

# Expanded inspiration: metric improvisation and compositional tools in contemporary modal music

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#### Curriculum vitae

Marina Liontou-Mochament was born in Athens (1984). She studied Computer Science in Athens Economic University and *oud* in the Department of Folk and Traditional Music in Arta (University of Ioannina). She holds a master's degree in *Oud* and Performance from Codarts - University for the Arts (Rotterdam, The Netherlands), which was funded by a full scholarship from Onassis Foundation.

She has participated in music seminars under the guidance of renowned *oud* players and musicians (Yurdal tokcan, Evgenios Voulgaris, Harris Labrakis, Mercan Erzincan, Sokratis Sinopoulos) in Ross Daly's Labyrinth Musical workshop, Crete, Greece.

From 2013 to 2018 she lived and worked in Istanbul as a performing musician. There she co-created Sinafi Trio, with whom she recorded the album 'IHO' for KALAN label. Sinafi Trio has participated in festivals in Turkey, Greece, Serbia, Italy and Cyprus and they are currently preparing their second album.

She is also a member of the Crossover trio, with Alkis Zopoglou and Yann Keerim, with whom she performs concerts consisting of the members' original works. Their last collaboration was with the renowned kaval player, Theodosii Spasov in Belgrade for the Guitar art festival (May 2023).

She leads workshops on modal music, makam improvisation and music creativity in Athens and Thessaloniki, and she is currently working as an *oud* teacher in the Music School in Drama.

## LIST OF ARTISTIC OUTCOMES

For an overview of all artistic outcomes listed individually below, as well as practice videos, and audiovisual material of workshops, please consult:

https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/L4xKYcUPu29Pshe

Password: metric

## **Metric improvisations**

(Included in the text)

- 1. In Gönul kalk gidelim
  - a. <a href="https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/vbQ1nukjd6onBfr">https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/vbQ1nukjd6onBfr</a>
  - b. <a href="https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/Xa8EyjVUpxXmxCF">https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/Xa8EyjVUpxXmxCF</a>
  - c. https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/r5B1iyowTQZBdlo

## (Other examples)

2. In *Ceyranum Gel Gel* (folk tune from Azerbaijan, arranged by Sinafi Trio, included in the album *Iho* by ZKALAN muzik, Istanbul 2019,

https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/KZw5kgEHVnvn5fm

- 3. In *Urfaliyim Ezelden* (folk tune from Turkey), unpublished recording, Istanbul 2017) <a href="https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/eKwmLR0GOUmxVEq">https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/eKwmLR0GOUmxVEq</a> (03:09-04:02)
- 4. In *Florina* (writer's original composition) (03:38-04:33) <a href="https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/ZgKXDzu2dJcdVfv">https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/ZgKXDzu2dJcdVfv</a>

#### Usulü taksimler

(Included in the text)

 Saba usulü taksim in Daracık Sokakları <u>https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/yDCgtxM3</u>

(Other examples)

2. Hicazkar usulü taksim in *Görmezsem bu gece seni* (Fulya Özlem's original composition, recorded for the album, *Manidar Boşluk*, ZKALAN muzik, Istanbul 2018) <a href="https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/nBNgpybZEk5sAIV">https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/nBNgpybZEk5sAIV</a> (02:12-03:04)

# **Compositions**

1. Harman Sokak https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/14kL6wU041QiVbf (5:55–8:26)

2. Vertigo https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/14kL6wU041QiVbf

3. J

https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/OjsdgCDhnLF0m8U

&(1:00-5:50) in

https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/14kL6wU041QiVbf

4. Karma

(13:26-17:30)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNbCioaew1M

5. Unsaid

(26:00-30:36)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNbCioaew1M

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Figure 194: Modulation

Figure 195: Basic rhythmic pattern

Figure 196: Motif 1 and variation (bars 1-2)

Figure 197: Motif 3 and variation (bar4)

Figure 198: Phrase 3 and variations (bars 6-8)

Figure 199: Triple variation and question-answer tool (bars 17-19)

Figure 200: Syncopated motif (bars 13-14)

Figure 201: Two - bar intro and loop for improvisation phrase

Figure 202: Combination of rhythmic tools

Figure 203: 3:2

Figure 204: Accents and syncopation

Figure 205: Repetition of the same motif three times

Figure 206: Question -answer tool through 2-bar phrasing

Figure 207: Additive way of structuring sentences

Figure 208: Kürdi makam

Figure 209: Karma

Figure 210: First appearance of Motif 1 in Part 1

Figure 211: Appearance of Motif 1 in Part 2

Figure 212: Appearance of Motif 1 as part of a sextuplet in Part 3

Figure 213: Question-answer tool

Figure 214: Different approaches on the sextuplet

Figure 215: Unsaid

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# **APPENDIX I: Transcripts of interviews and podcasts**

#### 1. John Berberian

Interview transcript from podcast by Andrew Kzirian under the title: *John Berberian: Oud Master*. <sup>167</sup>

(01:35-22:25)

Andrew Kzirian (A.K.): Welcome to our TAQSIM podcast. This is Andrew Kzirian. I have the honour of being here with *oud* legend John Berberian. Today, we're going to be learning a little bit about John's take on the *oud*, and his background as a musician, performing, recording and kind of a history of everything he's done. So, welcome everyone, welcome John.

John Berberian (J.B.): Thank you good to be here, and to hopefully help you in this project.

A.K.: Excellent. So, John, if you could maybe introduce yourself to some of our listeners. I am sure some of them may have heard of your music and your contribution to Middle Eastern artistry, but I'd love for you to kind of just give a brief background of yourself and kind of educate our listeners a little bit.

J.B.: Ok, I don't know quite where to start, but nevertheless I probably had about over fifty years of music experience, *oud* playing experience. It's been the love of my life for many years. I did work, you might say a decent day time job for many of those years and *oud* playing was a spice to the life that I lived then. However, I didn't want to make music a full-time venture because I felt I wanted to keep it away from being a job so to speak. There is time for a job and there is time for pleasure and music was always that pleasure end of my life and *oud* was that vehicle. So, I went to school, I went to Columbia University and there studied whatever I needed to go into business. And, I worked as purchasing director, manager you call it for various companies. When I finally moved out of the New York, New Jersey area to Massachusetts I pretty much retired from the daytime work and just concentrated on my music, and that's what I'm doing now in my retirement years. I have some students that come for lessons and I'm very happy to pass on whatever I have learned to them.

A.K.: And John you're being modest, I mean you have a huge discography of super high quality professional recordings, just masterful music of the *oud*, if you could go a little bit on that? I think that would be something interesting for people to hear about.

J.B.: Well, I was surprised when at a young age-I think it was twenty-one years of age – some producers from a major record label came to where I was working. It was an Armenian restaurant

https://www.listennotes.com/podcasts/taqsim-middle/john-berberbian-oud-master-Ri7MPLA-WS3/, accessed June 26, 2023.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Podcast available online at:

called 'The golden horn' in New York city. And, they came there and it sort of mushroomed from that point on. Mainstream records had produced two of my previous albums and then we went on to record for Verve Forecast and RCA and MGM. And, little by little, I found that G[od], you could make a decent living out of this kind of thing and I really enjoyed it at the same time. Nevertheless, it started back there in the early 60s for me and mushroomed into something of a different nature. We recorded an album called *Middle Eastern Rock* on the Verve Forecast label and that took us to a different vein.

A.K.: That was kind of a landmark recording for the time wasn't it?

J.B.: Yes, it was, yes it was. I think if you would listen to that today, in terms of today's taste, in rock or jazz music, I think you 'd find something very, very current, even due to the fact that it was recorded in the 1960s.

A.K.: And there was a scene right, there was a burgeoning, thriving, middle eastern music scene in live music.

J.B.: Yes.

A.K.: And I feel like the timeliness of that when you were kind of coming into your own as a musician and an artist yourself, there was a coincidence, a synergy there that I think was a really big part of all this. Maybe you could speak about the scene with all the live shows, the belly dancers, the programs? From what I would hear there would be six or seven nights a week, multiple restaurants would have packed houses with live bands. That sounds so captivating and interesting.

J.B.: New York city was really a melting pot for music and for cultures. Greek, Armenian, Arabic, Turkish, all mixed sometimes within one given restaurant or club venue. Musicians, it was like a United Nations on stage sometimes, with the various types of music being offered.

A.K.: And you would play with artists of so many different backgrounds.

J.B.: That's right.

A.K.: You'd have a Greek clarinet player, an Arab drummer, a Turkish violinist, an Armenian *oud* player. I mean it was just such a mix.

J.B.: Absolutely, and this was an area in New York called Greek town, but don't judge it by the name, it wasn't only Greek music that was played, that's what I'm trying to say. It was a mixture of music and the Greek for the most part were the owners of these clubs but focused on a variety of music. And these were the older generation if you will, the firstcomers to America that played in these clubs. I, as a young person, would go every now and then and they would ask me to come up and play and I felt like they were proud of me. Especially the Armenian older men *oud* players would say: "Johnny come on up and do something" and it gave the chance to sit back and say:

"Let's show off this Armenian kid to the rest of the audience that's over here." And they were very happy about that. Then, there was another area of New York Greenwich Village. It was a different scene, it was an after-hour scene. These were more like coffee houses. One very well-known was the *Café fincan* and it was Israeli – talk about a melting pot – we had Palestinian Arabs and Israeli from Israel presenting their music, we had a Moroccan *dumbeg* player by the name Ali Hafid. And it was just wonderful to see this togetherness and I wish the Middle East would take an example today of what it was like in that coffee house.

A.K.: That's a great point, how music brought everyone together and people could set aside their differences, that's a really great point. John, given your background with the *oud* and your experience playing this instrument, I'd love for you to share some of your impressions of what the *oud* means to you. From what I know your father was involved with the *oud*, it's something you grew up seeing in your world, you were immersed in it and how that impacted your playing and your artistry and the style of music that you cultivated.

J.B.: Well yes, my father played the *oud*. I learned much from him. He was an immigrant from an Armenian village in Turkey as my mother was as well. My father had a talent for the *oud* and also sang very well. Much of what he did sing happened to have been Turkish songs, as was the case with many of the newcomers to the New York area and major cities in the country. Those that left villages in Turkey, obviously were fluent in the Turkish language, they had to be, so to speak. Nevertheless, this was an inspiration for me and my father tried to stir me in favour of the violin, because he felt that that was more of a viable instrument here in America and I considered that and took violin lessons for five years. I studied violin with a teacher and I played in a couple of symphony orchestras. Although amateur as they may be, that was my focus at the time. But I couldn't get my hands off, or my heart away from the *oud* if you will, and I eventually came back and I made that my instrument of choice.

A.K.: As you explained, the *oud* was something that you saw all the time, your father obviously a strong influence. So, as you were maturing into adulthood, into becoming an artist in your own right, what was your approach, what was your philosophy, as an *oud* player? Learning what you had seen growing up and turning that into – as I am sitting here with you all of these records that I see on the wall, you clearly charted a course for yourself artistically. Maybe you could speak about that, that would be super interesting.

J.B.: Because of my violin training, it gave me a classical experience. It not only helped me to work with a fretless instrument as the violin is and as the *oud* happens to be but it also sort of took me into what is a 'western way of thinking'. So, we had to play, you might say, 'legit' music on the violin. When I first went for my violin instruction, I went there playing an Armenian song with a lot of quarter tones and my violin instructor said: 'You've got to forget this. You can't play like that and be in the symphony orchestra someday!'

J.B.: That was a different school of thought.

A.K.: And when you were learning the instrument, coming into your own, saying: "I'm gonna

have some structure, I'm gonna do records, I'm gonna perform," I see all these records, all the memorabilia, clearly it became an organised, professional endeavour in many ways. As you were learning, you learned the violin, you learned the *oud*. As how did this lead to all these records, and all these performances?

J.B.: One record kind of led into another one and another one.

A.K.: Well, how did you start recording, how did you start asking musicians to come play with you on these recordings, in these ensembles? Because it seems that you had a logistical function too?

J.B.: There was a time back in the 1960s, where one focus was on Indian music, namely Ravi Shankar, and the sitar. There were recording companies that recorded him, they wanted him, it was something unusual for its day. Many artists performed with Ravi Shankar as a result during those times. The recording company that I dealt with, looked at the *oud* in a way that they could compare it with the sitar and thought that maybe I could do what Ravi Shankar did with the sitar and do it on the *oud*. So, this was their focus. When they printed my first album covers they focused on the *oud* rather than on me, thinking that: "Well, if we can push the instrument then maybe this person would be known for it."

A.K.: So, the marketing philosophy and strategy behind the *oud*. See, this is such interesting stuff on how the music industry was viewing the instrument and the rise of it in that time period. To try to promote it and maybe get other *oud* players to look at it financially, how to promote this scene.

J.B.: Yeah, as a youngster in music and especially in recording albums like this I didn't care, I wanted to just make some music and it sounded like it was a tremendous opening for me and sort of that's how it started. There was distribution that was done worldwide as a matter of fact. I wish the rock album had the same kind of distribution or management push, because the company sold hands about a year after that rock album of mine was released and new management was no longer interested in really pushing the old stuff, even though it was relatively new for the company. They were interested in their own productions. Whoever had that album and if it's still out there, and CDs were made later by other companies to reproduce that, so it had some travel if you will. There are some things that I am probably leaving out.

A.K.: So here is a question: In terms of your playing, you are Armenian-American, yet you had such a diverse background performing in that music scene that you described and also so many different musicians from different cultural backgrounds. So, how would you define the different types of *oud* styles? The Arabs, of course there are so many Arab countries, they have their style of playing. There is the Turkish style generically, of course they have their subparts as well regionally, there is the Armenian style, the Greek style. Maybe share some of your thoughts and impressions of what you hear and what each one has and what you like or what you feel is so great about the Armenian-American *oud* players?

J.B.: One thing I tried to do was to and it is hard, not to be a jack of all trades but a master of all trades. I loved Armenian music and I tried to reproduce it as authentically as I can, being an

American born Armenian. But when I heard Turkish music, I felt the same way about that, I wanted to reproduce it as they would. I think I mentioned to you once that, if I was presented in front of a bunch of judges from a particular country and judges of music – the *oud* let's be more specific – I wanted to be approved by them one hundred percent in each of those cultural areas. Not to be thought of as: "Well, he plays certain things well, but he is not familiar with the foundations of our music." I really wanted to get down to, needy, greedy, and build up from something solid, so they could not find something missing. I love the idea of being versatile, not being branded as one or the other, that I could play in any venue and I studied music in each of these cultures, Arabic included. I love Arabic music, especially Arabic classical music. I studied that music wholeheartedly and if I had a choice to grade them, one, two and three, it's hard. There is good in every music. Even to create a new music as we would use the concept of fusion and bring in rock elements within an Armenian song or an Arabic song or a Turkish song, that's another nuance that I wanted to experiment with. So that's about it.

A.K.: So, how would you describe [the *oud*-guitar relationship] – of course when people think of string instruments that are plucked, usually people think about the guitar given the pervasiveness of the guitar and also how the *oud* is coming more into the mainstream. What are your thoughts on the *oud* compared to a guitar? What are the differences, how do you feel they work together?

J.B.: I'm a lover of *oud* and guitar combination to say the least. *Oud* is an acoustic instrument for the most part. This is how it was built the way its origins were. It wasn't meant to be electrified. However, at least not the original. Let's say the grandfather to the guitar which the oud is considered today goes hand in hand grandson and grandfather as the music is concerned and it's a natural outgrowth. I think of the *oud*, the guitar lends itself. That middle instrument by the way is the lute that is also a part of let's say the lute family of instruments.

A.K.: On your records did you incorporate guitar with *oud*?

J.B.: Yes, yes I did. Going back in time, there was a music friend of mine by the name Andie Brandon who was really a very fine guitarist. We played together for a while and I recorded a piece called a *Persian-Armenian medley* in one of my albums and it was a wonderful give and take of *oud* and guitar. I think they really work well together. Two *ouds* also work very well together. I think *oud* and a keyboard nowadays also makes a lot of sense, especially with all the side sounds that you get off the keyboard. There is a sort of classiness, simpleness, a meaningful part of hearing the *oud* and guitar together. I played violin for a while, I still do, but like every instrument you have to keep after it otherwise you start to become rusty.

A.K.: What encouragement or thoughts would you offer to someone who now starts to play the *oud*. Any advice or guidance you might want to offer them?

J.B.: I think my best advice would be to listen, first of all listen to as much of the type of music you love to play on the *oud*. Music is constantly changing. The music that my father enjoyed was one type of music, you know we – sort of – evolve into our own world. We think of the Armenians in America. It presents a different slant on music as compared with an Armenian in an Arab country

or a Turkish village, you take on the character of the country you live in and the music that's played in that country it's unavoidable. My parents brought the music to this country that they were used to. If they were born and brought up in an Arab country their slant on music and maybe my take on it as a result of being born from them was going to be different as well.

A.K.: Thank you John. TAQSIM is very excited to have this session with you. We want to wish the best of luck with your music endeavours.

J.B.: Thank you very much Antony. It was very nice to be here and I wish you well on this project.

## 2. Ara Dinkjian

I. Interview transcript from podcast under the title: Ep. 68 'An Armenian in America' meet Ara Dinkjian and enjoy a great music story'. 168

(00:58-31:28)

Fadil Alturki (F.A.): Master, I would like to start with a biography.

Ara Dinkjian (A.D.): Well, sure, I was born in 1958 in New Jersey to Armenian-American parents. My father was born in Paris, my mother was born in Lyon. Both of them were born in France but they met here in New York. My grandparents on my father's side are from Diyarbakır, which is Eastern Turkey, and my mother's side is from Harput, also eastern Turkey. I had the trip of my life when I took my father for the first time and we went to the old country to see the villages of our ancestors, that was about fifteen-sixteen years ago. Since then, not only we went back a few times we also performed there, my father being a very well-known Armenian folk and liturgical singer his name is Onnik Dinkjian. So that being the case, I was brought up in a very musical home. I didn't know that homes were any different. I thought everybody woke up singing and playing instruments and went to bed like that also. So, music was just part of our language. And it seems that even as an infant, I was more interested in those sounds, if they were coming from the record or from the radio, or from my father's mouth or from when we had people over and they would spontaneously start to sing, or if we would go, let's say for example to a wedding. All my parents had to do is put my little baby carriage next to the band and for the next six hours I would be ok. "Leave me alone let me watch the magic that was happening", as I was trying to understand what is this and how can I become a part of that world. It was really Fadil, nothing that I ever chose. It seems that I was programmed for this, and I'm very grateful. I am now 62 years old and I wake up every morning anxious to hear something I haven't heard before or to learn something new or to write a piece that I haven't written before, in other words my hunger is still there, which started as an infant.

F.A.: Interesting. I would like to expand more the biography, the way you started with instruments at home, to be an Armenian in the States [United States].

A.D.: The part about being Armenian is really all-encompassing and I say that because, before I was or conscious it seems that all of our friends, of course relatives, everybody that we associated with was part of that Armenian-American community. A lot of it centred around the church, my father is a deacon which means he served at the altar singing the religious music, and when I was thirteen, I became the church organist and continued that post for over forty-five years. So, the religious music, actually to be honest any sound any music was fascinating to me and I wanted to be part of it. So, I started as a little child banging on the table and my mother even told me that when I was a little boy in church, if they were singing a religious chant that had a rhythm, I would

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Interview available on YouTube channel, Alnadi podcasts: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4g-u8Vubkfw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4g-u8Vubkfw</a>, accessed June 26, 2023.

start to bang on the chair and my mother would tell me: "no you cannot do that!". So, they got me a little darbuka as my first instrument and that was really the beginning. I wanted every instrument, it didn't matter whether it was eastern or western, it didn't matter if it was a string, a percussion, a wind or a keyboard. I wanted to explore everything. My parents, to their eternal credit, bought a piano and a guitar. I started to take clarinet lessons in school and it just went on and on. But the most impactful instrument story in my life was when I was about five or six years old. My parents explained to me that I could go anywhere in the house except into their bedroom. And why? Because there was an *oud* in the bedroom and they warned me it is a very delicate instrument: "You cannot touch that, you can touch anything else in the house but you cannot touch that." (...) Of course, I became very curious: what was this thing that I was not allowed to touch. (...) As months and years went by, I became more and more brave. My mother would be sawing in the living room, my father would be at work, he doesn't come home until 6 o'clock. After a few years I'm sitting on my parents' bedroom floor. I have the oud in my arms and I'm starting to figure out something slowly. Well one day my father came home at 16.30. I didn't realise he was in the room listening to me. When he walked in his first reaction was: "What are you doing? Oh, you are playing?". He saw that I was respecting the instrument and I had achieved something and I guess that's how I escaped being punished for not having listened to them. From then on, I was allowed to play the *oud* and this became a fascination with me that continues to this day.

F.A.: How did you come to learn to learn the *oud* on your own? Did you have the chance to meet a teacher?

A.D.: You know the answer to the question, it depends on who you are and what you believe in. And I say that because I am not taking credit for what I have achieved because it seemed to have been programmed in me. No, I did not have a formal teacher but at the same time I can tell you that everything I heard and every record and even the birds singing outside and the wind shields wiping on the car making a certain beat, virtually everything is my teacher. But to get more specific, at a very young age, I discovered that my father had a few of the 78s, the old gramophone records that turn very fast on the machine. These are the earliest (other than the cylinders) documentations of our music and he had a few of those records. I became absolutely obsessed, eventually understanding that this is the roots of our music, of the instruments, and I have been collecting those records ever since now beyond 5000 Armenian and Turkish 78 rpm old gramophone records. My feeling about it is that I saved them from being thrown in the garbage because the truth is that by the time is started collecting over 50 years ago the old people who had them were no longer listening to them their children the following generation was not interested in them, and they were taking up a lot of space and a lot of junk and I gladly took them and I feel like I saved them from being destroyed. Now, of course, it has become a little more fashionable and even monetarily profitable to have these old records but that was never my motivation. My motivation was to learn the foundation of the cultures. And it was not just Armenian, it could be Arab, it could be Turk, it could be Greek, it could be anything. To hear the foundation of our ancestors playing these instruments. Because, as you know, as time goes on, yes, we do become more refined but we also lose a certain authenticity. So, I figured out early on that if I could hear the early music, I could understand the development and where it has come to this day. My intention was never to try to recreate the past, because I believe that it is impossible. I am in

America, it's 1970 for example, it is not Istanbul in 1910. So, I cannot be something I am not, I cannot feel something I am not experiencing. But I can still learn from the masters through their recordings to the best of my ability by listening closely. Yes, we start by imitating, this is how we all start. But I could never be Yorgo Bacanos, I could never be Farid el Atrash, I could never be Udi Hrant. The goal has to be to discover who I am, what do I have to add to this history. You don't do that early on, you spend most of your formative years learning the history of your instrument, of your music, of your culture and at a certain point you start to discover certain unique things about yourself. And as you nurture those unique aspects maybe you start to discover a unique musical personality.

F.A.: I think we should stop at this point and go back to a previous point where you mentioned, Ara, the need to observe. This is a very delicate skill. When you listen to those recordings and you don't have an instructor and you need to understand without a video or a picture what these masters are doing. Plus, the knowledge of *makam*, the *seyir*, all the culture of the music you are listening to, and the *makam* family. Or maybe other kinds of music. Tell me about this skill and how it nurtures and grows.

A.D.: It's a wonderful question, Fadil. And you made another point: I did not limit myself to makam music. Let me at least at this point say that, because I was born and raised in America – whether it's in the house or not – you are going to hear the Beatles, you are going to hear western classical music, jazz, all kinds of music and I never differentiated between them. To me it was a sonic wonderland that I wanted to be part of. I did not make categories. To me it was just music. Regarding how one learns without a teacher or how one observes: I have always felt that the musician's job is not to play but to hear what most people don't hear. If you are able to do that then you know what to play to make the music better. The ability to play in tune or fast or loud or slow or whatever, is a technical ability but if you do not put it in its best context, in the music that's happening, then you are not improving that musical moment. And this may sound strange but I'll give you an example of one of the ways that I realised this [example from American TV-series about knowing exactly where someone is]. As a musician as we are playing at any moment you should be able to stop me and ask me: "Right now what is the kanun playing?". I should be able to tell you: "He is trilling in the upper register." (...) In other words you have to be aware of what is happening so that you know what to play, in other words to hear what most people don't hear. I believe this is the job of the musicians. Once you hear this, maybe the best thing for you to do is not play anything at all. Or maybe play in the low register because nobody is playing down there. We need that bottom. So this is how I began to train myself. Regarding the old records and not having a teacher, it took a lot of time and imagination because sometimes, for example, the 78 rpm was not a standard speed until the late 1920s, which means that if you have an earlier record the proper playback speed might be 72 or 86 [rpm]. So, I'll be listening and the *oud* is B-flat and I would be confused. So, I had to hear these things and understand these things: "Oh, maybe there is a technical issue." Eventually you start to hear: "He is playing an open string and it's b-flat, so either he tuned higher or the speed is incorrect. There are universes to learn. And I'm trying to figure out which strings he played, which fingers could he be using, and how to use his mizrab to pick that phrase. And I'm still trying to find those answers you know.

F.A.: You mentioned about the first years, that the musician has to learn the history of the instrument, until he discovers himself. Could you please describe the process?

A.D.: When I said the musician has to do that, what I really meant was this is what I believe. Of course, there are musicians who are not interested in the past. They are born with talent and they move forward from the point where they are. I am just telling you my own philosophy and my own approach. I want to move my instrument, my culture and my music forward just a little bit. But before I do that, I have to know its history. Because maybe somebody already did what I'm doing or maybe this is breaking all of the rules and therefore it is not a direct line it is not a logical transition to the next step. I personally want to be aware of all of those things. And I once tried to teach my children to trust what seemed right to them. [examples from his family members]. The same way as a musician. And please don't misunderstand. I don't ask other people their opinion about a particular song of mine or a performance of mine. I don't ask because, if I ask ten people I will get ten different answers and what does that do for me other than confuse me. I have to trust what I hear and what I feel. This is part of discovering who you are. As a matter of fact when I started my first band which was called Night Ark, my father who is my hero and my idol not only musically but as a human being he is my example he said: "What is this music you're doing, what is this jazz mazz you don't blend those things this does not belong [together]." Ok, but I did it because, without thinking too much, this is what I felt. And it was a crucial step towards discovering who I was and starting my career because you know what? My father was not born in America but I was so if I ignore the fact that I was born in America, I am not being honest. At the same time, if I deny my Armenian heritage, culture and history I am not being honest. So, when I play music, when I write music to various degrees, those are the elements that should come through. If I am being sincere about who I am. That's who I am, you don't like the music that's fine, I have to make myself like it. I have to take a picture of who I am when I'm presenting myself musically. Those people who relate to it who like it, those become your audience. Those who don't like it, that's not your audience. You cannot please everybody.

F.A.: This is a big question; we will come to it in a different way later in our discussion. Touching on this, how come you were not dragged to the music flow or the music fashion or whatever was the mainstream at the time because you are not playing western music. I know that you did the organ for 45 years but you do the Eastern type *makam* music.

A.D.: You are asking why I didn't become a typical American musician?

F.A.: Yes

A.D.: Haaa, that's a great question!

F.A.: That is also good for the business, you can make money from it.

A.D.: When it comes to making money and thinking like that I am a disaster. If I wanted to make it, I would not play the *oud*, I would be doing something else. But like I said, I did not think I just followed what was attractive to me, what made me hungry, and it was these instruments and these

sounds. [Personal story:] My father was an orphan. He does not remember his father at all; he was around two when his father died. Back then if a man died and you did not have money, a single mother with two children could not support her children. My grandmother started to become insane with worry and she was institutionalised. And she died when he was five or six, so he barely remembers her. The only thing he remembers about her was that she would sing lullabies to her two children for them to sleep, in the Anatolian makam style (we call them maya or uzun hava). Now, when I was about twenty my father and I went to France to do a concert for the French Armenian community and an old lady came up to my father and she knew the biological parents. [describes the meeting with the old lady]. And she said: "And you know? Your grandfather played the oud." When she said that, I broke down and started weeping because I am an American born in Jersey. Why do I want to play the *oud*? Are you stupid? Play the guitar, play the drums, get some girls, get some money. That blessed woman gave the lesson of my lifetime which is: we are carrying physically the blood and the DNA and the characteristics of our ancestors. It is in us, even if we never met them. Maybe I talk exactly like my grandfather talks, maybe I walk this way. I don't know but he played the *oud*. It was the greatest gift I ever received. Because it confirmed everything that I felt, because she told me this is the path. That is what I was trying to teach my children. You may live and die and never feel the right way. you have to trust, it is who you are.

(36:10-55.30)

F.A.: Master, let's go back to the music and genres you learned and lived with, and the various instruments you play?

A.D.: Like I said, growing up, I never divided or categorised the genres of music. That's really more of a marketing device, so they know how to sell it and how to market it. Musicians have always rejected those categorisations, by the way. As a matter of fact, the great Duke Ellington said: "My music is not jazz, it's my music." By saying that he is allowing himself to bring in blues or jazz or classical or anything and it's still his music. I feel very much that way. America is a very interesting and unique place because as you know it is inhabited by people from around the world. So, it has an incredible diversity of cultures. [Describes his disc collection.]

F.A.: [Asks a question on Dinkjian's routine concerning his disc collection.]

A.D.: My routine these days is to wake up for coffee and look for something I have never heard before. I'd like to make another point which is more important than amassing a big collection. The point is this: experiencing music is what ties us all together as humanity. It's been going on since the beginning of time. It is one, I don't know if I should say this, it's one of our only hopes. When we find ways to define how we're different, music is one of those things that reminds us of what it means to be human. In that way it is one of our most precious gifts. I can hear someone play a couple of notes and they are on the other side of the world and they are touching me. (...) It is a precious gift. I think I have mentioned to you, there have been times in history and certain cultures that to be a musician is a derogatory low class negative designation. There are even negative words to describe musicians in certain cultures. Maybe I'm naive but I'm extremely proud to be part of a great history of musicians, I'm not putting myself at their level necessarily but,

whether we like it or not, we are the ones we are alive today with our instruments in our hands and I'm very proud because it is a unifying force.

F.A.: Let's talk about the music community from the time you started being a musician.

A.D.: My particular experience was with the Armenian American community which meant church on Sunday morning, and by the way our church service is two and a half hours long and everything is sung. So, two and a half hours of melody. That's why I loved it so much because of its music. We also had folk dance groups both children and adults, where we would wear the ancient costumes of the villages of our ancestors and we would recreate the folk dances of each of the villages and we would perform those. I myself refused to dance and as a five-year-old I would play the darbuka. I would play the music but I would not dance. And a very interesting thing has happened. You know there were terrible events that happened during the first World War, specifically in Turkey. We were either wiped out or had to run. This is actually why I was born in America. After I turned back and so those villages and towns I understood that if it was not war there was no reason to leave. We had mountains and lakes. It was paradise. Many, many Armenians wound up in America. Some from Harput, some from Diyarbakir, some from Erzurum, some from Malatya, some from Urfa and on and on. And each one of them had their own melody, their own dance. But in America, when the Armenians would gather, they wound up learning each other's dances and melodies. That never happened in Turkey because you were a little more isolated, each one of you, you were in your own village. But in America they would all gather. (...) So when my father and I would perform – and we performed thousands of picnics and weddings and dances – there would be hundreds of Armenians, all dancing all of the folk dances of our ancestors and we didn't realise how precious that was. It was almost like keeping a dinosaur alive. We were not conscious of how precious it was, until some people from Turkey came and I brought them to an Armenian dance that we were playing, and they saw the dances of the little Armenian kids. And those people made us realise that what we had done was so precious because the dances were dead over there and we kept them alive here not intentionally. The Armenian-American community was and remains very strong still today. [Dinkjian talks about his family.]

F.A.: That actually leads me to another question: the connection with the great masters of Armenian composers and musicians.

A.D.: I have to make the distinction. The Armenian masters of music, I don't like to make categories but, because my ancestors come from what today is called Turkey, I can tell you that there are many crucial masters, composers and musicians. We know this from history, from old records, from books. Their compositions are still performed today. Most cases the language performed is Turkish because that's where they were living but the composers were Armenians, Greek, Arab, Jews you name it and of course Turkish. We make that distinction from what was formerly Soviet Armenia and is now independent Armenia and we have a group of master composers. By the way, that music, which is different from Turkish music, is a music I am also obsessed with. They use slightly different instrumentation, they use different approaches. It is not the ancient *makam* system, there is harmony and yet it makes me feel Armenian. There are two schools of Armenian masters, both schools of which I am a student.

#### F.A.: Can you name some of these composers?

In Turkey we have Tatyos efendi, his *saz semai* and *sarki* are still being played today. One of my absolute favourite composers is Armenian Bimen Şen Hazarian and there are so many more. When we talk about Armenian composers, we must mention Gomidas Vartabed; he was an ethnomusicologist, a *selebet* priest, a composer, a musician, a choral leader. He went throughout Turkey and recorded and transcribed folk songs. He is the Armenian pillar of composers, probably the most important. We also have Sayat Nova who was a minstrel, a troubadour, an *aşık*. These are all some of our foundations.

F.A.: Ara, one question here is about language and music. You were born in the States but you do play *makam* music. Do we learn the language the same way we learn music or do you link it back to genes and the ancestors, the 'Armenian tree'?

A.D.: One thing that we have finally come to understand is that children are capable of learning many languages. There was a time in America, I don't know about the rest of the world, in the 1960s when the teachers were telling the parents not to speak their native language to their children. This was terrible advice, wrong advice because they have proven that the brain of the child can learn many languages. So, your time to learn in an unconscious way is between 1-5. I tie that into music. If I accomplished anything it is because there was so much music in the house as a baby. Just as I speak Armenian fluently, it's because I grew up listening to it, whether it is *makam*, Gomidas, or the Beatles. I heard that every day, it became natural, it just became part of my world.

F.A.: Do you see that we learn the language the same way we learn music?

A.D.: If you don't take advantage of it when you are a child, then you learn in an academic way. It becomes a chore. I never ever considered music a chore. Just the opposite. While I wasn't a big practitioner, I have always been a constant player and explorer.

F.A.: Having all these obsessions with old recordings, might give an impression that you are old-fashioned or an imitator. But when we listen to your music it is so connected to the past but is todays. How is that?

A.D.: How can it be anything else? I could never sound like they sounded in the 1920s. I could never sound like I was born in Cairo. My only chance is to be honest. If I'm honest you'll hear some West you will hear some East, depending on the piece. The important part is sincerity. I am not trying to play in a particular category. When I was younger, I did not know the technical names of the *makams*, I was not paying attention to the *makams*. When I would write music, I was always in this family of the *makams Hüseynî*, *Beyati*, *Muhayyer*. I didn't know those terms back then, but I was writing these songs. Later, when people would ask what *makam* is that, and I had to answer what *makam* I was playing, I started to see that 80 percent of the songs of Diyarbakir, where my ancestors came from, were in this family of *makam*. I was not conscious of it, I was not trying to do that, I wasn't thinking of my connection to Diyarbakir but there it is. If I am just allowing

what's going to happen, I see my history it's coming through me.

F.A.: About living today, about expressing today rather than mimicking the old records. Sometimes we are impacted by the massive number of the old recordings, it will impact our style, it will impact our taste. That's not very clear when we listen to your recordings.

A.D.: I honestly am not conscious of it, but I do know that first comes the writing process. And if I can tell you about that: The only time the writing is really something that makes me happy is when I'm more of an observer rather than in control. When I'm in control then I am using my brain and right there it becomes a calculation instead of an inspiration. This is really the truth; my wife knows that in the middle of the night if there is a light, she knows not to ask me. Because in my dream I heard a melody and I had a music paper and wrote it down and went back to sleep. I'm in the shower and suddenly I hear this melody. Fadil can I say that I am the great creator of this melody? Wow, something came. Where did it come from, it's coming from God, it's coming from our ancestors, it's coming from you I don't know but when it comes without warning you don't know. [Gives examples of inspired moments.] That said, you might be commissioned to write something and you are sitting there waiting for inspiration and time is running out and you have to force yourself. I'm a musician. I'm a composer. I know how to force myself to write something. They are rarely something that I' m really, really happy with afterwards I can tell it was a bit of a calculation.

F.A.: Ara, you once told me that composition is nothing but finding music and putting down music on paper, what we call composing.

A.D.: One of my CDs is *Finding Songs* as opposed to writing or composing. And I say *Finding* because when they come you know that it is right. As if they have always existed and you found them. They don't need to be changed. It is hard to take credit for something like that. So, I say: "I found it!"

F.A.: So you need to keep listening and waiting for them to come rather than engineering a piece.

A.D.: I think it is sort of like – I hope it is not an inappropriate analogy – when you are a young person and you are wondering how I am going to meet my wife. My advice to my children was that you cannot predict or plan it, but you have to remain open, available. It is the same thing with music. I am not sitting waiting but when it comes I know that I cannot interrupt the moment because I know it may not come for a long time.

F.A.: So, we stay tuned as musicians. So, what would you choose for us to hear from your personal music?

A.D.: *Picture* which is a piece that came to me many years ago and has been recorded in about a dozen different languages. I am saying this not to call attention not to myself, but on the power and diversity of music. Diverse cultures can hear a melody and feel human. In this piece, I'm playing the *cumbus*. And if I may say a story: I had written that piece and I was making my first record

with Night Ark for RCA records, a big multinational company. In the best studios in NY, best microphones engineers, producers. We made the whole record, I played this with the *oud* and I was not happy. I said the piece was special and it needed something special and we didn't get it. He said: "Ok, we'll get it tomorrow." I went back to my apartment and I looked in my closet. There was this instrument there, her husband had died. And it was in the closet. I took it tuned and I took it to the studio, played that song and that's what I was looking for. The *çumbus* is really like a poor man's *oud*. Inexpensive, not particularly well made, not very respected. *Çumbus* was never treated with such respect. Eventually the *çumbus* company called me and the sales had gone up. Sometimes ignorance is the best thing (...)

(01:14:30-01:17:00)

F.A.: [On the use of lyrics and the universality of music.]

A.D.: I do believe that spoken or sung language can be a wall. If we use it that way it can be something that separates us. It was one of my goals to bring the *oud* to part of the world that thinks that is a Muslim, Arab, etc. I wanted to bring up the fact that there is no limitation to any instrument only to human beings. That's why I recorded a Beatles song. For that part of the world, I wanted to bring a western harmonic colour to the makam system because as you know makam music doesn't have harmony. Well, I'm born in America, and harmony is part of how I grew up. How do you bring harmony to microtonal makam music without offending either one? This has been my work, trying to enhance both bringing harmonic colour to the makam system, and bringing microtonal music to harmony. This is one of my ultimate goals; to make instruments more loved by people who do not know them, certainly to bring the time signatures that are unique to our world to the rest of the world and to blend but in a way that enhances both. You know in the 1950's there was Yehudi Menuhin and Ravi Shankar, East meets West you know? They would take turns playing and the other one would play. It was a beautiful meeting of cultures but it did not create something new, just very polite: "now you'll play now I'll play". I wanted to blend and create another possibility that these cultures can mix. But to do that you have to be respectful and aware of both. I don't like when a middle eastern traditional folk player says: "I'm gonna play jazz". You cannot play jazz, you have to study jazz and I don't like when a rock player says: "I' m gonna play some microtonal modal music." No you have to study, you have to know about it before you do it.

# II. Personal interview transcription with Ara Dinkjian and Tamer Pinarbasi (02/2015 Istanbul)

Marina Liontou Mochament (M.L.M.): Could you explain what you define as Armenian-American style of *oud* playing?

Ara Dinkjian (A.D.): So, the style that developed in America is a combination of Udi Hrant's style but also the fact that you are born and living in America and there is even jazz or there is eventually rock and all these different sounds. And you are combining all of these things. So, this unique style developed. Your parents were born in Turkey, you were born in New York, you heard

Udi Hrant but also you are listening to the Beatles. And so all of that developed the kind of unique style where simple harmony [developed] more than it would develop in the Arab world or in Turkey. And then some of us, like Tamer and I – maybe I'm wrong to say this – but one of our greatest pleasures is either creating or re-defining harmony where harmony did not exist. You know, more than playing faster, to find the harmonic colour, which is supposed to be a Western European concept, it does not exist in Middle Eastern music traditionally. That harmonic colour, to bring it and lay it on top of a modal system which in itself is so rich without clashing, this is our great challenge and our great pleasure when we find it. So, these packets of communities, the biggest one being in America because of Udi Hrant (but Hrant also had relatives in France so he would go to France). Hrant also made recordings in France on a small Armenian recording company named Ararat, that do not exist anywhere else in the world. So, he is singing by himself on the oud on Ararat label record Hastayım Yasıyorum, which is different from the one that he recorded here. Oh my God, these things are precious. So, maybe there are some French *oud* players that were inspired by him, by Udi Hrant. So, this is I think the genesis, if there is an Armenian oud playing style it is ultimately connected to Anatolia or to Turkey. If we trace back, back, it comes back here but it develops according to the country you are talking about. So, Tomboulis was born in Turkey for example. (...) You get affected by your environment.

M.L.M.: What about the improvisation in Armenian American *oud* playing? We can listen to a *taksim* like improvisation played after a song or a tune [meaning metric improvisation].

A.D.: Ok, the interesting thing about *oud* improvisation is that, in Turkey the *oud* was not the prominent instrument to improvise in ciftetelli, it was [supposed] to keep the ostinato going. Because you have the sustained instruments and then you have the kanun, it comes third after the clarinet and violin but oud would be the last one. But in America, again because of Udi Hrant – the dominant influence – the *oud* became [the lead instrument]. First of all, the *oud* started playing in the low register, where I love it, where it lives and breathes and [then] it shifted up an octave, because it became the lead instrument. The opposite of Soviet Armenia and Turkey. Now, [America in the 1960s], it's playing up here [high register] and when it comes time for a solo, first thing is the *oud* and they are playing up here [he imitates the high register gestures]. So, because it became the lead instrument now the soloing style and the repertoire had to develop, so what happened with Richard Hagopian in California he developed a picking style that I stole (and he is my dear friend and I acknowledge him and thank him) where, because the oud doesn't have sustain if you want to hold a note [Dinkjian here sings a tremolo technique, to give the illusion of sustain]. So this would be a joke in Turkey – if you want to hold a note let the clarinet do it – but again the *oud* became the dominant instrument in the Armenian American community so it changed the picking style to give the illusion of sustain and you had to develop some sort of rhythmic line. So, something developed in America that I don't think it developed anywhere else, frankly because of that. Had it been Sukru Tunar, who came to New York in the 1950s maybe that would have made the clarinet the prominent [instrument], but because it was Hrant and he was Armenian, [people said:]: "Oh, he is one of us." So, this is how this all developed.

M.L.M.: About your improvisation techniques and strategies. How are you thinking about that, how structured are your improvisations?

A.D: First of all, thinking is the great danger in music, the brain is the great enemy of music. If you are conscious and you are using your brain it means you are not allowing. I am sorry to get so hippy. You are not being sincere, you are editing. This is the great danger. If you are asking me what I am thinking, I am not thinking, if I am playing well, it means I am not thinking. But as far as structure is concerned, I believe [a] basic story or art or anything you state your opinion, you develop it and you conclude. If there is structure to improvisation, generally there are exceptions to everything of course, there has to be that part. *Taksim* is a perfect structure, introducing the *makam*, modulate and recapitulate This is a general structure for music, for art, for architecture, for stories, for life.

M.L.M.: Yes, for sure, but let's say that you have to practice before you get a good solo or a good rhythmic improvisation, what would you think for your practice, not for your performance.

A.D.: I do not mean to be rude, but I reject your premise, you have to practice. I never practice [at this point Tamer agrees by saying: "I never practice"]. Here's what is going to happen, we are going to play a concert tonight, we cannot guarantee that we're going to play well, no this is true we are good enough that we can make most of the people satisfied because we know our music and our instruments well enough. But for us to say "Yeah we really did something tonight," there is no guarantee. If we have a chance to do something then, we are impressed with ourselves. [If we say] What a great concert [it] means that our brains were not on and we allowed for something to happen. I reacted to what he was doing and he reacted to what I was doing, I don't know if it is God or if it's chance, the people, the sound, all these uncontrollable elements and then we have the chance, even though he [Pınarbaşı] is the best kanun player, we don't know if this is gonna be a great night. And here is my only [advice] (this is not good for students): If I practice then when it comes time to play, I'm gonna play what I practiced. I'm not going to allow music [to be expressed]. I'm gonna practice to execute what I practiced and this is the beginning of the problem.

Tamer Pınarbaşı (T.P.): But she was asking about *taksim* practicing or practicing.

M.L.M.: Improvisation practice in general.

A.D.: I never practice.

T.P.: For me you have to listen, you have to practice your instrument, not improvisation, whatever. If you listen, that's the best practice.

A.D.: Our job as musicians is to listen not to play. Playing is the easy part. How do you know what to play? It's only if you hear what is needed. He is doing this, he is doing that, maybe the best thing to do is not play anything, that would be great. Or he is doing this, he is doing that: "Oh my god if I do this, [this] is gonna [have a certain effect]," but you only know [when you listen]. So, when we are playing music at any moment, Marina, you should be able to say: "Stop, Ara. What is the kanun doing right now?". And I should be able to tell you he is trilling. If I don't know what he is doing, how the hell do I know what to play? If I'm not listening to my fellow players, what are

they playing, who the hell am I to be playing? This is the most important thing.

T.P.: There are so many great players, but they don't know how to play. They are playing the song but they can play a lot. They just play, they don't care about what's happening, they don't hear it. That's the bad thing, that's not music.

A.D.: And you know, when we have a rehearsal it's obviously not to learn our instruments, it's to find what we can do with that piece. Sometimes, we are talking about intonation and we're talking about a sixteenth tone, we're discussing this for five minutes.

T.P.: He loves it, nobody cares.

A.D.: And you know Ismail can hear it! I'm going to give you another secret. You know sometime [at some point] we will not be here, and the young people [will continue]. This is not ours you should know this. She [Marina] is nice. I'm going to give it to her. So, look my dear. When it comes to improvising or even composing – which might be the same thing. My father is an Armenian folk singer. Sometimes, I close my eyes and I imagine my father singing when I'm improvising because for me all instruments are trying to emulate the human voice. We are trying to say something, to sing, to tell a story. This is what I do, this is my secret, if I have a secret. I imagine the human voice and I know my instrument has certain limitations. It does not have sustain, his [Pınarbaşı's] instrument, all other instruments have certain limitations, we all have our problems, right? But what I love about Hrant is that he always gave the illusion of sustain. You could sing his *taksim*. You could not sing Yorgos *taksim*, (sings) this is Hrant. This is what I do: in my instance it's my father's voice that I hear but you can hear a voice, and if you are trying to tell a story like a human voice then the instrument is not the important thing. Then the story is the important thing, tell your story, don't tell me you are a great *oud* player, tell me your story. The instrument is not important, the story is important.

M.L.M.: You mentioned something about composition and improvisation I would like how you get inspired by your composing [process]. How do you do it with inspiration?

A.D.: Inspiration is by definition something that you cannot force.

## M.L.M Yes but you can help it a bit!

A.D.: Well, we are all good enough on our instruments that if we are not inspired but we find ourselves on stage or a recording session and you have to improvise. We know enough to do something that is not necessarily inspired but that most people (I am not trying to talk down to anybody) would tell that was nice. You know, I have been playing for fifty years, so I have developed enough little things that I could connect them and here you go, this is the improvisation. [laughs] You know, the moments of inspiration are for me very, very rare. I don't know about him or anybody else. It's what I live for. I can't wait, I don't know when it's going to happen next week or in six years, I don't have any control over that.

### 3. Kyriakos Tapakis interview

Interview transcript of personal interview with Kyriakos Tapakis, in November 2021, in Kavala, North Greece. The interview was held in Greek and was translated by the writer.

[In the first part of the interview Tapakis talks about his education and his choice between jazz guitar and *oud*. He chose the *oud* after his high school years when he moved to Thessaloniki and formed along with other musicians the music group Loxandra. He then as he says dedicated his focus on the *oud*.]

Marina Liontou-Mochament (M.L.M.): Rhythmically [in improvisation], what is your approach?

Kyriakos Tapakis (K.T.): To tell you the truth, I haven't approached it. I haven't thought about it. Great part of my approach has been influenced by the band that we had with Theodorou [Kostas], 169 mostly with him. Everything there was rhythmical and we were together there with Anastasiadis the drummer, and I was really enthusiastic about his approach to rhythm. He was always telling me things about rhythm, but I did not practice any of those on the *oud*, I was practicing them rhythmically [by tapping his feet, counting out the subdivisions and others] and then those things passed in my *oud* playing. If I had some time to practice, Anastasiadis would always tell me to do it on the instrument, but I never did. [I am playing] Whatever comes out, I did not practice it.

M.L.M.: Structurally, how do you think about metric improvisation, do you ever think about structure?

K.T.: No, I don't think about it at all. It needs to have a development, ok, it starts slow and then 'I give pain' [Greek expression used when someone is doing something passionately] [laughs]. I haven't analysed it and in general, I'm not so good with structure. I do not think about it so much. But I'm copying a lot of other people. I have a lot of students and we transcribe *taksims* and practice the phrases. But we don't learn it by heart. It is not good to imitate as such.

M.L.M: How do you treat the rhythmic structure when improvising?

K.T.: I hold the beat [pulse] and then I'm playing on top of this. Anastasiadis was calling this a way but I don't remember.

M.L.M.: Do you compose and what is the process you are following?

K.T.: I'm filling my phone recorder with ideas and then if I have time which I don't have [laughs]. I developed them [afterwards] but my phone broke down and I lost everything [laughs].

M.L.M.: Could you describe how those ideas emerge?

<sup>169</sup> Kostas Theodorou is a Greek multi-instrumentalist and composer living in Thessaloniki.

K.T.: Sometimes an idea comes. The best ideas mostly come before sleep or after, or in an explosion of happiness. You go for a walk and then an idea comes.

M.L.M.: So, maybe they come from the subconscious?

K.T.: Yes, and then you have to work on this. You write it down, you record it to not forget it and then you work on it. And also, for the melodies to come you have to cut down a bit on your practice. When you are always learning new melodies, you don't have space for your own. You have to empty your mind and your ears a bit to let the melodies come.

#### 4. Harris Lambrakis

Interview transcript of personal interview with Harris Lambrakis, in November 2018, in Athens. The interview was held in Greek and was translated by the writer.

Marina Liontou-Mochament (M.L.M.): Could you describe how your engagement with improvisation started?

Harris Lambrakis (H.L.): [In the Music school of Pallini, Athens] Alexandros Hamoutzis taught us a lesson, the best lesson in school, he called it *Free expression*. [It was actually] free improvisation. We could do whatever we wanted, play or not, dance or not, relax, do whatever you want but the point was that he wanted us as a team and he wanted us to be there. He did not judge anything of what we chose to do.

After that, everything came from action. The need for playing, for example with Haig [Yazdjian]. <sup>170</sup> [He would say:] "Play a solo" and then you are searching for what to play. Then you listen to other things, clarinets, violins. I think mostly because of Haig this rhythmic improvisation came. And from jazz.

M.L.M: When did you start performing with Haig?

H.L.: In 1994. And it was from Haig that it all started. At first, we played Arabic repertoire with Arabic percussion. But then he wanted to play Armenian [repertoire] and Mohamed left and he [Yadjian] invited Sidirokastritis [Nikos]<sup>171</sup> in the group. And the drums gave another sensation. And it's not the drums; it's the way Nikos played. Nikos helped me a lot without knowing. It's this feeling that somebody 'pampers' you [with the way he is playing the drums]. You play and he doesn't let you 'fall' or be exposed. Every time the feeling is the same with Nikos, he hugs you [with his playing]. He listens to what you play and he helps you with the phrase. He 'takes' [extracts] the phrase out of you and he guides you without pressure, softly and sweetly. And this was happening with freedom and allowed for openness. I didn't feel the need to put a label and define it [the practice of metric improvisation].

M.L.M.: And how did you decide to teach this [metric improvisation]? Because you are the only one that conducts this kind of seminar.

H.L.: I realised, through performance, teaching experience and praxis, that it [metric improvisation] exists as a subject. I saw a lack in me and in others. I asked myself "what is this?"; it exists [in performance] and we do not know what it is. I did not want to define it, but I wanted to find a way to approach it and then allow it to open its own world. What we never achieve in this week of seminars is to find each other, because we focus on technical things and then we don't

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>170</sup> Haig Yazdjian (1959) is a Syrian-Armenian *oud* performer, singer and composer. Yazdjian has been residing in Greece for the last forty years and has been a prominent figure in *oud* playing in Greece.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> Nikos Sidirokastritis (1963) is a Greek drummer, born in Athens. He is generally considered one of the most creative drummers in Greece.

reach it. [My wish for the seminars is] To find oneself inside this [the seminar]. I don't want to say do this or that.

M.L.M.: Another question, Harris: do you differentiate rhythmic improvisation from *taksim*? Because there is a mentality in Turkey that does not recognize rhythmic improvisation but only *taksim* and the categories *usulü* (with *usül*) and *usulsüz* (without *usül*).

H.L.: I see this free thing [usulsüz] as a case. India has played a great role in this, jazz, the clarinets Roma clarinets the versa. 172

M.L.M.: And what about the title of the seminar 'rhythmical improvisation'? Could you give me some information on the term?

H.L.: This title is Ross's [Daly]. This 'modal rhythmical', I don't remember how he said this at first. [Maybe] Because every time you have to relate to a rhythm. Someone could ask: "in the free thing's [i.e., taksim] doesn't there exist a rhythm?". I am interested in how I react when someone is playing a rhythm. Even when I am alone, I can consider that there is a rhythm, but in the case of rhythmic improvisation there is an interaction. And in the seminar, this is another thing that I am trying to make people understand; the one who keeps the rhythm or accompanies is equally significant. The thing I was telling you is that Nikos is taking the phrase out of you. If Nikos was not there the same thing would not happen. In jazz, this is a common mistake everywhere. You think that if you play swing and the other is soloing it will be nice. No, if you don't listen to the other performer, then it's not going to be nice. It is an interaction, we are together to play together, if the other one is metronomic [it will not work out]. When you are alone you have your own rhythm. All the taksims have rhythm, some notes are bigger, some smaller. I can extend the notes, the phrases when I am alone but when we are together, how can we do it together? Accompaniment is significant, it is a relationship.

M.L.M.: What do you consider the weakest points in metric improvisation performance and practice-based on your experience?

H.L.: I see that the basic problem is the great focus on the meter (bar) and the lack of a wider perspective. The primary effort is to analyse everything inside the bar but then to leave it and see it from the outside. And then this helps me to relax and not think about what I am going to play. [The goal is] To be able to raise your focus. Then, the meter becomes something like a breath. And then [the goal should be] to leave from that. It's not something difficult. For the drummers maybe it is more difficult. But for me this is the way. And then when we approach the non-tempered of the rhythm. There is the tempered rhythm of the metronome (exactly the way the piano) and then there is the non-tempered where you can breathe and get away and be inside the rhythm. It is the same with the intervals. I see it as something that opens and closes. But for this to happen you have to get away from counting. Because I have the impression that most of the people do not count like

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> According to Kalaitzidis (2015): '*Versos* (lit. spin) are composed by a compilation of small phrases which the musician chooses from oral tradition and fixes them with others of their own' (197).

this (tempered rhythms) the ones who know how to write and read he counts like this (tempered). [Here, he demonstrates counting of the external rhythm] The gypsy who plays the davul plays clearly like this. In the *makam* also it is like this, as scholars we are missing something that the ones that do not know how to read and write have more of; the feeling. (...) And the basic thing is to feel free and stop thinking.

M.L.M.: The other thing that I would like to discuss is if and how much your involvement with metric improvisation has helped you in creating forms and structures, that is, compositions.

H.L.: I think it is going together, and that was the other goal [of the seminar] to come to a point to see it as an on-the-spot composition or as a crystallised composition. That is, I'm doing an improvisation now in front of the "client" or am I doing this at home and taking it to the client as a ready product. This was what we were trying to do. In the quartet [Harris Labrakis quartet], we are trying to not crystallise the compositions as is the case with the *şarkı*. They were notated but the piece is not this, so what is the piece and where is the piece? [*şarkıs*] are also improvisations that were just written down. However, everyone improvises [in performance].

M.L.M.: So, we are improvising an improvisation?

H.L.: Yes, and with keeping the thought in mind that the two extremes [improvisation-composition] do not exist. I can never play exactly the same thing twice and I can never improvise without any reference, random, like a machine, random notes, this is impossible. As it is impossible to play something exactly the same. So, if these two things cannot happen all the rest are in the scope of /aytoschediasmosinthesi (comprovisation). The human is somewhere in between.

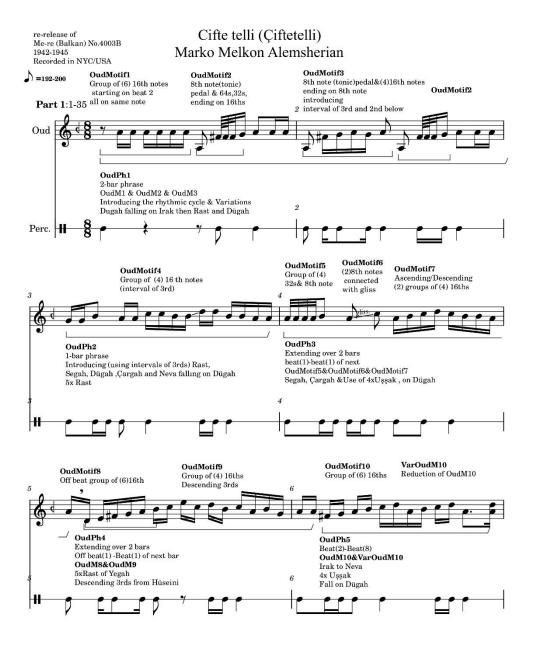
M.L.M.: Because whatsoever we have the memory of the body.

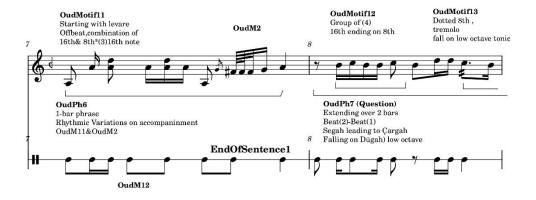
H.L.: Yes, and the two extremes are not human, they are mechanics. Even the themes can change. Our mood in the rehearsal is different. Our mood is different in front of the audience so how can things not change? It would be a lie. If this can happen and there is some interaction this is the goal. This is also αυτοσχεδιασμος (improvisation) and composition (σύνθεση) if you do not have any maestro. The older generations played like this, free (χύμα).

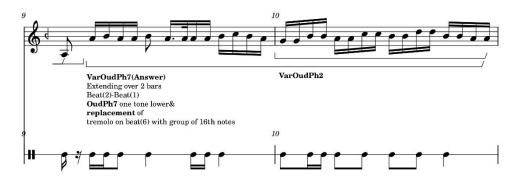
M.L.M.: So, this freedom that comes from your personal expression differentiates you.

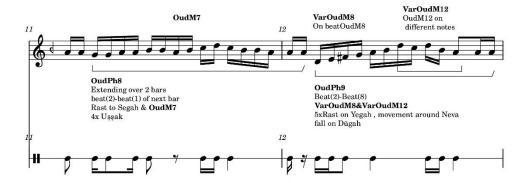
H.L.: You are always searching for something you are searching for yourself.

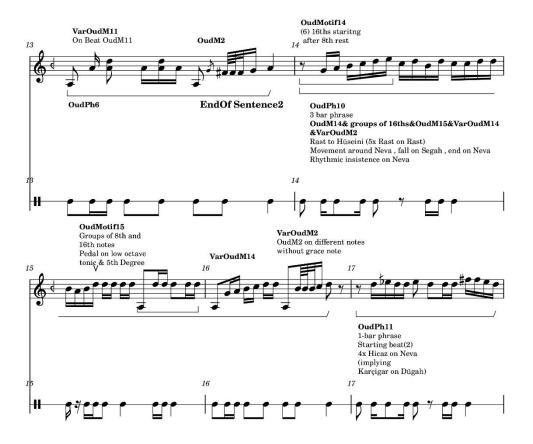
## **APPENDIX II: Transcriptions of musical sources**

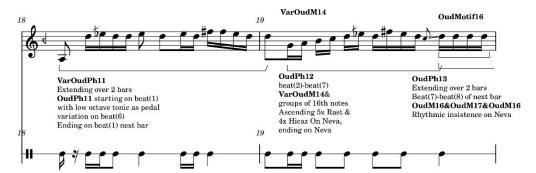


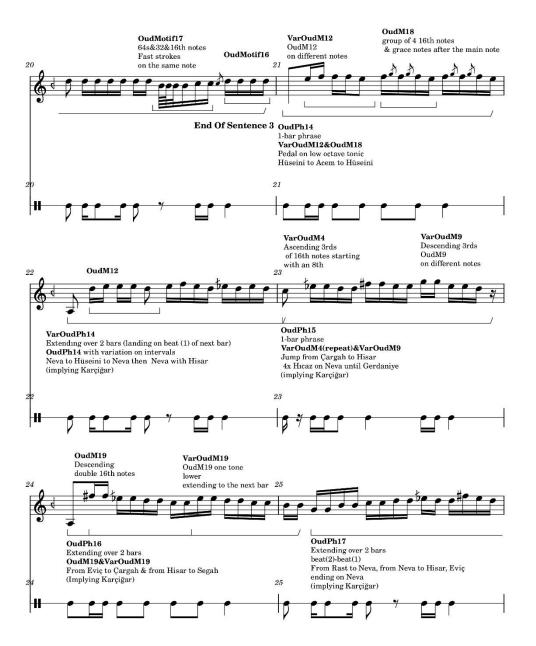




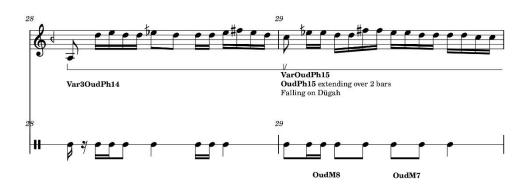


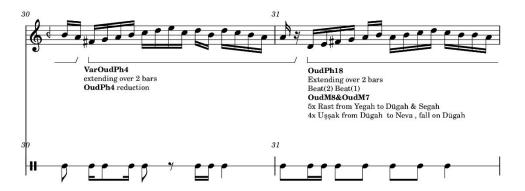


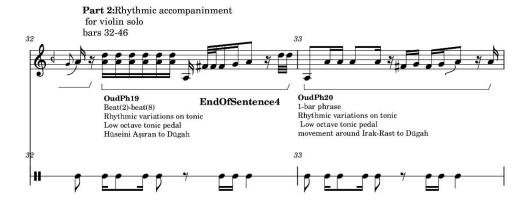


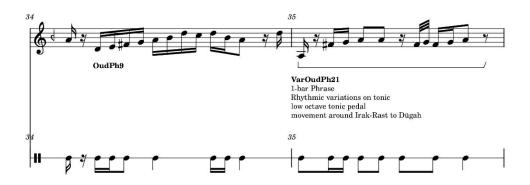


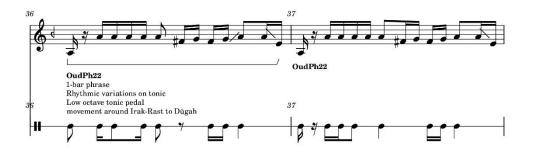




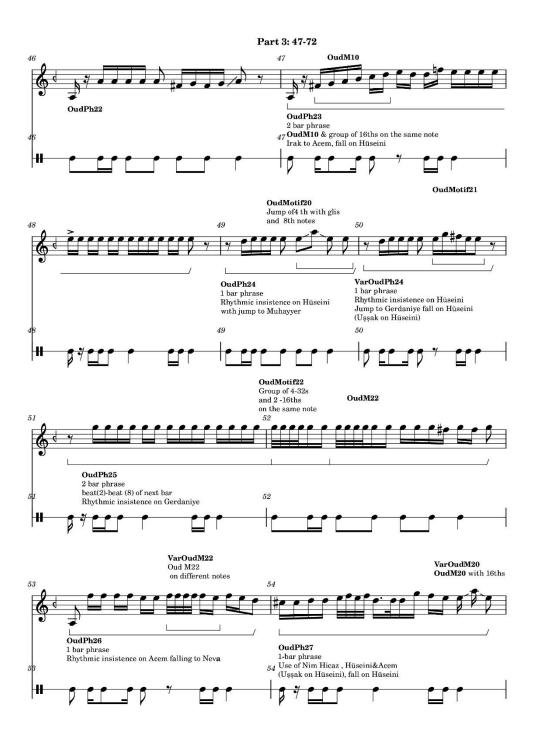


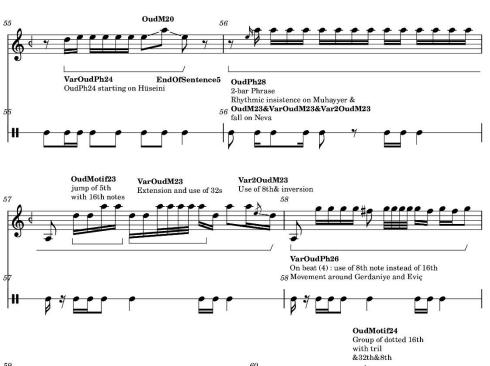




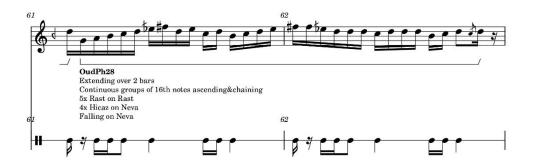


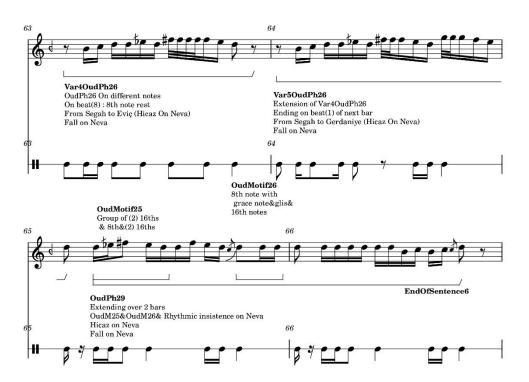


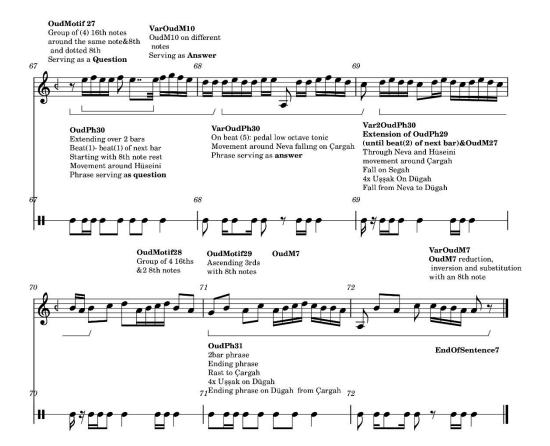












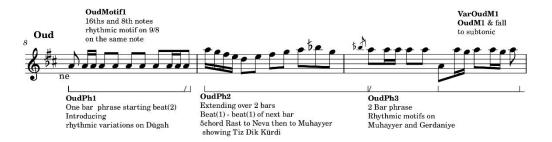
# Hicaz Karsilama

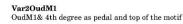
Udi Hrant's oud metric improvisation in between Indim Yarim Bahçesine & Baharin Zamani Geldi (Comp. Dede Efendi)

Album:4265 *Udi Hrant* (Traditional Crossroads, 1995)
"Previously unissued, these tapes were recently discovered, having been recorded in New York during his tour to the United States in 1950's."

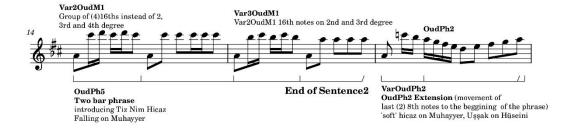




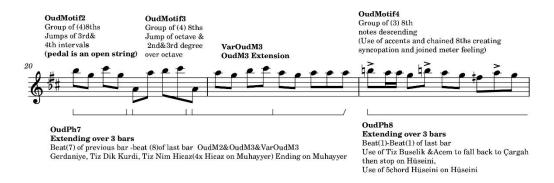


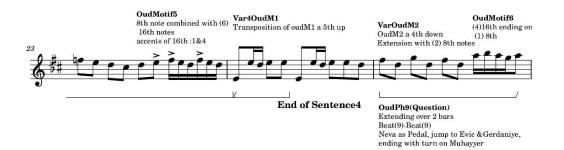




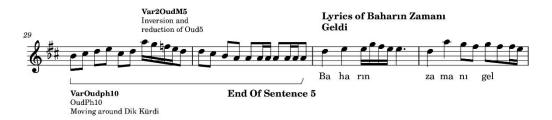














## Basha Bela

Album: Expressions East (1964) Concert Pitch-E John Berberian's metric improvisation

Anonymous

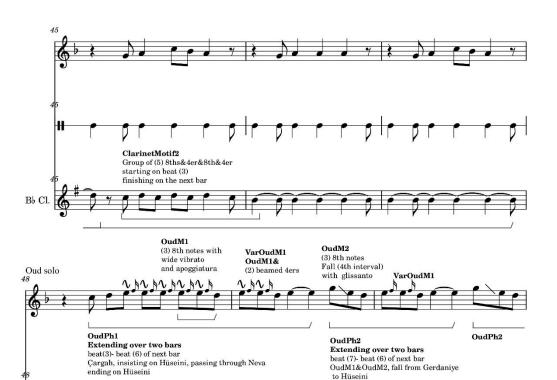


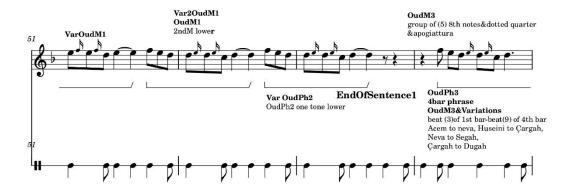






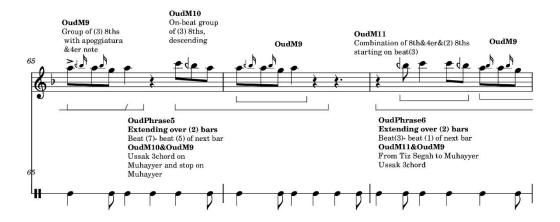


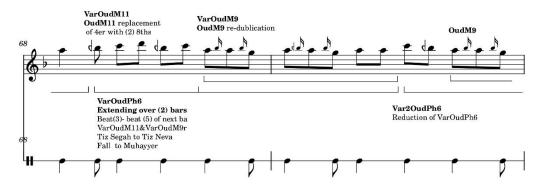


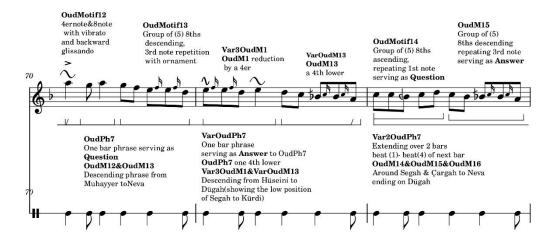


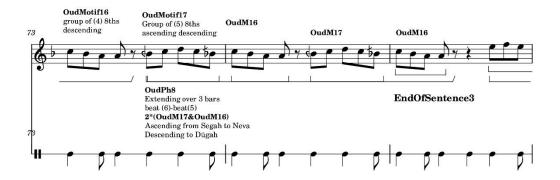
to Hüseini

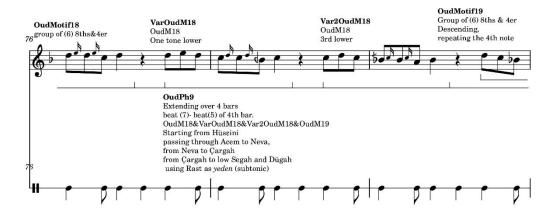


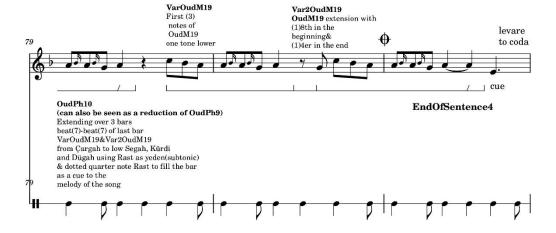




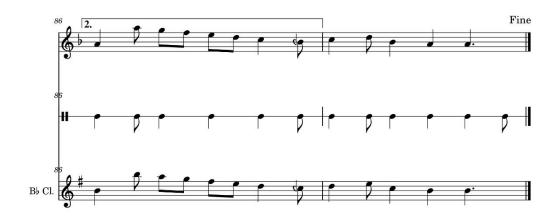














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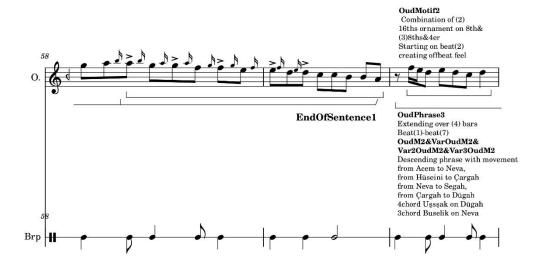


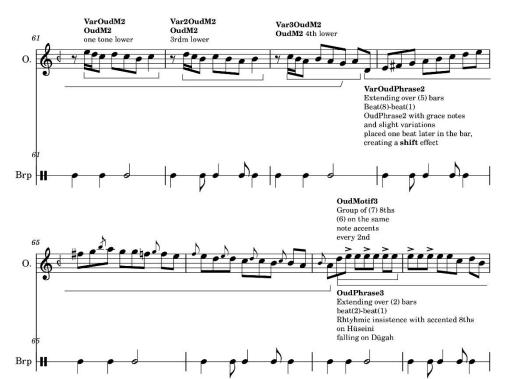
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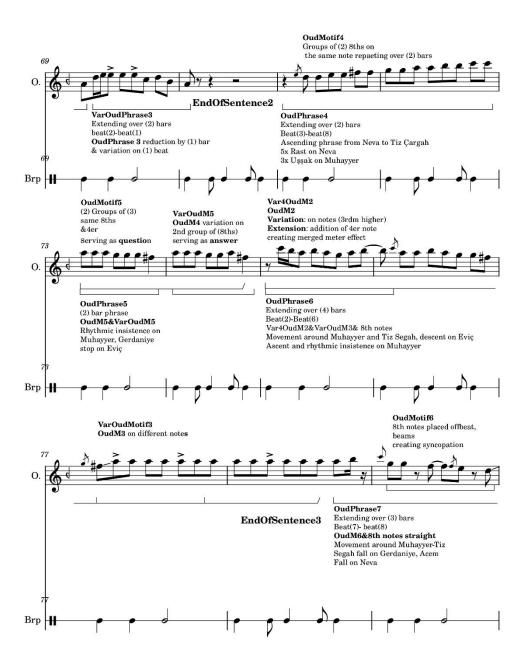


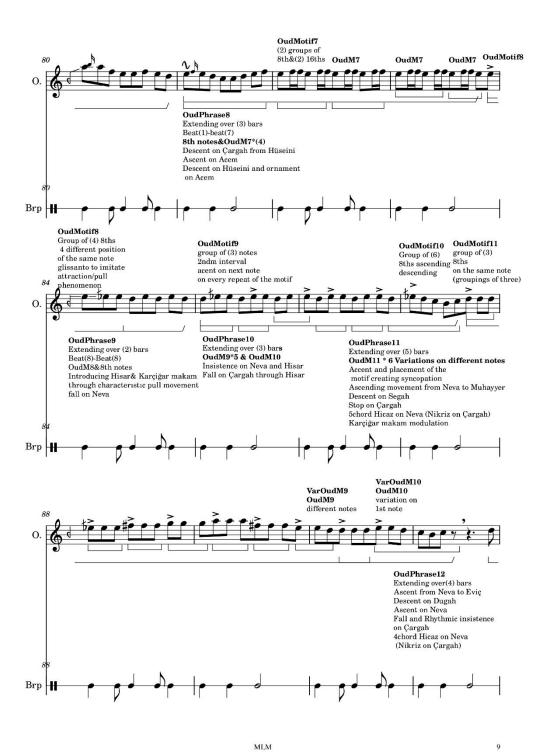
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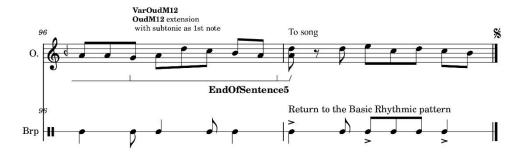






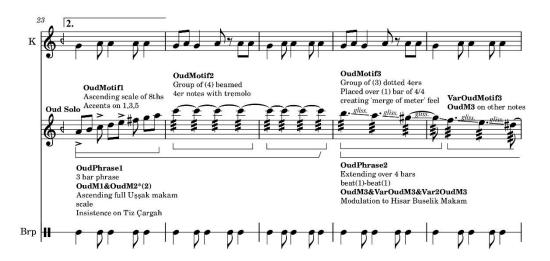
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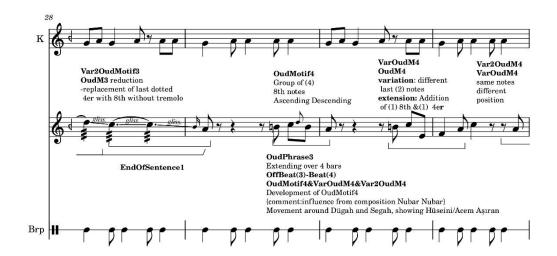
# OudMotif12 group of (5) 8ths jump from tonic to 4th fall on tonic OudPhrase13 Extending over (4) bars OudM12&8ths on tonic&VarOudM12 Ascent on Neva fall to Dügah 4x Uşşak on Dügah with a fall on Rast End on Dugah

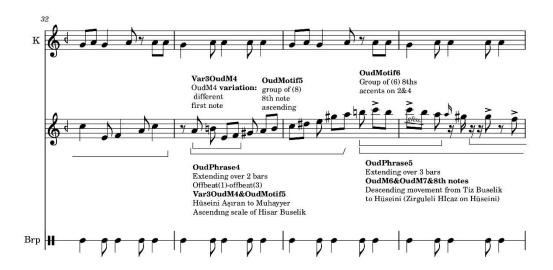


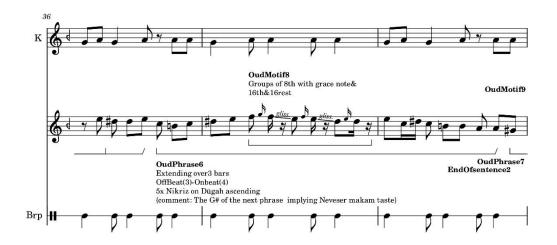


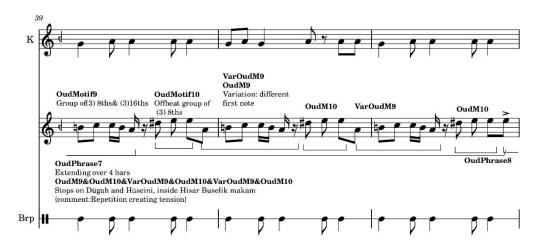


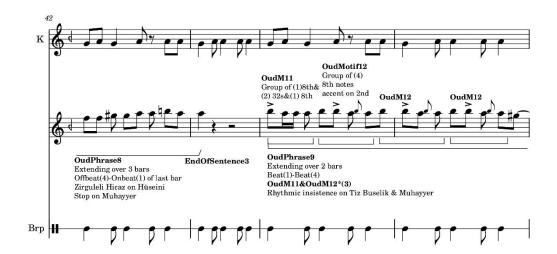




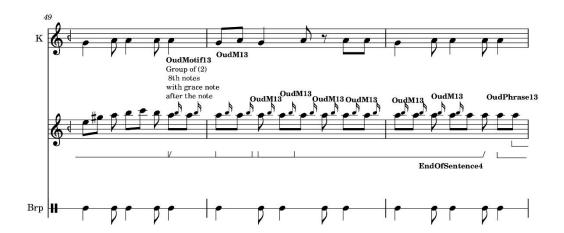




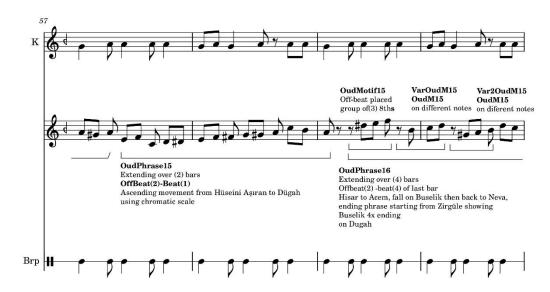






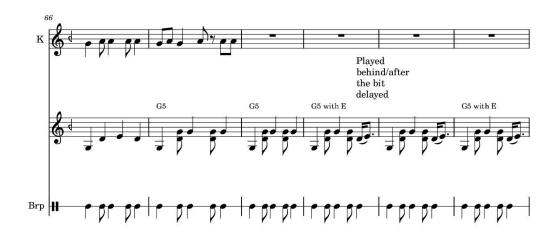






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## Album: Middle Eastern Rock – John Berberian And The Rock East Ensemble (Verve Forecast, 1969) performance pitch Dugah = E

#### Chem oo chem

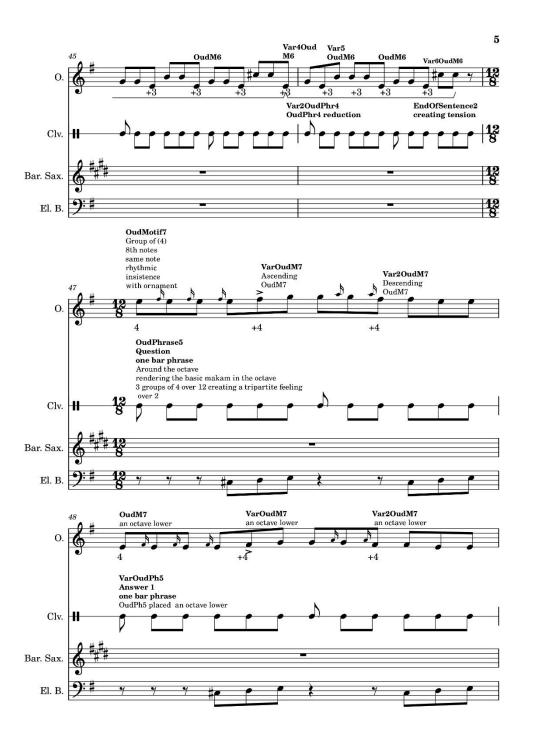
John Berberian's metric improvisation























### Annatol'ya

**Album:** An Armenian in America (2006) Ara Dinkjian - oud solo

Ara Dinkjian



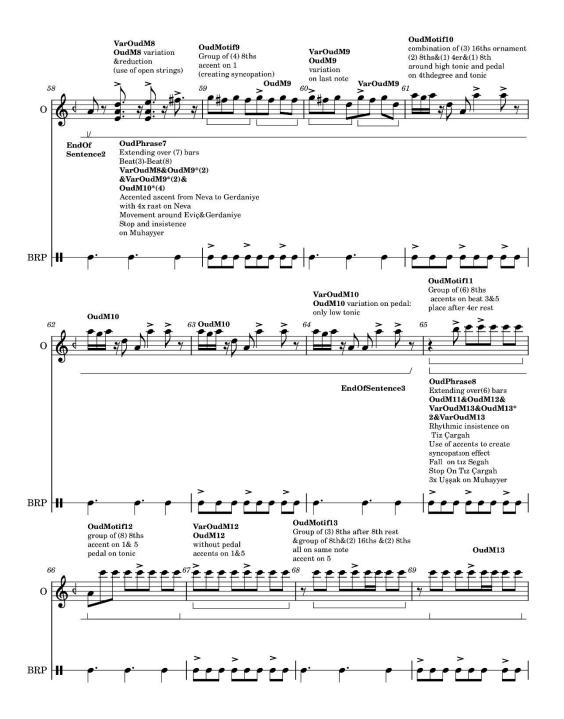


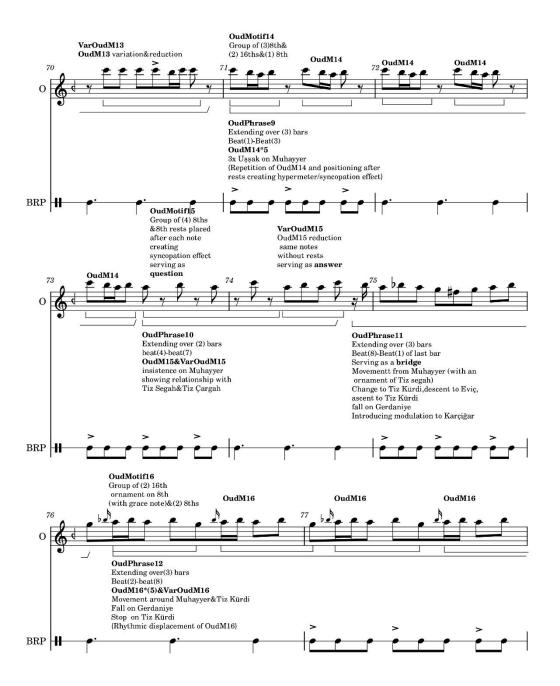


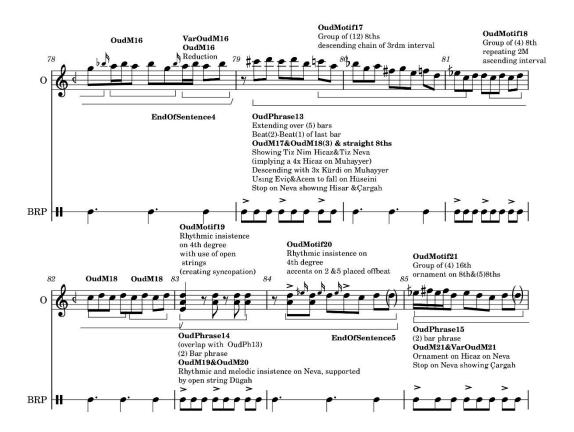


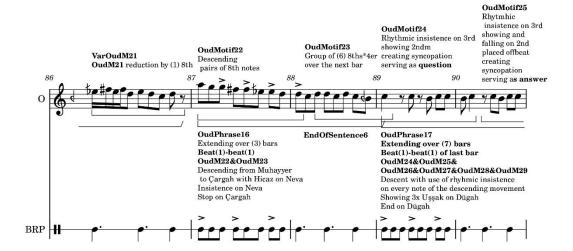














#### Kef Life

#### Ara Dinkjian's metric improvisation

Album: An Armenian in America (Krikor, 2006)

Ara Dinkjian













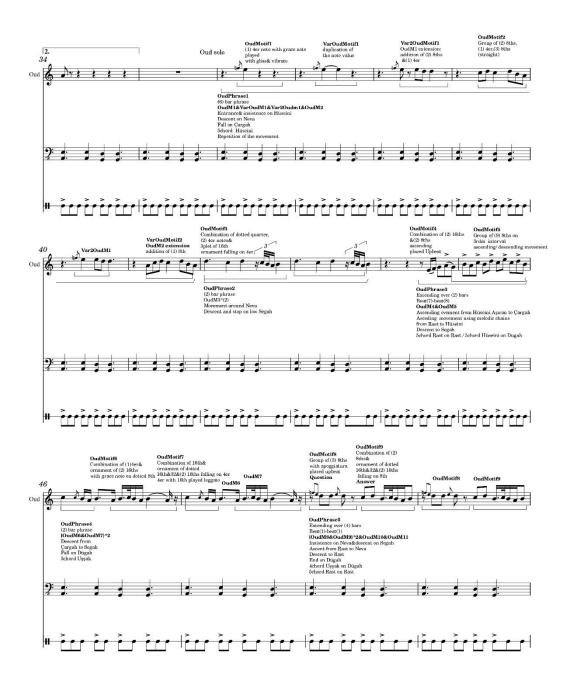


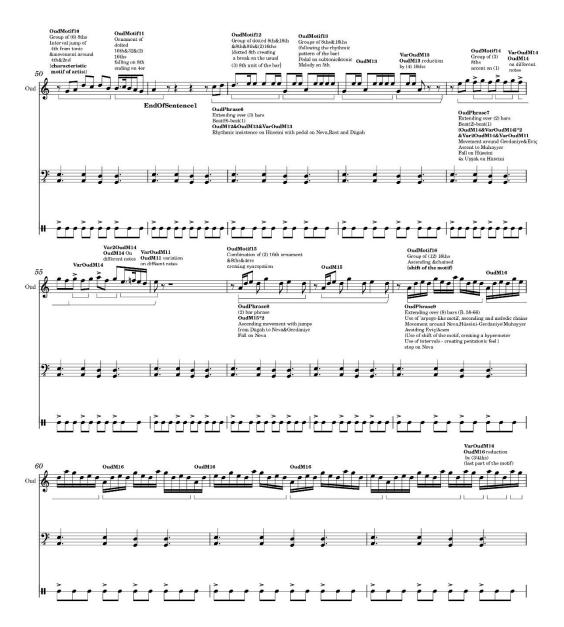


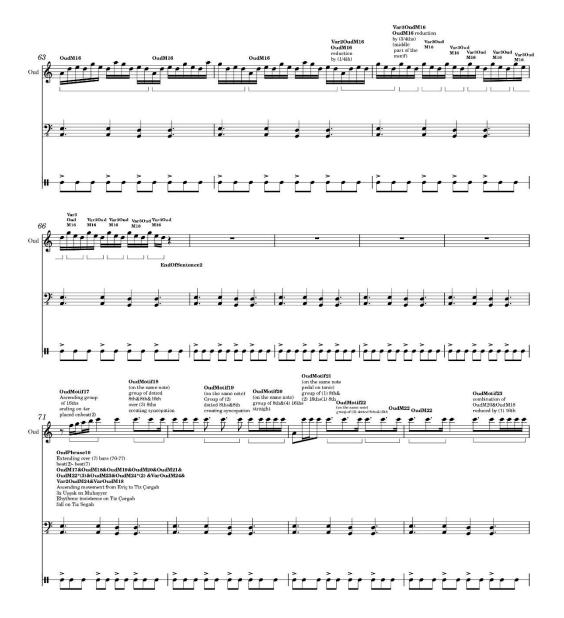






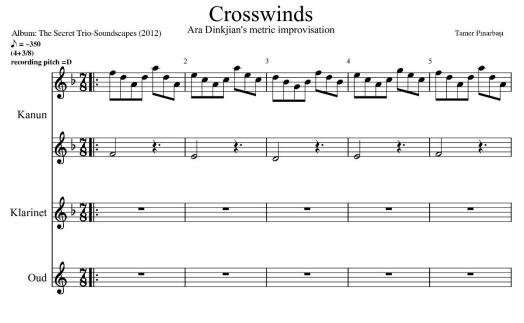
















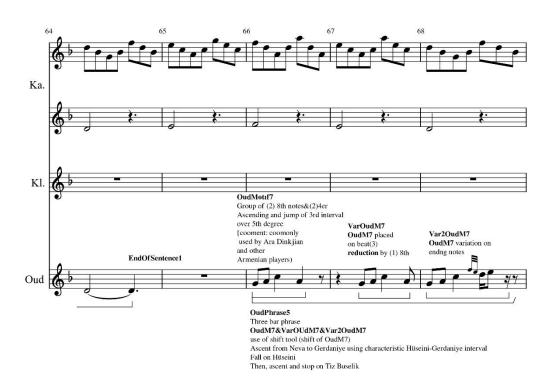








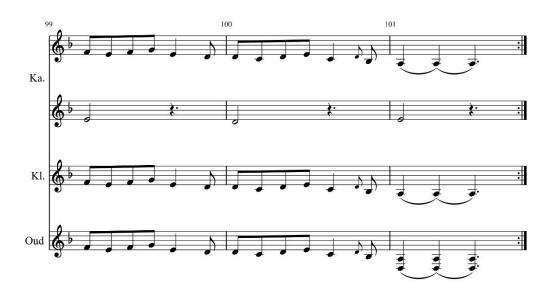






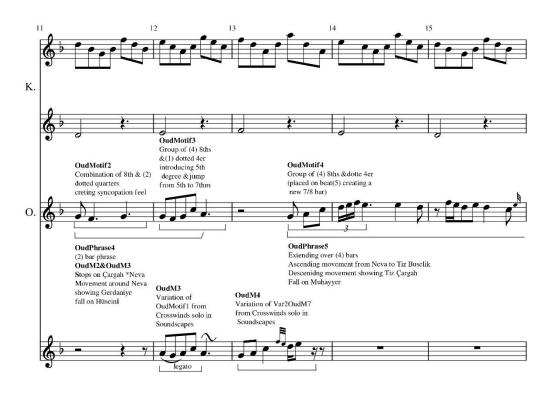






transcribed by Marina Liontou Mochament











transcribed by Marina Liontou Mochament





## Moments Tamer Pınarbaşı's metric improvisation







.5





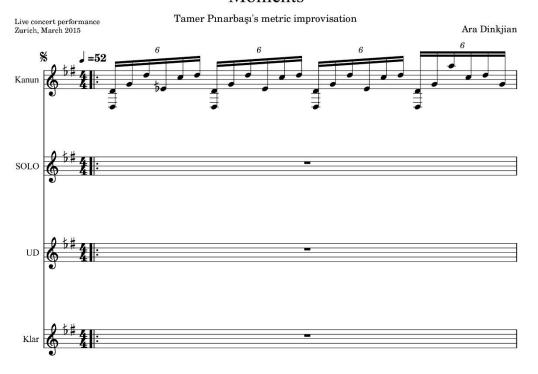




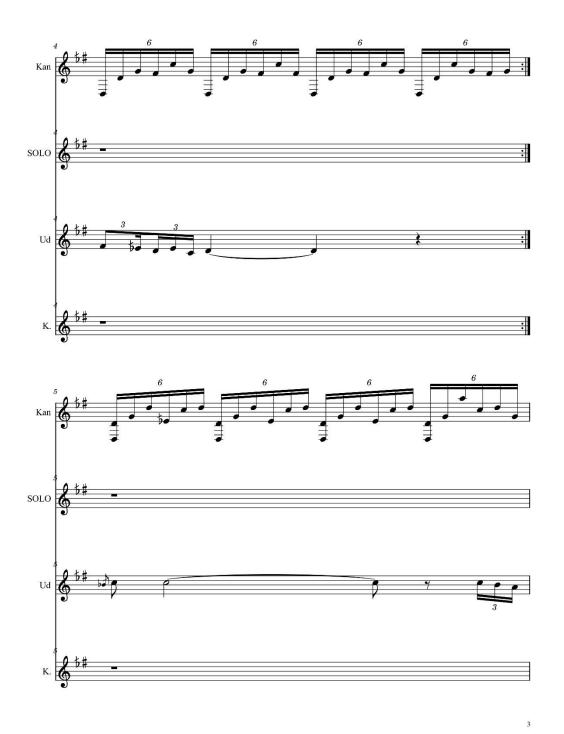




## Moments

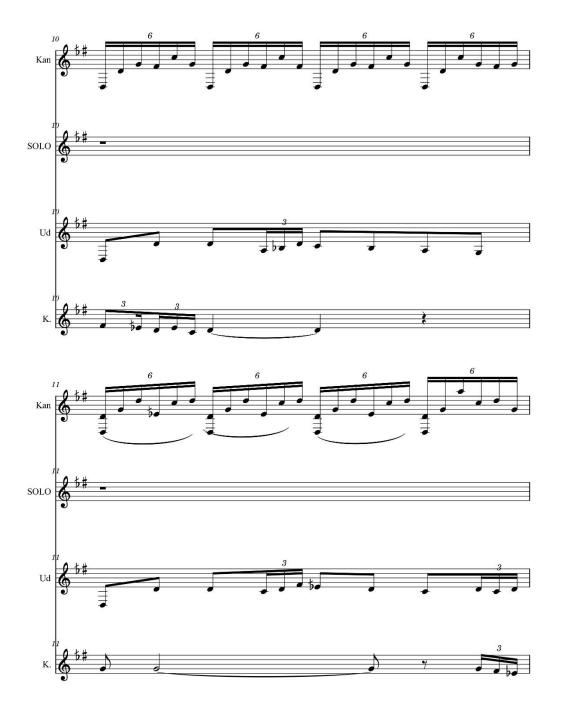




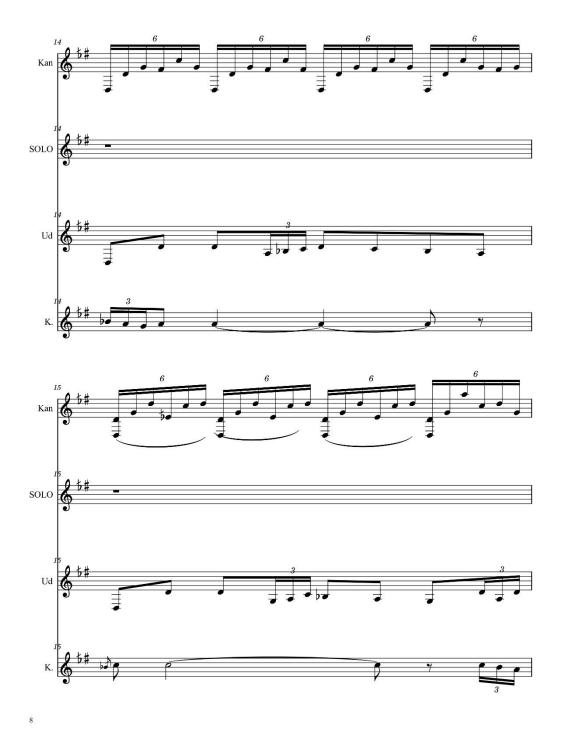


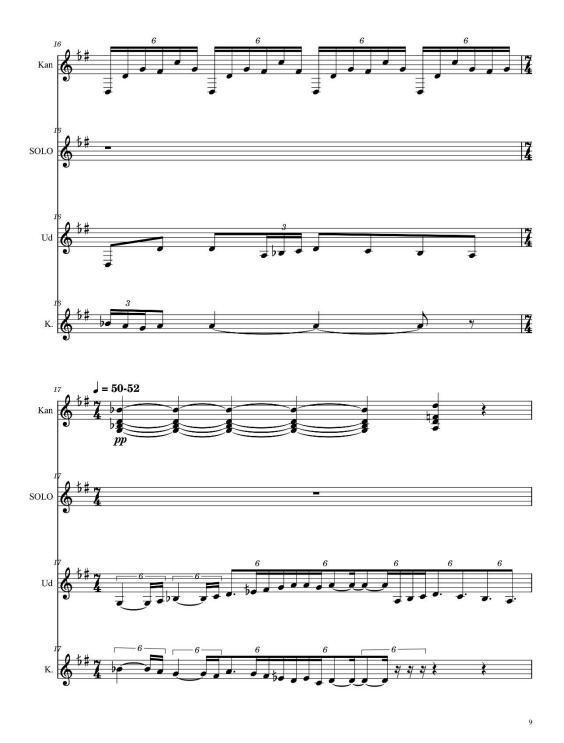




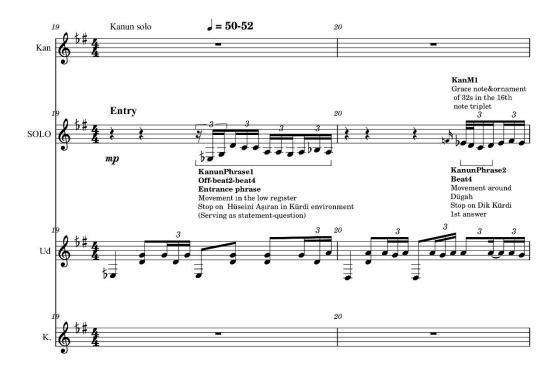


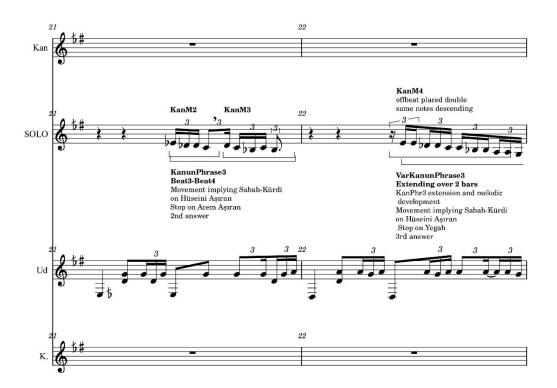


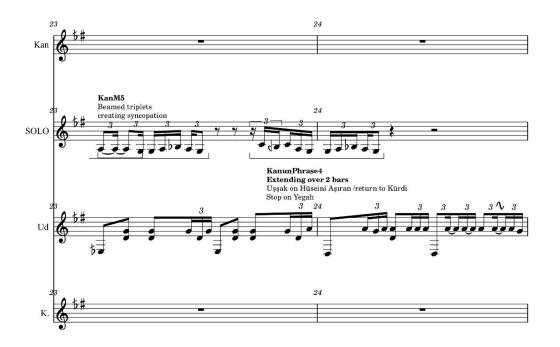


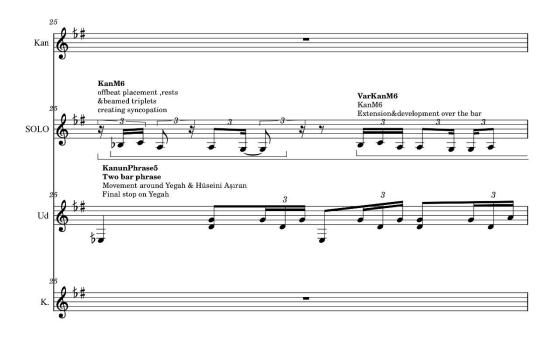


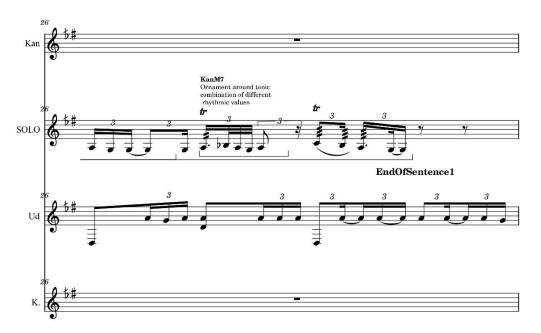


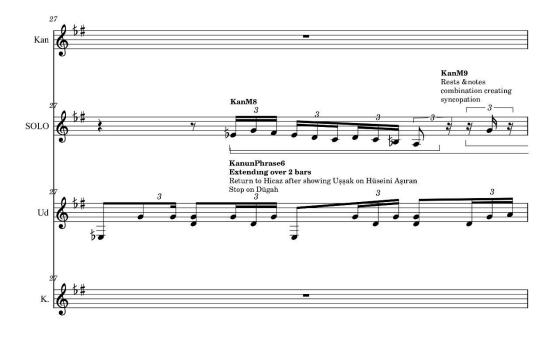


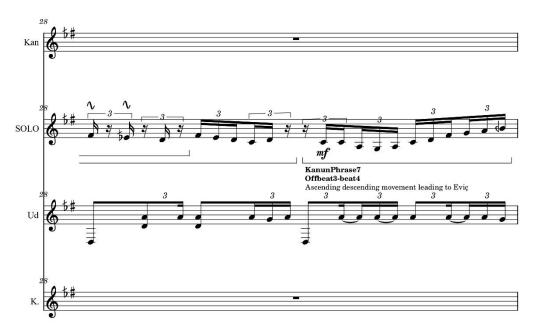


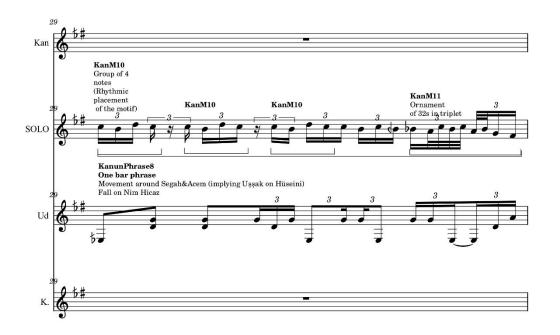


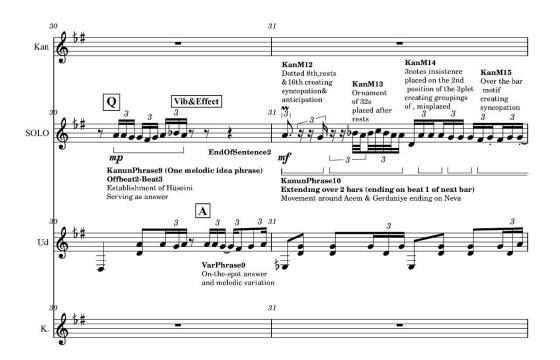


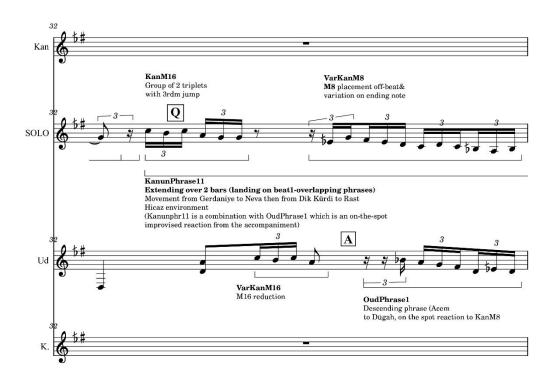


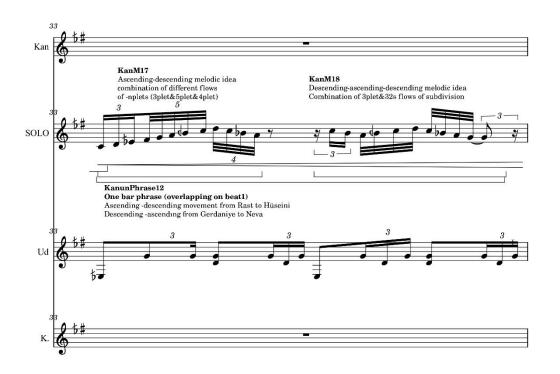


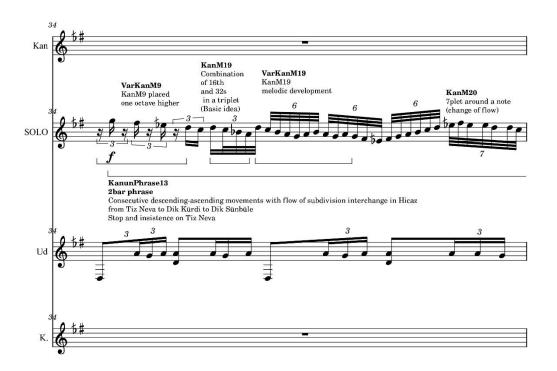


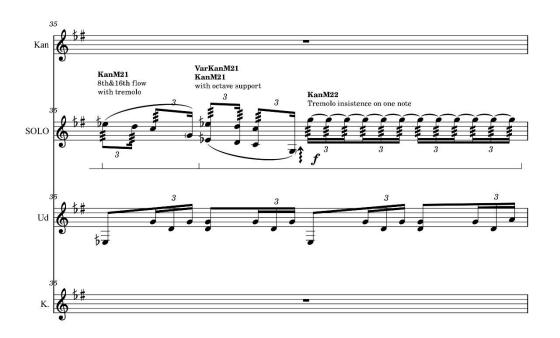


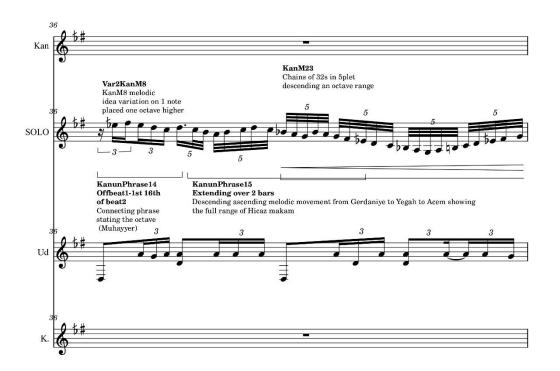


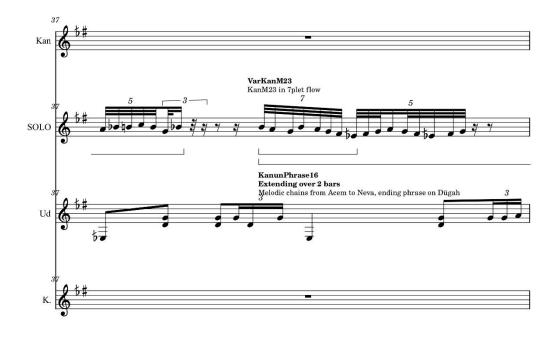


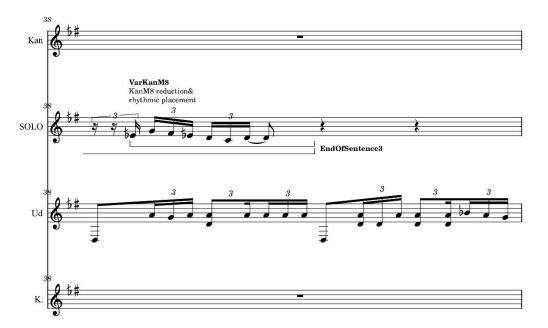


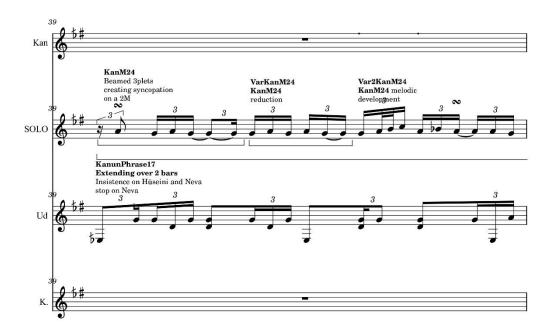


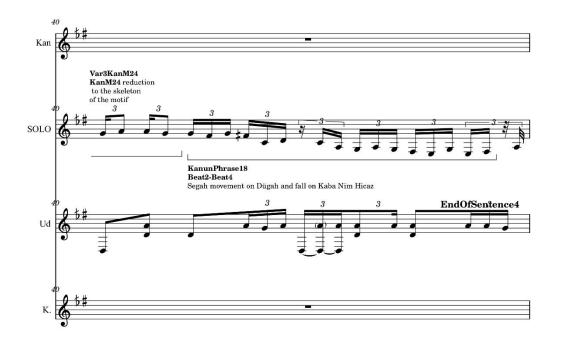


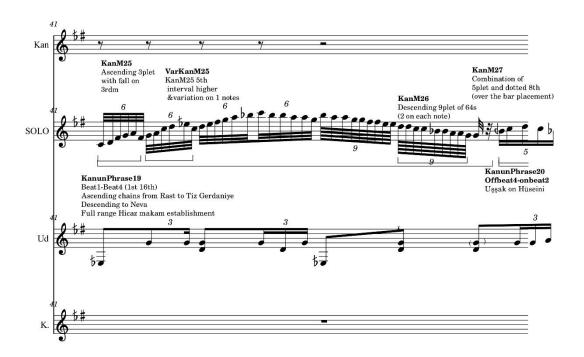


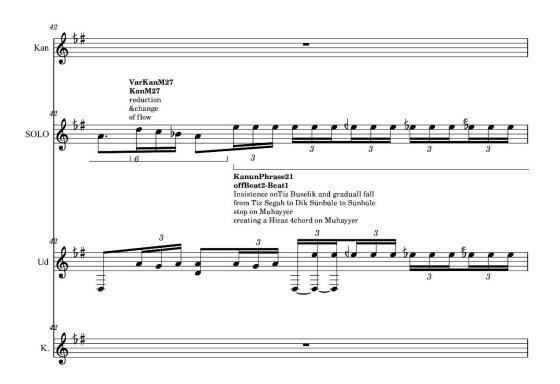


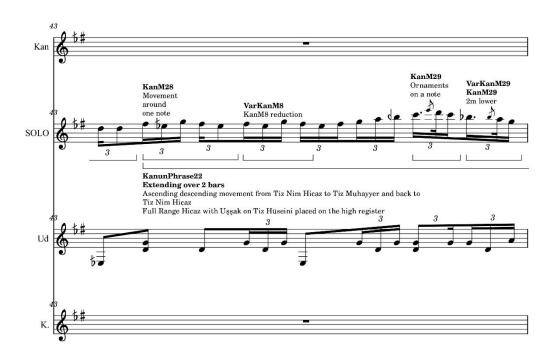


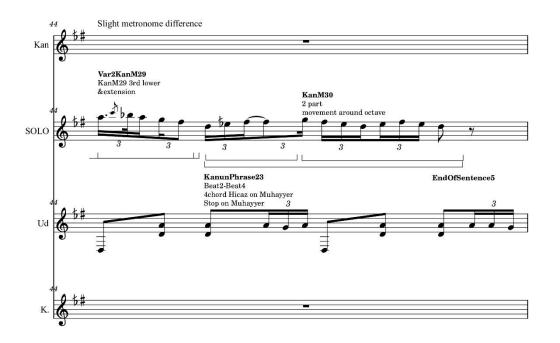


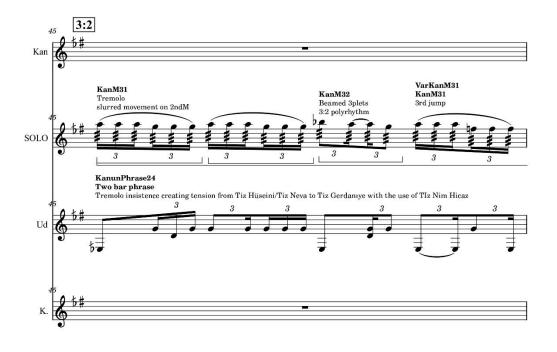


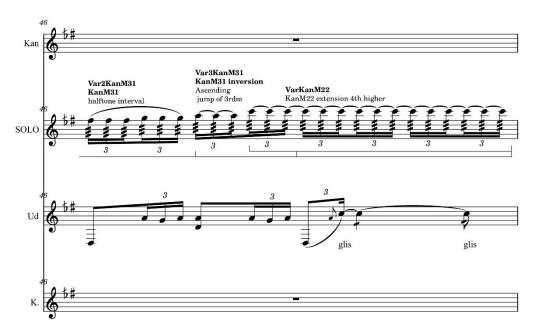


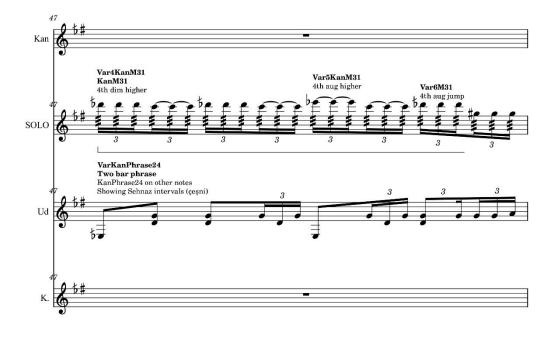


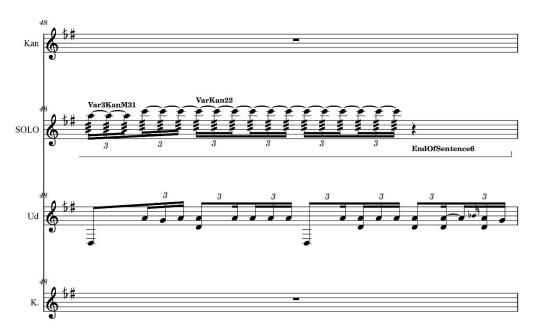


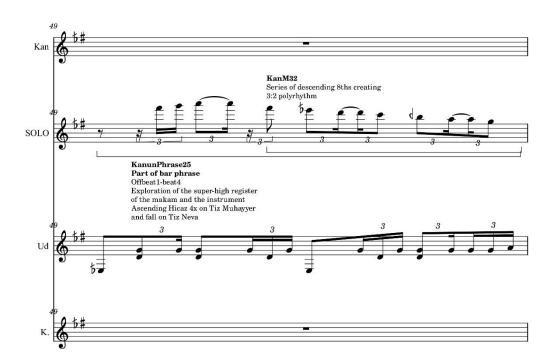


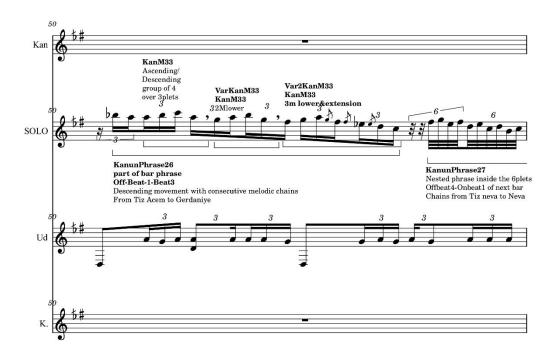


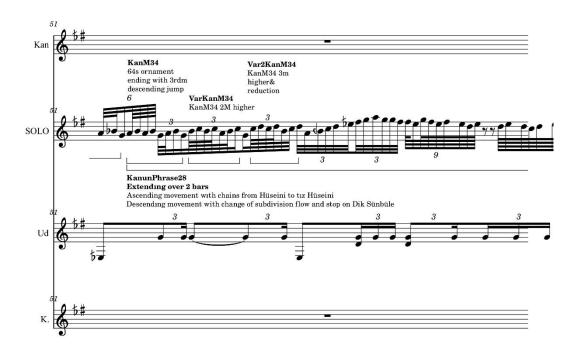


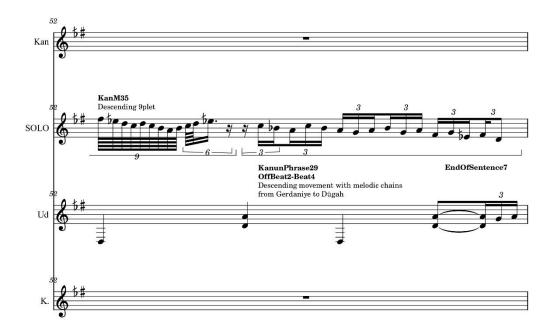


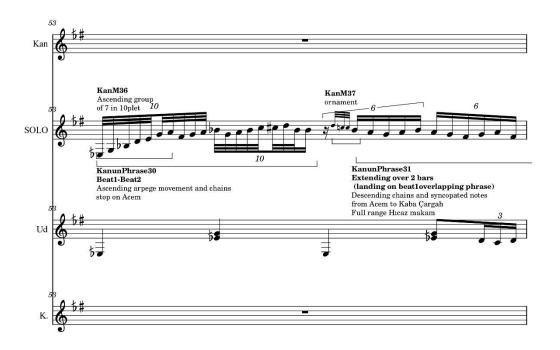


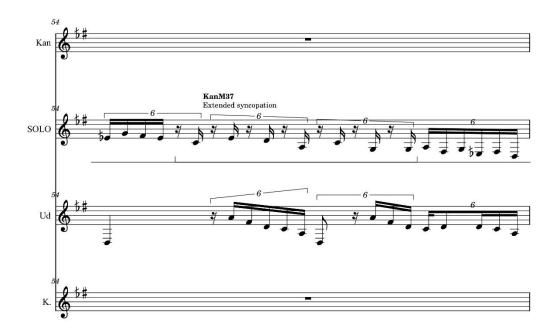


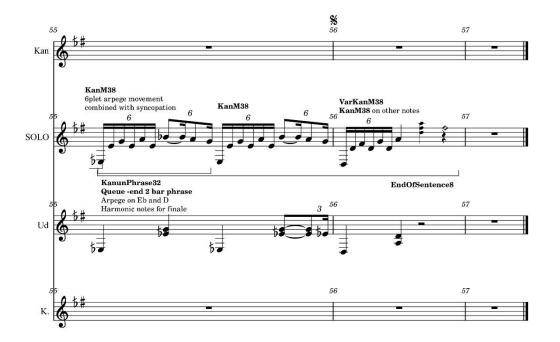












# Volta

Kyriakos Tapakis's metric improvisation

Κυριάκος Ταπάκης

Kyriakos Tapakis & Folk Orchestra of the BNR conducted by Dimitar Hristov Arrangement by Kostadin Genchev (2015) Concert pitch: G





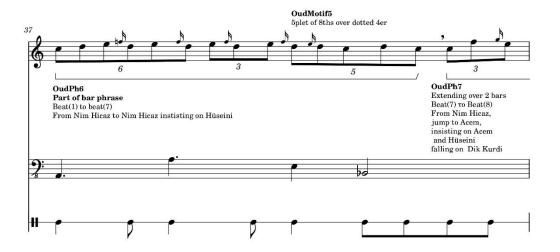


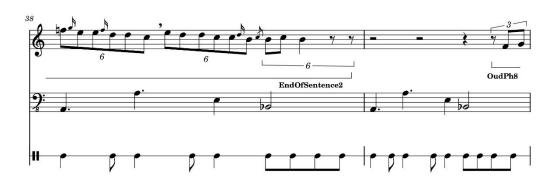


















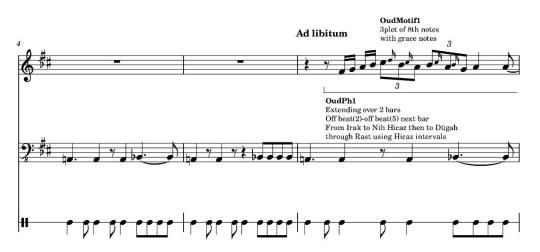


MEYBAHAR Evenings III - Ek Vatheon 2019.05.23 Fonó Budai Zeneház, Budapest

Volta Kyriakos Tapakis's metric improvisation

K.Tapakis



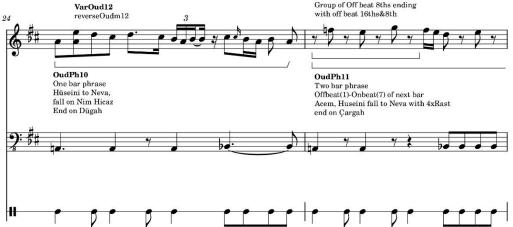






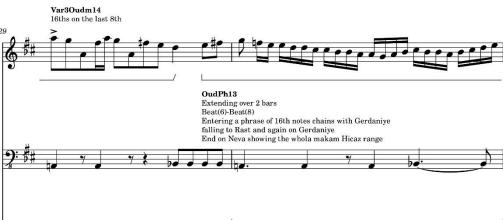




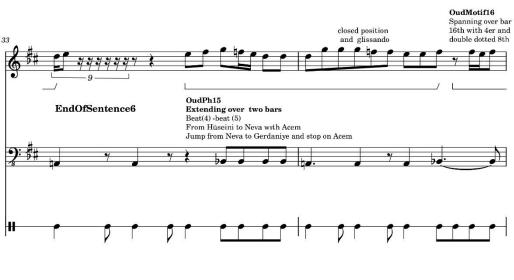


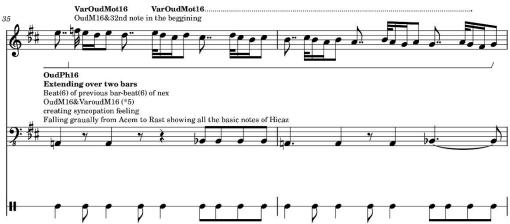
#### VarOudm14 Grouping of (2)8ths instead of 4er



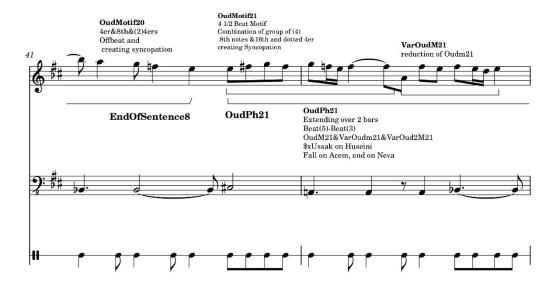


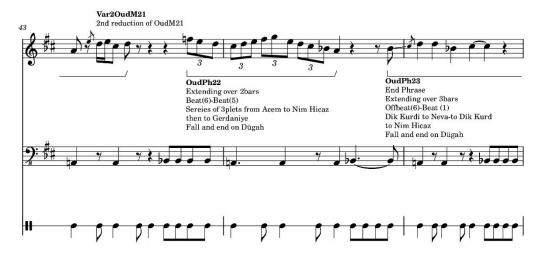


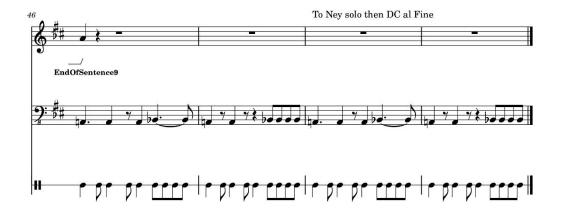










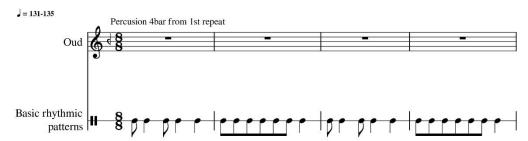


## Kef Life

Live performance recording uploaded on YouTube on 2-04- 2016 (Jerusalem)

Ara Dinkjian's metric improvisation

Ara Dinkjian

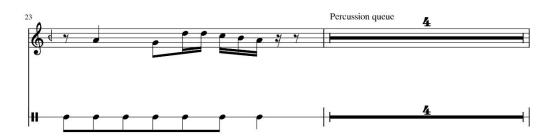


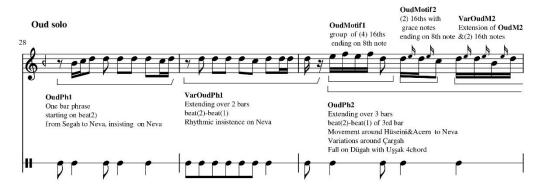


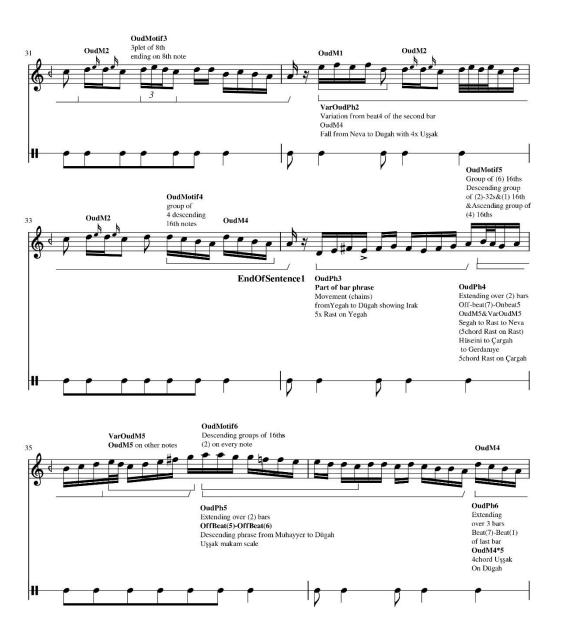


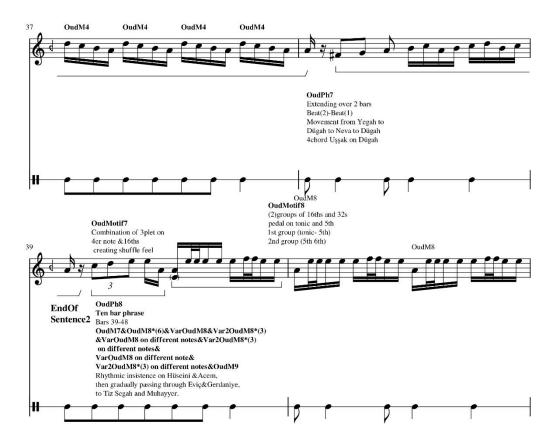


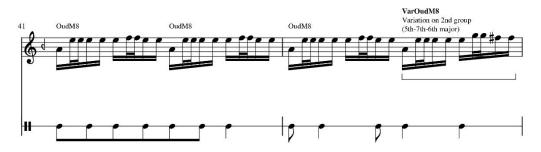


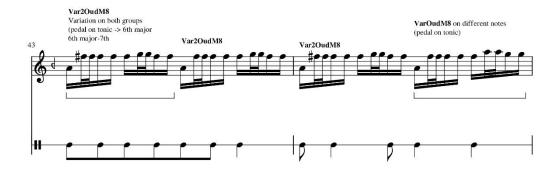


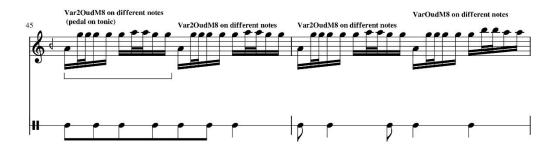


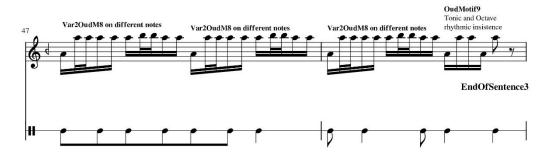


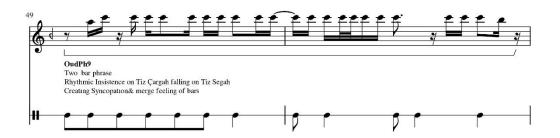






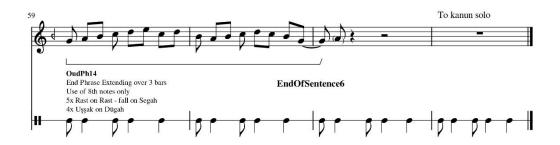












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### **Kef Life** Tamer Pınarbaşı's metric improvisation

Live performance recording uploaded on YouTube on 2-04- 2016 (Jerusalem)

Ara Dinkjian





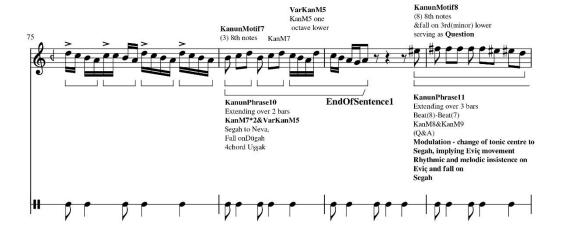




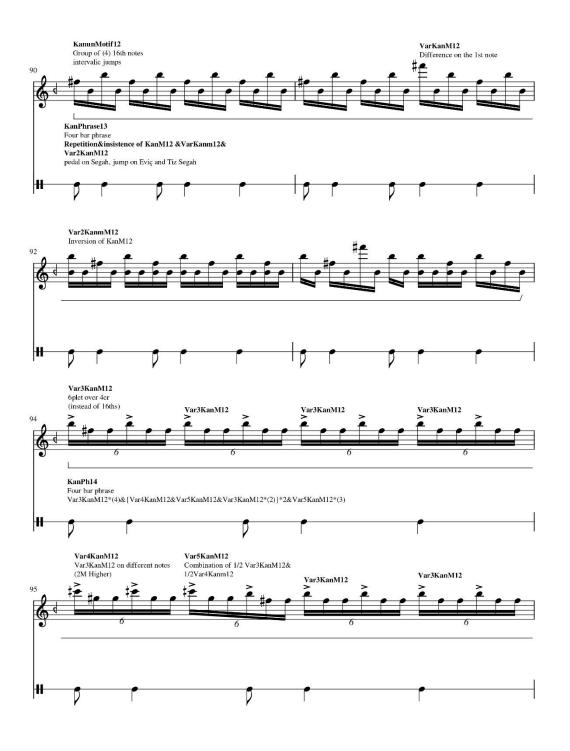




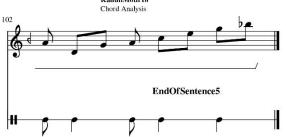












## **APPENDIX III: Composition scores**

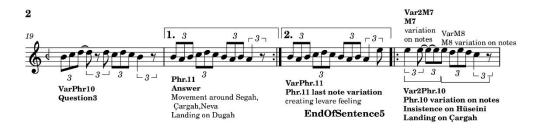
## Harman Sokak

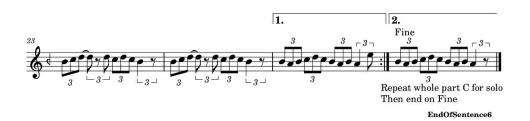


MLM













## Karma



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