IT

Instruments: Violin (IT), darbuka (Adem Yilmaz).

Camera and audio: IT

“Khak” is another Kurdish composition and improvisation for violin and percussion that I transcribed from a performance on YouTube by Halo Gharib and a *darabuka* player.<sup>4</sup> It is slower in tempo and more relaxed in style than “Abasi Kamandi”, although it utilises some of the same violin re-tuning and string crossing techniques. As already mentioned, string crossing is a recurring feature in Halo Gharib’s violin playing.

I first played it with the percussionist Adem Yilmaz; we rehearsed together and recorded it in a single session but in retrospect consider this to be a very rough draft. We re-recorded it some months later for the CWP. Adem suggested adding a percussion solo towards the end to give it a different flavour from Gharib’s version. Reviewing the recording later, I find I look and sound too stiff, and that I had not yet gained an understanding of the piece as a whole. Once again, I felt that memorising the piece would ultimately lead to a more fluent performance.

**CWP Item # 3:** “Raghs e Atash” [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAtjCYiBy\\_0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAtjCYiBy_0)]

Recorded: May 31 2020

Duration: 5’14”

Origin of the piece: by Ardeshir Kamkar (original for *kamancheh* and *tombak*)

Instruments: Violin (IT), djembe (Alex Apt).

Camera and audio: IT

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<sup>4</sup> Halo Gharib’s version can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54X2TGtxGRg>.

“Raghs e Atash” was by the Kurdiah musician Ardeshir Kamkar, originally for *kamancheh* (a Middle Eastern spiked three or four-string fiddle played with a variable-tension bow, played sitting down like a cello) and *tombak*. It appears on his 2008 album *Bi Qobar-e Adat (Far from Vogue)*. The original version was approximately nine minutes long and was actually for two *kamanchehs*.<sup>5</sup> I arranged “Raghs e Atash” for violin and reduced the length of the piece in order to better fit with my recital time limit. This is the only piece in the CWP programme that was not originally written for the violin. I did later record it with a backing track to prove to myself that I could play the entire piece.

Transcribing it for violin required transposing it down a whole tone so I could use my open G string as a drone instead of having to finger an F#. I also had to tune my E string down to a D for ease of playing. My aim was to adapt the *kamancheh* part for classical violin and to attempt to capture something of the sound of the original instrument. When I first played the original recording to Anna McDonald, my teacher, she suggested playing it in the top half of the bow, as the *kamancheh* is played. There were a few tricky passages in the original that did not easily translate to the violin context and I had to use some obscure fingerings to play the notes as they sounded. This section can be seen and heard in my performance. For the CWP, I wanted to memorise the piece so I could be more confident and authentically expressive in my rendition.

Shortening the piece led to a loss of some of its drive, I feel, but otherwise I am quite pleased with the result. To perform “Raghs e Atash” in its entirety successfully would have required a few more rehearsals. In hindsight, the piece would probably sound better if I was to cut back on a few sections and also if I was to play more consistently in the upper half of the bow, with stronger accents, to better capture the *kamancheh*’s sound.

**CWP Item # 4:** “Kevoke” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RitU9KECKRk>]

Recorded: 7 April 2020

Duration: 7’04”

Origin of the piece: the album *Awazê Kurdî* by Dilsad Said

Instruments: Violin (IT), piano (Jeremy So).

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<sup>5</sup> This version can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5Mwv94bA-I>.

Camera and audio: IT

“Kevoke” was composed in 1984 by the Kurdish born violinist Dilsad Said. Said, although Kurdish in heritage and being largely influenced musically by the Middle East, has a distinctly Western sound. For much of his life he studied violin in the UK. Alan Majeed’s thesis, ‘Middle Eastern Violin Method’ (see the Literature Review) encouraged me to transcribe Said’s composition as Majeed considered Said to be a prominent violinist in the Persian music field. The most famous of Said’s Kurdish arrangements is “Melli Melli” which is alongside “Kevoke” in his series of short Kurdish pieces arranged for violin.

In essence, “Kevoke” is Said’s arrangement of a Kurdish folk melody for violin and piano. As I did not have access to the written score, I transcribed the piece from a YouTube recording. The piece is very accessible to Western listeners as it utilises classical violin techniques such as fast scalar runs, high position changes, tremolos, trills, slides, and is played to a piano accompaniment.

The improvised section was the trickiest part to transcribe. I wrote out all the notes and had a rough idea of how to group the rhythms but I had to play along with the recording many times in order to make sense of what I had written in relation to the sound of the original version. My friend Pavle Cajic wrote out the piano accompaniment and Jeremy So ended up playing it with me in the final CWP rendition. On reflection, I think my performance is convincing. However, my sound is very much in the pop/Western, pseudo-Kurdish vein compared to the pieces I had previously transcribed and worked on.

With the piece, I wanted to expand my repertoire and my skill set and to be able to evoke an improvisatory sound similar to the cadenza section of Said’s piece. Unlike more traditional Kurdish pieces, “Kevoke” was played with the standard EADG violin tuning. Compared to the Kurdish pieces by Halo Gharib, this has a more Western, pop sound. Its significance in my CWP is as an example of a musical bridge between Western and Kurdish music styles.

**CWP Item # 5:** *Zigeunerweisen* by Pablo de Sarasate



Recorded: 18 November 2020

Duration: 8'60"

Origin of the piece: the Western classical violin repertoire

Instruments: Violin (IT), piano (Nadia Koudesheva)

Camera and audio: IT

*Zigeunerweisen* was composed by Spanish violinist and composer Pablo Sarasate in 1878 and is thought to be based on themes of the 'Roma' people. Although it is in a single movement form, it encompasses four main contrasting movements and is virtuosic in style. The first section is marked *moderato* and is very free and expressive. The second section is marked *lento* and has an improvisatory quality. The third section is written *piu lento* and demonstrates the "Mannheim sigh" dotted rhythm motif whilst the final notoriously challenging section, is marked *allegro molto vivace*. The piece contains double stops, harmonics and left hand pizzicato.

The improvisatory style of the piece shares an affinity with the Kurdish folk pieces in the CWP due to the lyrical, somewhat free and expressive qualities. In my performance I sought to convey the similarities in sound worlds between these two forms of music. Further reflections on learning this piece can be found in Chapter 5, in an "autoethnographic coda", which also refers the reader to a subsequent practice session recording I attempted.

**CWP Item # 6:** *Calligraphy No. 5* by Reza Vali

Recorded: 18 November 2020

Duration: 5'22"

Origin of the piece: the Western classical violin repertoire

Instruments: Violin Solo

Camera and audio: IT

*Calligraphy No 5* is a piece of contemporary Art music written in 2003 by the Iranian American composer Reza Vali. Reza Vali currently resides in Pittsburgh, USA, and he draws upon Persian musical systems in his compositions. *Calligraphy No 5* is based on the *Dash Nava* scale and *E korons* (one quarter note higher than standard pitch E) are utilised throughout the piece. These

are marked on the score with a ‘flag’ symbol. Although the piece is extremely rhythmic and requires the performer to subdivide into quavers continuously to gauge the changing metre and pulse, the piece organically sounds quite free and improvisatory, like a lot of traditional Persian music. Even so, it is definitely composed according to a Western classical aesthetic. It has contrasting lyrical, strong and powerful sections as well as cadenza-like parts. It also features several ostinato figures that recur throughout and certain tonal centres that the piece moves around, which also becomes a feature throughout.

When playing this piece, I tried to evoke the sound world it sought to convey and create some kind of Western musical shaping within that world in order to appeal to a Western audience. My Western classical violin teacher Goetz Richter helped me with this aspect of the performance. The dramatic opening centres around the pitch G. Goetz outlined that for music to be accessible to a contemporary Western ear it needs to have melos, tension and release, and a lyrical, contrasting section. This concept helped me make meaning of the piece and create an ongoing sense of direction when playing it. When I first brought the piece to Goetz I was quite frustrated with my interpretation as it sounded quite harsh and abrupt with a limited contrast, which was jarring. I included the piece in my CWP as I found it to be an interesting mix of Persian traditional and Western avant-garde classical styles. It was helpful to listen to some of the available recordings of the work in order to render the E koron accurately.

**CWP Item # 7:** *Sonata* by Fazil Say

Recorded: 18 November 2020

Duration: 15’02”

Origin of the piece: the Western classical violin repertoire

Instruments: Violin (IT), piano (Nadia Koudesheva)

Camera and audio: IT

Fazil Say’s *Violin Sonata* was commissioned by the Arizona Friends of Chamber Music in 1997. A renowned pianist, Fazil Say’s compositions are largely influenced by his background in Turkish folk music and jazz. The sonata is in five movements titled Melancholy, Grotesque, Perpetual Mobile, Anonym and Melancholy (DaCapo) (the fifth movement is an exact repetition

of the first one). Throughout the work, Say employs musical techniques that evoke the sounds of the Middle East. In the first and last movements he uses whole tone scales, chromaticism and trills. Grotesque is a scherzo dance and the violin and piano imitate traditional Turkish instruments. Instrumental techniques include slap G string pizzicatos and the placement of heavy objects on the piano strings to create a woody sound. Perpetual Mobile, with rapid tremolo and a double stopped ostinato in fourths, evokes the sound of the *kamancheh*.

In my performance, I attempted to infuse the various compositional techniques with energy and I studied various recorded performances of the piece as I developed my own interpretation. For example, instead of using pizzicato I used *col legno battuto* in ‘Grotesque’ to add variety and I also used *sul G* rather than the plain fingered D string for a contrast in tone colour. The fact that Fazil Say himself was performing in one of the versions I consulted gave me confidence that he would support my interpretation.<sup>6</sup> Although incorporating elements of the Turkish Middle East, the piece as a whole sounds distinctly Western classical in style. In my CWP the piece sits as a bridge between Western classical and Middle Eastern musical styles.

**CWP Item # 8:** “Olasonic” [<https://youtu.be/59A9epMCCq8>]

Recorded: 3 August 2019

Duration: 9’58”

Origin of the piece: Labyrinth Modal Music Festival in Greece, performed by Giorgos and Nikos Papaioannou.

Instruments: Violin (IT); flute (Jessica Scott); guitar (Majid Amani);

Camera and audio: Otto Khoo

“Olasonic” is a piece I first heard at the *Labyrinth Musical Workshop* in Houdetsi, Crete, in July 2018. It was originally by the band Neda and comes from the album of the same name.<sup>7</sup> Neda has its roots in Ottoman and traditional modal music as well as Byzantine, Baroque and classical music traditions. I was attracted to the straightforward 10/8 melody that expands continuously but never becomes boring. At the workshop I learned that musicians often transposed pieces up

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<sup>6</sup> Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Fazil Say’s version can be heard here:

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

<sup>7</sup> Neda’s version of “Olasonic” can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8XZRuGyGHQ>.

several pitches to suit the register of the *oud* (lute). They also introduced harmonies, improvisations and embellishments in performance. The sheet music was merely for teaching-learning purposes.

I asked one of the organisers at the workshop for a copy of the music. Giorgos ended up giving me the *ney* (flute) part that was in D minor, a different key to the one I had previously heard. This is because, traditionally, instruments have to be tuned to fit the *ney's* register. To play the piece, I transcribed it down a 5th to A minor and wrote out the parts and made an arrangement for violin, flute and guitar. I then asked everyone in the trio to come up with their own improvisation based on the original melody to form the opening *taksim* or improvisation to begin the piece. This is how our interpretation differs from the recordings I had heard. Because of this, the final two pieces in the programme have a personal or improvised element to them.

Majid, the guitarist, has a Persian heritage and he found it quite natural to introduce Middle Eastern elements to his improvisation. The flautist, Jess, was familiar with extended techniques on her instrument and had completed a short course on jazz improvisation. She was excited about the prospect of creating her improvisations. In the recording, Jess uses slap tonguing and spitting techniques to give the piece a percussive and earthy sound quality. Although I think my violin trills are not completely correct and sometimes sound a little too Western, I feel that the piece is very effective overall and I would love to perform it again.

I'm not very experienced as an improviser but I semi-regularly compose melodies that come to me. To help with my improvisation in the piece, I composed a rough sketch of the notes and rhythms I wanted to use for the opening, based on a couple of recurring ideas that happen within the main melodic theme. I decided to move between notes at the rhythm that felt right to my ears at the time so as not to overplay the improvisation, which would make it sound too structured. I move to the upper register towards the end of my improvisation, which is out of traditional style, and listening back I'm not so pleased with that aspect.

Before we recorded the piece we had two rehearsals in which we outlined the structure and planned what we would do in our improvised sections. It did not take too long to come together.

In hindsight, If I could pay my musicians and if I had more time to record, I would want to revisit the piece or practice it but try and learn it from memory so that I feel the 10/8 pulsing more naturally. The ensemble is out of synchronisation at one point. This is largely due to the fact I was not able to relax into the 10/8 metre pulse at the beginning of the piece.

**CWP Item # 9:** “The Forgotten Athletes of Persia”

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eirv9986OKw>]

Recorded: 25 November 2019

Duration: 4’09”

Origin of the piece: the album *Home Improvements* by My Friend the Chocolate Cake, composed by band members Helen Mountfort and Hope Csutoros

Instruments: Isabel Tzorbatzaki, solo violin; Sebastian Mansell, cello; Majid Amani, guitar; Will Hansen, double bass; Alex Apt, darbuka (Persian goblet drum)

Camera and audio: Otto Khoo

‘The Forgotten Athletes of Persia’ is a track I came across on the *Home Improvements* album by the Melbourne-based band My Friend the Chocolate Cake. Although the piece does not sound authentically ‘Persian’, it incorporates some Western orientalist elements including dramatic, over the top, bow strokes, slides and glissandos. The piece is relatively simple and was composed in a free, improvised form. I contacted Helen Mounfort, the band’s cellist, via FaceBook and she kindly shared a score for the piece.

At the time, I was working on studies based on the Persian *dastgah* modal system with my Persian-Middle Eastern violin teacher, Anna MacDonald. These studies are equivalent to Western style violin studies such as the Kreutzer or Mazas etudes. I played “Forgotten Athletes” for Anna, who commented on how *un-Persian* it sounded. She proposed that I make it sound more traditionally Persian by adding elements from ‘Radif Houyayoun’ (No. 11) to the piece – half flat *korons* (intervals smaller than a semitone) for example. To develop my own version of the piece I undertook the following:

1. I created and notated a completely new solo violin part by incorporating elements of Chahar Mezrab, No. 11 and No. 6, from the book *Radif of Mirza Abdollah-Borumand* (Azarsina 2000).
2. I also added grace notes before each of the notes, which is in keeping with Persian ornamentation aesthetics, and included techniques such as *sul pont*, *col legno* and *E korons* that I had come across while studying and listening to Persian music.
3. I found it challenging fitting the elements from the *Radif of Mirza Abdollah* components into the key of the MFtCC version. Another challenge was aligning my solo components, which were rhythmically complicated, with the rhythm of the guitar solos around 1'40" and 2'25". Upon playback, I noticed that I could have used more string contact towards the end of the bow from 3'00" onwards.
4. During the process of creating my solo part I practiced as I went and modified various elements according to the way I thought the solos should sound. This means that I brought a compositional dimension to the project, writing out the embellishments and so on, which went beyond simply copying and pasting components from other sources. I drew extensively on my prior listening to and transcribing of excerpts of the playing of the Kurdish violinist Halo Gharib, who used certain recurring techniques such as left hand open string pizzicato and *col legno*.
5. Next, I used the score Helen Mountfort sent me for the accompanying instrument parts, however I replaced the drum kit with the much lighter sound and feel of the Persian tombak. I asked my tombak player to listen to the original MFtCC recording and improvise his own part. In my version, following the improvisatory violin introduction, we followed the MFtCC score. Differences between the original and my version include fast ascending scalar runs, placing acciaccaturas before notes, octave shifts, rhythmic expansion and manipulation, switching certain notes to offbeats rather than main beats, and inverting some of the repetitive melodic sections. Basically, I attempted to divert the recurring themes by using different compositional techniques of rhythmic augmentation and ornamentation. In addition, I asked Majid, the guitarist, to freely play his solo incorporating whatever he liked into his part.
6. Finally, I met with the musicians and we played through the piece once, then recorded it. The ensemble is made up of fellow students at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. All

are Western classically trained, with the addition of the tombak player who is Israeli and is used to playing non-notated music (as is the guitarist, who is Iranian).

*Notes on other repertoire items*

**Project Item #10:** “Julie-O” [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h\\_IHQJVBSX0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h_IHQJVBSX0)]

Recorded: 23 September 2019

Duration: 5’25”

Origin of the piece: composed by Mark Summers from the Turtle Island Quartet. It is an improvised, stylistic piece.

Instruments: Violin (IT); cello (Seb Mansell)

Camera and audio: Otto Khoo

I encountered “Julie-O” when searching for fun-sounding violin and cello duets to play at a gig. The piece has a Bluegrass origin and the sheet music (excluding the improvised bits) can be purchased online. I transcribed the improvised sections from a Mark Summers recording I found on YouTube. I also tried to incorporate bow “chopping” techniques I’d heard and seen in YouTube videos. For the recording I asked my friend Sebastian Mansell, who is a classically trained cellist, to play with me.

Listening back to the recording, we *definitely* do not sound like Bluegrass players. Our tone is still very much in the classical mould. I put too much care into each note instead of sounding free and relaxed. This is very much how I felt when practicing the piece. Worried about getting all the technical elements of playing the exact rhythm and getting every note that went into learning and transcribing the piece rather than the specific sound world I was after.

**Project Item #11:** “Pop Kurd” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahRAIqLAdRc>]

Recorded: 20 March 2020

Duration: 2’56”

Origin of the piece: by Halo Gharib transcribed by IT

Instruments: Violin (IT)

Camera and audio: IT via Acapella app

This is a piece the outstanding Kurdish violinist Halo Gharib sent me; it is by the violinist Mohammad Esfahani. I transcribed and arranged it for a violin duo. I was initially hoping to perform it with a friend and then COVID-19 hit and everyone went into isolation. I decided to record it using the app “Acapella”. The audio on Acapella is not outstanding and sometimes I feel like the accompaniment line is too soft. I would like to re-record in the future with another violinist if I have the opportunity.

**Project Item #12:** “Short Kurdish Tune” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rA9JFuKyFpI>]

Recorded: 4 April 2020

Duration: 1’9”

Origin of the piece: by Halo Gharib transcribed by IT

Instruments: Violin (IT); cello (Seb Mansell)

“Short Kurdish Tune” is an excerpt of a piece Halo Gharib sent me as a voice memo on 16 June 2019. I liked the rhythmic drive of the piece and decided to transcribe it as a study in compound time. I transcribed it for violin and cello and concluded it with a short octave double stop. I later saw the piece published on Gharib’s page as a chamber item for clarinet and small string orchestra.<sup>8</sup> Writing out the piece was a good exercise in incorporating Kurdish compound rhythms into my playing as I feel that in order to play and improvise convincingly within the style, I would need to have a firm sense of the rhythmic pulse.

**Project Item #13:** “Zardasht” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quGEcPaUfs0>]

Recorded: 12 April 2020

Duration: 4’43”

Origin of the piece: Halo Gharib’s original performance published May 13 2016<sup>9</sup>, transcribed by IT

Instruments: Violin (IT), daf/ frame drum (Adem Yilmaz).

Camera and audio: IT

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<sup>8</sup> This version can be heard here: <https://www.facebook.com/halo.gharib>.

<sup>9</sup> This version can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xOoHeKhkao8>.



This was the first piece by Halo Gharib I attempted to transcribe and arrange. I had to tune my G string up to an A to reach some of the notes more efficiently (for example in the string crossing section). In hindsight, I think I needed more energy in the bow strokes, more bow, and a deeper connection with the piece. Comparing it to Halo's original video, I felt like he had more meaning imbued in some of the longer, deeper strokes. In order to get the piece together with Adem, the percussionist, I sent him a link to the video so he could understand the general idea of the piece and the rhythms used. Adem learns music by ear so this was the easiest approach for him. He inserted a brief percussion solo towards the end, following which I re-enter then build from a low A drone to a more erratic string crossing section before a climactic finish.

**Project Item #14:** "Laille Laille" [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjJYyU7yPfE>]

Recorded: 6 April 2020

Duration: 2'34"

Origin of the piece: transcribed from YouTube video<sup>10</sup>

Instruments: Violin (IT), cello (Seb Mansell).

Camera and audio: IT

I stumbled across this piece on YouTube as played by an old-time sounding Persian style string orchestra. Although a few of my Persian musician friends thought the piece sounded corny when I played it to them, I enjoyed the melody and found it catchy. I therefore decided to transcribe it for violin. My arrangement does sound a little sparse as a whole and would probably sound a lot better in a band type set up of around four or five players which includes a *darabuka* percussionist.

**Project Item #15:** "Kassiopeia" [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uus8hYpcDk4>]

Recorded: 13 June 2020

Duration: 6'01"

Origin of the piece: the album *Tokso Folk String Quartet*, by the string quartet, Tokso<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Listen to the version I first heard here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GxpLshHoyE&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>11</sup> Listen to the Tokso version here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9xE6PF7IHg>.

Instruments: Violin (IT), Violin 2 (Annastasia Milwain), Viola (Aisha Goodman), cello ( Sam Milch), double bass (Will Hansen).

Camera and audio: IT

I discovered the unconventional string quartet Tokso when I was first exploring modal folk music on YouTube; I found “Kassiopeia” on one of their albums. The name “Kassiopeia” is taken from Greek mythology and refers to the Greek goddess who was the wife of Cepheus and later turned into a constellation. I was immediately attracted to the piece and it became my favourite piece by the band. I initially tried to transcribe the recording by ear but found the changing time signatures very difficult to decipher. I wrote to the band member Kelly Thoma who I had come across during my modal music course in Crete and she put me in contact with Sigrun Eng, the Norwegian cellist in the group who had transcribed the piece - she sent me a copy.

After receiving the score, I had to transcribe the cello solo which I later placed in the violin’s register, and the opening lyra solo, which was also played by violin. The piece itself is actually quite simple however the constantly changing rhythms make it slightly complicated for Western musicians to sight read. We rehearsed and recorded the piece on the same day. It was tricky to get the timing together, coming out of my solo and back into the *tutti* section as I had not transcribed the solo precisely over the 7/8 quaver time signature. I could have improved our rendition had I done this.

Later (in 2021) I had the opportunity to perform the piece at the Greek National Day “Hymn To Liberty” Concert at the Sydney Town Hall (see that performance here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTPCn2pMNDE>). The same difficulties arose as we rehearsed, however we solved the matter differently: when coming out of my solo, I began the 7/8 rhythmic motive as a cue for others to synchronise with me and then I led back out of it to the coda section by visually cuing the other players.

**Project Item #16:** “Ronak”[ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUMeo4yUIug>]

Recorded: July 10 2020

Duration: 3’41”

Origin of the piece: a performance by the Iranian violinist Bijan Mortazavi on the 2004 album *Ye Ghatreh Darya*

Instruments: Violin (IT)

Camera and audio: IT

“Ronak” was recommended to me by Anna MacDonald; it was originally played by the Persian violinist Bijan Mortazavi. It is a widely known spirited Iranian folk piece. When I transcribed it, “Ronak” sounded quite plain as I had not yet notated the *col legno battuto*, open string drones and bowing variations. After playing it to Anna and incorporating some of her ideas, including pizzicato and rolled or arpeggiated chords, I felt that it sounded more engaging and in the spirit of the original folk song. To make it sound further like the original recording, I created an atmospheric backing track on *GarageBand* by recording a combination of hand claps, spontaneous shouts, stick percussion and other sound effects such as coin drops, cheers and car engines, which gave the recording more of a folk feel. Recording the piece did not require too much effort - as a whole it came together reasonably successfully.

**Project Item #17:** ‘Tum Hai Ho’ [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wg7fKuDtyYY>]

Recorded: July 28 2020

Duration: 5’14”

Origin of the piece: the melody was composed by Mithoon and sung by Arijit Singh for the Hindi language film *Aashiqui 2*

Instruments: Violin (IT), flute (Chloe Chung)

Camera and audio: IT

This arrangement of mine was inspired by a conversation I had with a fellow student Chloe Chung about our menstrual cycles and being of a similar age (in our mid to late twenties). At the time, I had been asked to play some Indian songs at a wedding and was listening through to some of the songs that had been suggested. I came across “Tum Hai Ho” and really liked the melody and song form. After researching a little about the cultural customs relating to menstruation I discovered that in Indian culture there is a festival that celebrates when a woman first has her period. People wear bright colours and there is a lot of singing and dancing. “Tum Hai Ho” is a

love song which is in a cyclical structure, so it became a metaphor for ovulation and learning to accept and love oneself.

I used melody and counter melody in the violin and flute arrangement as well as compositional techniques of variation and extended instrumental techniques to make the piece more interesting. In hindsight it would have been good to reduce the length of some sections to maintain interest and convey the main ideas more effectively. Chloe posted a portion of the video on her Instagram page and quite a few people requested the notated score, which was positive!

**Project Item #18:** “Tolou” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6TUtMN2Q54>]

Recorded: 3 August 2020

Duration: 9’22”

Origin of the piece: composed and performed by Ardeshir Kamkar and appears on the album *Bi Qobar-e Adat (Far from vogue)*.<sup>12</sup>

Instruments: Violin (IT)

Camera and audio: IT

“Tolou” was a *kamancheh* duet I came across on YouTube. The piece itself is quite long and the transcription process took me a while to complete. Again, I think I could have reduced the length of a few sections to make it a bit more catchy, especially for use in a gig setting. The most difficult part to transcribe was the solo improvised section as there was not a particular metre or rhythm behind it. I therefore wrote out the notes and played along to the recording so as to learn to get the feel of the piece. Listening back to the recording I made, I think this became the most effective part of the piece. I had almost given up on transcribing the improvised section but Anna McDonald said that she liked how it was sounding, which gave me the confidence to complete it. If I was to play “Tolou” again, I would trim the length of a few sections and play it with a percussionist. The original recording also had two *kamanchehs* playing so it was hard to work out the most important lines to bring out. It would have also been nice to add another violinist to the arrangement as well.

**Project Item #19:** “Eshveh” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPOYng8g1h0>]

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<sup>12</sup> Listen to Kamkar’s recording here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6A-8ssbl08>.

Recorded: 7 August 2020

Duration: 4'15"

Origin of the piece: originally played by Bijan Mortazavi on the 1992 album *Bijan 2*<sup>13</sup>

Instruments: Violin (IT)

Camera and audio: IT

I discovered “Eshveh” on YouTube while I was transcribing “Ronak”, as it was also by Bijan Mortazavi. It was very simple to transcribe as it was in quadruple metre and I added a backing track to it to fill in some of the sparseness. I really liked the melodies in the piece and feel like it could be played at a Persian wedding!

**Project Item #20:** “Barg-e Khazan” [[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAgI4NXW0\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAgI4NXW0_U)]

Recorded: August 21 2020

Duration: 5'49"

Origin of the piece: transcribed by IT from Mojtaba Mirzadeh’s video<sup>14</sup>

Instruments: Violin (IT)

Camera and audio: IT

“Barg-e Khazan” is a piece I came across while searching for Mojtaba Mirzadeh, a violinist who had been recommended to me by Halo Gharib and also Aref Shakouri (I’d met the latter playing in the string section when Moein toured Sydney in 2019). The piece sounded straightforward in construction and also slightly classical as a result. The violin strings were in a Western GDAE tuning which made it fairly easy to transcribe. Anna McDonald suggested I play the trills faster or tighter and that I should differentiate my playing between repetitive sections, which included using different slurring patterns and bowing articulations. For example, emphasising the main note of focus in the phrase rather than its acciaccatura. In general, my grace notes and trills need to be tighter to sound more authentic. If I was to improve the piece, I would try and add my own cadenza, maybe by transcribing another of Mirzadeh’s solos from YouTube (for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tDI-kVyo8M&t=4s>).

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<sup>13</sup> Mortazavi’s version can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwShffw0SYY>.

<sup>14</sup> Mirzadeh’s version can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5gRg2OyZ4g>.

**Project Item #21:** “The Silent Tavern” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-UntKDtBIY>]

Recorded: August 22 2020

Duration: 4’48”

Origin of the piece: transcribed from pezhham akhavass video published May 3 2017

[[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heX\\_ZoZ2gzU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=heX_ZoZ2gzU)] Kemanche (Saeid Farajpouri), Tombak (Pezhham Akhavass).

Instruments: Violin (IT)

Camera and audio: IT

I transcribed “The Silent Tavern” from a video I came across on YouTube. I liked the style of the piece as I felt it conveyed a very happy, uplifting quality. In order to be able to successfully play the piece on my instrument, I had to transpose the piece up a semitone from Gb Major.

**Project Item #22:** ‘Kamanche and Tombak Duet’

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EaZu0jMiSDQ>]

Recorded: August 29 2020

Duration: 4’15”

Origin of the piece: transcribed from *tombak* player Pezhham Akhavass’s video<sup>15</sup>

Instruments: Violin (IT)

Camera and audio: IT

“Kamanche and Tombak Duet” is another piece I transcribed from the same concert as “The Silent Tavern”. In order to play the piece, I had to tune my violin to Persian GDGD tuning. The technically tricky aspect of this piece was getting my left hand fingers up to speed as it requires fast articulation.

In a lesson, Anna McDonald recommended that I play the piece in the upper half of the bow to imitate the *kamancheh* sound more accurately. I also had to transpose this piece up a semitone into G Major for ease of playing - Anna helped me arrive at this conclusion. There is a five note string crossing section towards the end which was particularly challenging to coordinate.

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<sup>15</sup> Listen to the Akhavass version here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DldUe7Pj0oM>.

**Project Item #23:** “Batman e Batman e” [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhp8oWWdLuk>]

Recorded: September 14 2020

Duration: 5’38”

Origin of the piece: from the album *Kurdistan* by the group Nishtiman, released in 2013.<sup>16</sup>

transcribed by IT for violin solo and voice.

Instruments: Violin (IT)

Camera and audio: IT

“Batman e Batman e” is a piece I came across on YouTube, which I transcribed for violin and voice. The piece was first performed by the band Nishtiman and is apparently a well known song in Kurdistan. Compared to my other transcriptions, this piece was particularly challenging as I had to learn to sing and play violin at the same time. At first I felt as though my singing was accompanying my violin line but later realised that to do the song justice, my violin part would have to accompany my singing. I am not a trained singer so I lack confidence in the case of such role reversals. I transcribed the piece as it sounded - for example, my violin melodic lines were played up an octave. However, following a lesson with Anna I realised I had to take them down the octave to support my singing of the melody.

Anna was supportive of my violin/voice exploration and told me how doing this exercise was a way of enhancing my musicianship, since I had to think of the music as a whole rather than concentrating on my individual violin lines alone. I learned much about harmonising myself with the violin. Originally I had thought that sixths, octaves and thirds would sound good in the harmony but Anna told me that fourths and fifths sounded more Persian. Because the piece is so repetitive, she suggested other techniques I could employ to create interest, such as left hand pizzicato and more string crossings/chords against the open string drones.

I had originally tuned my violin to GDAE but Anna told me it needed to be tuned GDGD to sound more authentic. Another challenge was recreating the ‘bugle horn’ wind effect on the violin and to get it to sound effective. To do this I had to put more energy into my strokes and add a lot of tremolo effects and string crossings. Another challenge was running out of breath

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<sup>16</sup> Listen to the Nishtiman version here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGAomktRBaw>.

between vocal phrases. To improve upon this I'd probably need to have some vocal lesson training.

To improve the piece in general, it could help to cut down some of the verses. The piece ends with a two-part polyphonic counterpoint of melodic lines. However this did not sound so good when played by just the violin line. To improve upon my arrangement I would like to compose my own section to complete the piece and give it a more personal touch.



## Chapter 5: Analysis of Expert Teachers' Evaluative Feedback

In order to evaluate my bi-musical development with a degree of objectivity, I asked each of my teachers to provide written feedback on my Creative Work Portfolio pieces. In this chapter I set out the feedback I received, and I analytically apply Tokita's three levels of bi-musical competence (see Chapter 3 Methodology for descriptions of each level) to this feedback. I have done this by way of colour coding each of her three levels as follows and applying the highlighting colour to remarks in the feedback that I understand as being representative of the respective competence level:

Colour coding	Aesthetic competence	Performative competence	Generative/Productive competence
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It should be emphasised that an increase in bi-musical competence is implied across the levels, from Aesthetic to Performative to Generative. It could be said that according to Tokita's scheme, to be fully bi-musical one would have to be consistently achieving at the level of Generative/Productive competence. Hence I have not coded the teachers' comments that refer to areas where I need to improve or increase my competence in either of the two violin traditions since these imply a *deficit of competence*, whereas the application of the codes above imply *evidence of competence* or an *increase in competence*. I interpret a competence deficit to imply that in general I have not yet attained the highest of Tokita's levels - Generative/Productive competence. As a result, given that Goetz Richter's feedback regarding my CWP Item No. 5, *Zigeunerweisen*, was not particularly encouraging, following the discussion section below I include further autoethnographic reflections relating to that item.

As might be anticipated, each teacher was more critical regarding items representative of their own repertoire specialty. For her part, Anna McDonald chose not to remark on the Western classical or art music repertoire; instead she confined her critique to the

Persian-Middle Eastern and folk music pieces. Goetz Richter on the other hand forwarded remarks on my playing of each of the nine pieces.

For clarity, I have underlined each teacher's summative comments, which distinguishes them from the piece-specific comments. Anna McDonald provides these at the end of her feedback; Goetz Richer remarks at several different points, at the beginning, middle and end of his feedback.

## Commentary and application of analysis codes

### *Persian-Middle Eastern violin teacher feedback*

Anna McDonald provided the following written feedback on six of the nine pieces in my Creative Work Portfolio (email to author, Monday 11 January 2021).

#### CWP Item 1. "Abasi Kamandi" by Halo Gharib

*Isabel plays this piece very beautifully. She has been in correspondence with the Kurdish violinist and composer Halo Gharib, from Iraq, throughout her masters' degree time. Connecting with a player one admires and listening frequently to their playing, learning from style and transcribing is a very important factor in Middle Eastern music.*

*This piece exhibits Isabel's well-developed ease in playing in 7/8 time, which is a frequently used rhythm in the Middle East. The piece also includes some of Gharib's Kurdish cultural violin effects such as glissandi, slides and fast bariolage in the 3 plus 4 variation of 7/8. The free-time, improved section has a very good sense of relaxed freedom, floating above the rhythm still imposed by the drum. This has a communicative and often delicate quality which is needed in this music.*

*This piece and all the other Middle Eastern ones show that she has now developed very well the varying bow speeds used in this part of the world. This gives her a greater emotional range and a natural flow in imparting the speech-like quality of the music.*

#### CWP Item 2. "Khak (Soil, ground)" by Halo Gharib

*Utilises pizzicato, syncopated rhythms, and decorative triplets. Isabel has tuned the G string down to E, as violinists sometimes do in Iran and Iraq, to emphasise the main note of the mode (Esfahan in this case). Her dialogue with the drummer is excellent as she brings in elements such as left-hand pizzicato simultaneously with ricochet of the bow.*

CWP Item 3. “Raghs e Atash (Fire dance)” by Iranian-Kurdish *kamancheh* player Ardeshir Kamkar

*This is for the most part played very well. It emphasises the rhythms with the drummer, bringing out the rhythmic aspects and frequent trills which are a hallmark of Kamkar’s style, and the style of many Kurdish musicians. Some intonation aspects could be resolved around 10:40, which are partially caused by the conventional tuning of the violin, instead of the original kamancheh tuning which has a fourth between A and D as the highest string.*

*One very important aspect which should be remembered is to include the four different korons (Iranian quarter-tones) in this piece, which give it its proper modal flavour. The Shur mode, which this piece is in, is characterised by these korons. This work passes through some different aspects of the Shur mode which means that different korons are added in very specific ways.*

CWP Item 4. “Kevoke” by Dilsad Said

*Isabel plays the virtuosic aspects very well, as well as playing the piece true to the feeling of Said’s playing, although with her own style. The piece is not easily assimilable, due to its very particular ethnic style and also its peculiar difficulty, so Isabel has done very well with this.*

*She has not included all the decorative elements of Said’s original performance, but has retained some important elements, and can always continue to develop her own decorations in this piece if she continues to perform it. The slow, quasi-improvised middle section again has a very appropriate and fine sense of spaciousness, as Isabel savours each effect and subtle shifts against the pianist’s sensitive textures.*

*Again, though, a major issue in this work is that she has not included the korons in the original piece. A note without the correct koron is basically considered a wrong note, and it’s extremely important, if choosing a piece with korons, to include them. Korons are part of ancient modal systems, and are notes in the modes - not ornaments. Missing them out could result in some major ramifications if playing works in public by other musicians. They can only be learned by listening many times to them until they feel and sound natural - like another note. I recommend this as an important next step for truly rendering Middle Eastern musical language, even if it is being adapted in some ways to performances in the west with instruments such as piano.*

CWP Item 8. “Olasonic” by Giorgos Papaioannou

*This is an elegant work by a Greek composer. Although I have not seen the score, it seems that Isabel and her chamber ensemble **play it sensitively and well**, and it certainly **gives a depth to the programming** to include an interesting Western-influenced chamber work from that part of the world.*

CWP Item 9. “Forgotten Athletes of Persia by My Friend the Chocolate Cake

*Isabel had a creative part in arranging this work, as she **integrated the gushe** (corner, or small melodic part of mode) Tarz from Dastgah-e Houmayoun into it. This was **a very nice way to integrate ancient traditions into a modern work**. Although it is not in any fundamental way based on Persian music, Isabel’s arrangement **actually rectified this in part**.*

*Isabel spent some time **learning parts of the Dastgah** (Iranian system of modes) and would have extended this more, had it been more possible to send her materials from Iran. This work, even in part, **definitely helped her to adapt her playing to a more Eastern style**, as she **could hear the** fragmented melodic **basis of the Dastgah system** - how melodies developed within strict modal frameworks.*

Summative comments:

*I greatly commend Isabel’s **well-researched and thoughtful programming**, which brought many examples by current musicians from the Middle East and Greece into her Creative Work Portfolio. She has also **worked extremely well with other musicians** to bring a **wide range of chamber ensembles and flavours into her performances**. I hope she continues with her path to create such programs and continues to develop her Middle Eastern style and her own creativity.*

*My most important advice is to work on the korons in her pieces so that this important modal element is authentic and true to the pieces’ original intentions. Overall, I do **highly commend** Isabel for the **significant progress and development of her expressive style**, technique and sound colours during her master’s degree time. Middle Eastern style has great complexity and it takes many years to develop it, so Isabel has **made great strides in this direction** and I’m sure will have many great performances ahead of her.*

*Western classical violin teacher feedback*

Goetz Richter provided the following written feedback on my Creative Work Portfolio (email to author, Thursday 14 January 2021).

Summative comment:

You **have done a lot of work and the portfolio is well advanced.**

CWP Item 1. "Abasi Kamandi"

This is **presented well.** Perhaps more extroverted and thrilling development of some of the phrases is possible still? The drum tends to disappear in your forte a little, at least on my speaker. More "earthy" colour to tone might make for more variety. Emphasise the minor mode (B flat etc) more perhaps. These are only suggestions to enhance the performance - as **the work is good already.**

CWP Item 2. "Khak"

**Good** as well. Is there a possibility to explore more variety of articulation? The bow tends to function melodically mainly and lyrically at that.

CWP Item 3. "Raghs e Atash"

**Good facility** here - the presentation can be more forthright. Some intonation can improve (high position); can we develop repeated motives more in this context?

CWP Item 4. "Kevoke"

**Good.** If a little bland. Vibrato can have more considered intensity in parts to enhance colour and articulation again might vary more. Explore. I find this technically less convincing.

Summative comments:

Overall 1-4 are **well presented** and can be **comfortably included in any public performance context** I feel.

CWP Item 5. Zigeunerweisen by Pablo de Sarasate

This is your least good performance - the vibrato intensity is a little underdone, the bow needs to develop more structure (phrase) and articulation is too relentlessly smooth - the fast section lacks sparkle (slow) and some coordination there has to yet be successfully realised. Presentation with music [score] could work but you are too glued to it which projects somewhat a lack of flair. I think at this stage it's work in progress and I would redo it if possible - I am happy to work on it directly with you. Alternatively, do you need it?

CWP Item 6. Calligraphy No. 5 by Reza Vali

This is **good especially in respect of dynamic development.** The rhetorical timing could be more purposeful and the presentation can generally become more rhetoric and extroverted.

CWP Item 7. Sonata by Fazil Say

*The Sonata is good and there is good ensemble mostly, and beautiful playing from both instruments. I feel it is successful and it comes across as an interesting and worthwhile work.*

CWP Item 8. Olasonic” by Giorgos Papaioannou

*Good. But comes across as a bit shapeless - maybe [you could] develop the narrative/ballad characteristics more; tends to just continue and would benefit from more purpose and direction.*

CWP Item 9. “The Forgotten Athletes of Persia” by My Friend the Chocolate Cake

*Great - very slick and convincing and a good finish.*

#### Summative comments:

*I am not sure if it's your intention to improve on the performances or if you are going to include [them] as is in your thesis. If the latter, I feel that is possible, with the exception of 5 which is as yet a bit borderline. It won't seriously damage your prospects to include it as is, but it does not show you at your best. Still, there is plenty of good - and even excellent work elsewhere. I hope that makes sense and it is helpful. Let me know if we should catch up more directly. All best wishes and congratulations on some really good work.*

## **Discussion**

I now discuss how I came to apply each of Tokita's levels to the teachers' critical commentary, as seen in the colour coding applied above.

1. In instances where the teachers used superlatives in their feedback, such as “very beautifully” and “delicate” in Anna McDonald's commentary on CWP Item 1 and “Great” and “excellent work” in Goetz Richter's CWP Item 9 and final summative comments respectively, I have chosen to highlight these statements in blue and so code them as relating to the highest level of bi-musical competence: Generative/Productive. As can be seen, the blue or G/P code appears infrequently in the critical feedback.

2. My Persian-Middle Eastern teacher has the most to say regarding my technical and expressive development. This is to be expected since this tradition represented the branching out of my practice from a Western classical base as I attempted to become at least somewhat bi-musical. She compliments the following aspects of my playing, which I have grouped according to whether they are technical or expressive components:

<i>Technical aspects</i>	<i>Expressive aspects</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● playing in 7/8 time</li> <li>● glissandi, slides and fast bariolage</li> <li>● varying bow speeds</li> <li>● dialogue with drummer</li> <li>● left-hand pizzicato/ricochet of bow</li> <li>● rhythmic aspects</li> <li>● frequent trills</li> <li>● virtuosic aspects</li> <li>● adapts her playing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● sense of relaxed freedom</li> <li>● emotional range and natural flow</li> <li>● speech-like quality</li> <li>● true feeling</li> <li>● fine sense of spaciousness</li> <li>● sensitive textures and sense of ensemble</li> <li>● programming depth</li> </ul>

Since she frequently qualifies these aspects with adjectives such as “well developed”, “very good”, “very well” and so on, and because they relate to my playing, I have coded these in green, that is, according to Tokita’s Performative level of competence.

3. My Western classical teacher was more reserved in his remarks, frequently using adjectives such as “good”, “well presented” and even “really good”. Again, I have coded these in green, according to Tokita’s Performative level of competence.
4. Aesthetic competence is Tokita’s base level of bi-cultural achievement (highlighted in yellow above) and it relates to an ability to appreciate, enjoy, understand, read and analyse within a music system. This coding appears infrequently and then, only in the Persian-Middle Eastern violin teacher’s commentary, but requires little further explanation.

5. Overall, the comments indicate that I still have quite a way to go before I achieve at the Generative/Productive level, although I do believe the teachers' comments can be interpreted as indicating that I do reach this level very occasionally.
6. Given that this study is about attempting to achieve a measure of bi-musical competence rather than mastering a previously unfamiliar violin tradition, from this analytical coding exercise it can be tentatively concluded that my violin teachers evaluate me as fitting squarely within the Performative level of bi-musical competence.

### **Autoethnographic coda**

After Goetz Richter's feedback above on CWP Item 5, *Zigeunerweisen*, I scheduled another lesson with him in order to address these areas of weakness and to concentrate on approaches that would lead to a more convincing performance of the Sarasate piece. Most of the follow-up lesson centred on how to imagine then execute my musical intention for the piece, and involved practicing without my instrument. As I had been playing the piece for many months, hours on end, I had lost my vision for how the piece should sound. Goetz described my performance as 'laborious' and this was evident to me too when I listened back to my first performance of it in a recording of the lesson.

Without the instrument, Goetz asked me to replay the opening phrase while thinking about the character in each stroke and about what I wanted to convey with my mind, even before playing "air violin". Even without sound, I could hear the sound that I was striving to achieve and the difference it made to my initial performance. Helpfully, Goetz instructed me to make sure I did not flick my fingers with the bow changes. The intensity of the bow stroke should come from my forearm, he said. Another suggestion he made was that for a strong sound I should make sure my elbow was always above my wrist, even on the E string, which contrasted with what I had previously heard. Goetz also explained how, without the instrument, to practice positioning my bow in relation to its optimal contact point. I was quite surprised to find how much I could problem solve without actually playing the violin. I also found this way of practicing made it easier to conceptualise an interpretation of the piece without too many other musical problems or thoughts arising in my mind.



Goetz talked about my objectives in practice. For example, my goals to “work on left hand technique - work on runs”. Although this train of thought means well, he said, it essentially does not improve playing and can increase negativity. With this kind of practice Goetz explained, one becomes ‘not an artist but a functionary’ and at the end of the day ‘all we have is our capacity to think and our playing’. In order to play successfully, one needs to be ‘happy in the silence before you sound’. I found these ideas enlightening and inspiring. Yet another practice point that Goetz raised was not to ‘destroy what you can already do’ or in other words, not to overly concentrate on the negative. Rather, play something through, then internally analyse what worked and what did not and progress from that point as it is essentially impossible to get everything right. The most important factor in practice is to practice with intent: ‘your active thought is essentially what sustains your playing’, Goetz stated, and you need to ‘practice like an artist’ rather than like an athlete.

Two other important ideas I took away from the lesson were to practice the high scalar runs as tenuto strokes on one bow while making sure the left hand is down on the string before the bow moves. That is, verify the note first then comes the sound with fast runs. Goetz’s other recommendation was to practice the fast passages of the piece without the violin and to play on the exasperation. Again, the stop-start practice technique with the left hand fingers being down before moving the bow worked well for this too. This is especially true in chordal sections that require an instantaneous rhythmic action from both hands at once. We also worked on being aware of a continuous left hand vibrato happening without the instrument. The lesson gave me more confidence with what to do next in the practice room. I feel as though all of these points were directly relevant in addressing the problematic aspects of my initial performance. After benefitting from a period of practice where I applied these ideas, the final step would be to memorise the piece.

After the lesson I decided to re-record the piece with a piano accompaniment backing track in order to incorporate what I learned into my playing. I found several backing tracks to *Zigeunerweisen* and learned that by removing their violin part, I could figure out what nuances

different performers had brought to the piece. Without the violin line, I was able to pay more attention to my surroundings and what was happening musically around me.

I added audio markers to the piano track to aid me in making the violin entry at certain points. Even so, this proved quite difficult to execute mentally as there were numerous factors to consider during the performance: tempo, expressive markings, playing with feeling matching the tempo regulated by the recorded track. It proved difficult to implement what Goetz had recommended whilst the piano played behind me. Yet another difficulty was trying not to look at the written music while performing the different sections and not think about all the technical aspects that could potentially go wrong. It was certainly a challenge to execute everything correctly in a single take!

In the end, I did not get a perfect take of the *Zigeunerweisen*, but I have uploaded what I consider to be a close version to YouTube (see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AboL\\_7vwR4s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AboL_7vwR4s)). I still think I could have done more with what Goetz had taught me. My bow grip into the string can be more solid and I can do even more with my vibrato, making it slightly more “over the top”, especially in the opening passage. It needs to have a more wild “gypsy” feel which is difficult to achieve with a pre-planned piano accompaniment part. I need to memorise the second page for it to sound more convincing. In addition, I can never get the final page with the fast semiquavers right. I have tried different rhythmic patterns, practicing without the bow, slow practice, stop-start practice techniques and all kinds of physical set-ups which make my fingers closer to the string, but each time my success or lack thereof occurs somewhat randomly.

Undertaking this in the space of a week was mentally draining. I noticed that working with a backing track made me more of a perfectionist with the piece. I would try to get absolutely everything right, which ultimately is not really the way music is meant to be made - a point Goetz made in the lesson (see above). Ultimately, I do not consider this - or any other performance in my CWP - a finished product. I will continue to work on the piece in increments even after this thesis is submitted. A performance should continue to improve over time, after thinking about the piece in new ways, listening to new recordings of the work and learning or discovering new aspects of the piece.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

I conclude this study with some reflections on the research process and on the extent to which I successfully accomplished my aims as set out in the Introduction. To recall, these were: 1) To take lessons in and become familiar with and as fluent as possible in Persian-Middle Eastern (P-M-E) style violin playing while continuing to take lessons in Western classical violin, and so be able to integrate some of the key techniques of P-ME violin into my playing; and 2) To become a more versatile performer and better-informed pedagogue as a result of my newly acquired knowledge and expanded skill set. I have organised my reflections under the following headings: musical skill areas in which my competence increased; the extent to which I accomplished my goals; challenges I faced and how I approached these; the creative project results; and next steps I would take as well as recommendations to others.

### *Skills expansion*

By undertaking this creative work research study I do believe my musicianship and instrumental technique have increased in a number of areas. For example, my ear for detail and nuance has improved as a result of immersing myself in the transcription process and I have grown in confidence as an improviser, even though my improvisation may not always be entirely idiomatic. Anna McDonald's feedback discussed in Chapter 5 confirms these gains. Furthermore, I learned more about my musical taste and interests, about what kind of music and violin playing styles I am drawn to by searching for and tracking down particular pieces of music that I found appealing and that I wished to learn. I gained artistic and aesthetic focus once I became aware what kind of music and what approach to the violin attracted me.

By transcribing pieces - by Halo Gharib in particular - I became aware of small technical gains in my playing. These were related to specific violinistic ways of ornamenting the melodic flow, and technical devices that would enhance a development or improvisatory section of a piece. Again, Anna McDonald's Chapter 5 feedback provides confirmation. Looking back, I do feel as though I accomplished my goals - *to some extent*. Given it was the first time I had rehearsed and performed such music, I believe the performances came off relatively successfully. On the other hand, to reach a level of comfort and satisfaction I believe I would need to memorise or

internalise the music to a greater extent, that is, free myself from the notated page. This would allow me to perform some of the pieces more convincingly in certain freelance performance situations.

### *Goals reached*

I know that I did not delve deeply enough into the particular “*çeşni*”, or flavour of the musical styles I explored, for example, sitting the *koron* half-tone exactly where it should be in some of the Kurdish pieces I learned. This came up in a few of the lessons I had with violinists, whether it was Anna McDonald, Nawres al Freh or Halo Gharib, and it is definitely a musical aspect on which I should have concentrated more.

### *Challenges faced*

Some of the challenges I faced included transcribing and adapting music for violin that were originally played on another instrument. This usually involved re-tuning the violin and changing the key of the piece, as well as adapting hand positions.

Throughout 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic presented unforeseen practical challenges, such as finding space and time to rehearse and not being able to borrow or make use of recording equipment. To work around these difficulties, I ended up trialling electronic apps such as Acapella and performing to a backing track in my own home.

Another challenge included discovering the meaning and original context of particular pieces and being able to work that knowledge into my playing. Related to this was the difficulties around translating teachings into English to achieve the same level of understanding.

### *Creative Work Portfolio results*

Ultimately, the transcriptions and adaptations I developed as I worked on the Creative Work Portfolio (CWP) represent a base or starting point for my future musical exploration. In order to develop the CWP, I created the basis of a new repertoire of notated music that can be used for gigs. I see my ideal specialisation or style of playing as one that forges a link between the modern and the old, Eastern and Western, as well as classical and folk styles of music and violin

playing. I believe there is a place in the Sydney scene for what I am trying to develop in my playing as it's unique and not often performed.

#### *Next steps and recommendations*

Next steps for me include completing more music transcriptions and putting more time and energy into the craft of violin playing, music memorisation, repertoire expansion, reading more about the styles I'm interested in, listening more widely, and taking lessons from other violinists in the field. I see this project as being more about the journey than the finished outcome. To anyone attempting to expand their musical understanding with an aim to becoming bi-musical, I would say: "Try to define your goals quite precisely and set aside time to refine and respect those goals. Do a lot of immersive listening and a lot of music exploring online - it's a rich archive of excellent players. Do not be afraid to reach out to fellow musicians via social media or even directly in your area. You have no idea what opportunities may arise."

Since finishing this project, I have become familiar with Brusk Zanganeh and Sergio Escalera's album *Trnotsi*, as well as the United States viola player Dena El Saffar's band Salaam. Brusk Zanganeh's playing combines elements of Kurdish traditional violin styles and Western classical styles yet is neither of these but something new. These recordings, which explore Armenian and Mesopotamian folk music inspire my desire to find new musical avenues such as these to pursue. In my mind, and from my research and experience, taking risks and experimenting with music is the only way to expand and develop your skill set.

We can never attain perfection in our playing - we should perhaps not aim for perfection but rather but we should draw on what we have already accomplished and try to incorporate elements of what we want to achieve, and in doing that, we can consistently make progress. As I have emphasised, this study was not so much about the finished product as it was about the process of attempting to increase my bi-musical competence. Did I succeed in this? I have certainly learned a lot about the violin, about my own musical tastes, interests, the faults and strengths in my playing, and about Persian-Middle Eastern violin culture. However, I have also gained a better sense of the limitations of my playing.

Attempting to become proficient in the Persian Middle-Eastern style violin was always going to be a supreme challenge. However, making inroads into learning the style has made me stronger as a player and this study has increased my musical appetite to play in the style and find my own way as a musician. The project has opened my mind up to new ways of learning and approaching music that is beyond the ambit of the music I studied formally for many years. In this way my violin practice as a performer and teacher has been considerably enriched and expanded and has certainly become more intercultural.

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