



Exploration of Instruments' Idiomatic Sound and Potential through the Realization of Newly Created Arrangement of Piazzolla's "Oblivion"

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Abstract

As music nowadays is played or/and written for certain combinations of instruments, hence limited the possibilities of creating more unique and special ensembles. This study aims to explore and create a new and pretty unique combination of instruments, as well as to help and guide arrangers and composers to create new instruments combination, exploring their maximum potentials. This study will be focused on the arrangement of the song *Oblivion*, composed by Astor Piazzolla for harpsichord, violin, accordion, and tabla. The following contribution methodologies to realize the arrangement will be explained, focusing on uniqueness of the chosen instruments and their combinatory possibilities. In the end, this arrangement is created based on the elements given from the original version, with the usage of improvisatory techniques, nationalistic elements, and newly composed sections.

Keywords: *Arrangement, Ensemble, Harpsichord, Tabla, Violin, Accordion, Piazzolla*

1. Introduction

Ensemble music has always been taken into great consideration by composers and arrangers. Without any intention to discuss deeply the topic in this introduction, we may briefly group arrangements into different categories: 1) the traditional arrangement or practical arrangement (Sadie and Tyrrel, 2000): a simple transposition, or occasionally music reduction of the main parts and elements of the original composition for the instrument(s) requested with minor or no modification of the structure of the original composition, as well as other music parameters such as rhythm, melody and harmony. The main purpose is usually to produce a work as close as possible to the original one, intended to be performed with different instrumentation; and 2) creative arrangement, which generally adapt the original music to the instrument(s) requested, following peculiarities of the instruments, modifying music parameters like original key and time signature if necessary, and varying melody and harmony. It may include newly composed sections as well as improvised parts. This latter case, in spite of the name, is much closer to a transcription, or composition, rather than to the traditional arrangement. It also requires some skills like compositional knowledge as well as a good performance's experience.

By exploring the possibilities of a new instruments' combination and using this new ensemble combination, the arrangement would be unique and interesting, and imbued of peculiar features of instruments.

Many doors of possibility can be opened by creating a new combination. Looking beyond each instrument, the nationalistic heritage inherent to each instrument, and in the specific case the nationality identity of performers will be considered as an asset and the starting point to realize the arrangement.

The elements of *Astor Piazzolla's "Oblivion"*, both accompaniments and melodies, offer several developmental possibilities. *Oblivion* is based on a strong and clear rhythmic pattern established through the all work. Thus, its melodies, in its original version, are not complex and based mostly on long notes. Besides, the structure of this piece is simple and does include reiterations, therefore it offers many rooms to intersperse improvisations and interludes. This arrangement is intended for violin, harpsichord, accordion, and tabla. Since violin and accordion are melodic instruments, they will have a prominent part in the variation and ornamentation of the melodies. Meanwhile, harpsichord and tabla will be mostly used to in the variation of the accompaniment. From time to time, harpsichord will be employed in the variation of the melody.



2. Objectives

1. To explore and create a new unique combination of instruments working with Piazzolla's "Oblivion"
2. To arrange a music for violin, harpsichord, accordion, and tabla with a consideration of each instrument's potentials

3. Methodology

1. Researching for "Oblivion" original version

Piazzolla wrote this piece originally for the 1984 Italian film 'Enrico IV' (Henry IV in English) (Porcelli and Rossellini, 1984). The original soundtrack in the movie was performed by bandoneon solo with string orchestra and unidentified percussion (David, 2019; Pohan, 2011; Tangofa Channel, 2016).

Although the original score was never published, many arrangements are found to be written for a typical ensemble/orchestra or a solo instrument with a standard accompaniment such as a symphonic orchestra or a small orchestra. *Oblivion* has many arranged versions, including the version for violin, cello, oboe and orchestra; strings quartet, and much more (2CELLOS, 2015; Maher Shammout, 2015).

2. Arranging

The written score, used as a starting point for our work, is a solo and piano reduction of the original version of Piazzolla's *Oblivion* as presented in the *Enrico IV* movie.

Oblivion by Astor Piazzolla was composed in an Argentinian classical-tango style. It consists of 2 main melodies, as shown in *figure 1* and *figure 2*. The time signature throughout the original version is 4/4, although the rhythm is based on a combination of 2 equivalent rhythms: 8/8, grouped as 3+3+2, in *figure 3*, which is accompanying the first melody, and 4/4, accompanying the second melody, in *figure 4*. This arrangement will use the same melody and accompaniment parts of the original score as a basis to develop original variations. Besides, the rhythm of the work as well as the key will be substantially varied in some section. Therefore, all of these elements need to be considered into the arranging procedure.



Figure 1 The first main melody



Figure 2 The second main melody



Figure 3 The accompaniment equivalent rhythmic of 8/8 (piano reduction)



Figure 4 The accompaniment equivalent rhythmic of 4/4 (piano reduction)



The parts mentioned above will then be assigned to instruments as follows: the melodic parts are assigned to violin and accordion. The accompaniment part is mainly written for the harpsichord, as well as for accordion and violin in some extent. Rhythmic percussion is provided by tabla in order to enhance the rhythmic pulse of this arrangement.

The abovementioned elements may be varied according to the characteristics of instruments involved. In *figure 5*, the first melody is given to the accordion, while accompanied by the harpsichord according to the instruments' possibilities (Black and Gerou, 2009). Later on, the first melody will be played by a violin.



Figure 5 The arrangement of the first main melody with an accompaniment part

The melody is first assigned to an accordion and then later moved to a violin, shown in *figure 6*.



Figure 6 The arrangement of the second melody with an accompaniment part

Tabla notation is normally written in Hindi language. However, the most used notes can be translated and written as the following *table 1*:

Table 1 Most used tabla notations in English and western notation

Notation	English Translation	Notation	English Translation
	Dhene		Nana
	Dhin		Ne
	Gene		S*
	Takita		

*S represents a space, as a sort of rest. However, it is not an actual musical rest or a total silence; it is notated using various syllables corresponding to the intended sounds.



3. Improvisation and Nationalistic Adding

One uniqueness of this arrangement is in the use of improvisatory sections alternated to written sections. As basis to improvise, some elements from the original version can be utilized.

Since this piece is based on regular rhythmic pulsation, it has been decided to improvise the introductory section using the same notes provided in the accompaniment in a free rhythmic combination (variation based on rhythmic) (Blatter, 1997, p.413), by playing with broken chords, ornaments, as well as pedal chord, and some melodic fragments with different sounds offered by the instruments.

The original accompaniment is shown in *figure 3*, and it will be improvised as shown in *figure 7*. This improvisation is based on 7 notes of the treble line: *F#*, *G*, *B*, *C#*, *D*, and *E*. In *figure 7*, the accompaniment improvisation is assigned to harpsichord. The melodic fragment is designed to be peaked through. This improvisation prelude is created by twisting the rhythmic and sounding technique. This melodic fragment is played by an accordion.



Figure 7 Example of the improvisation, prelude part

Tabla, the Indian rhythmic percussion, is added in this arrangement not only to enhance the rhythmic pulse, but also to add a scent of its exotic nationalistic element. Tabla can be played with different sounds and pattern. Its score is normally written in Hindi, and normally the pattern is improvised based on the sounds that can be created. In this arrangement, tabla is played based on the sounds from *table 1* above. The pattern, as mentioned before, is improvised. *Figure 8* is an example of the improvised pattern that appears in this arrangement; its translation from a Hindi score is “Dhin S Ne Takita Dhin S Gene Dhene Nana Gene”.

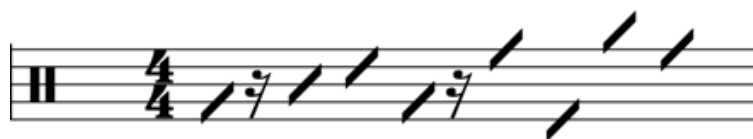


Figure 8 Tabla pattern in the arrangement based on the notations from *table 1*

After exposing this arrangement with the Indian nationalistic hint, a time signature is changed from 4/4 (equivalent rhythmic 8/8) to 7/8 for Indian rhythmic style as shown in *figure 9* in this interlude part. This interlude part is assigned to a harpsichord and tabla duet, as to expose the Indian nationalistic into the arrangement and preparing for the mode changing.



Figure 9 An interlude part in 7/8

Please note that tabla notation is commonly drafted and used as memory aid to develop the improvisation.

After this interlude part, the time signature is changed back to 4/4. The first melody can be heard again, adding a twist by using an Indian Raga scale, shown in *figure 10*: a scale similar to Phrygian mode with raised 6th. In this part, the first theme can be heard again, however, the first melody from *figure 1* is now twisted with the mode modification into *figure 11* below:



Figure 10 Indian Raga scale



Figure 11 Arrangement of the first melody using Indian Raga scale

4. Results and Discussion

Table 2 The arrangement's structure

A						B		A'			B'		
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n

This *Oblivion* arrangement is consisted of 14 parts: named as *a-n*. The structure of this piece is written into a rhapsodic form, with its main structure: A, B, A', B'. A represents the first main theme (the first melody; from *figure 1* and its accompaniment from *figure 3*), and B represents the second main theme (the second melody; from *figure 2* and its accompaniment from *figure 4*). The first theme (A) is written to be exposed from the beginning, including smaller *part a-f*. After that, the second theme (B) can be heard in *part g-h*. The first theme then reappears as A' in *part j-l*. Then the second theme, reappear at last as B' in *part m*.

In details, *part a* is a sort of prelude and a preparation to the exposition of the first theme. It is intended to be played as an improvisation between the instruments. In this arrangement, it is assigned for a harpsichord and accordion, leaving a violin and tabla to be heard later on. The example of this particular improvisation can be found in *figure 7*.

In *part b*, as shown in *figure 12*, the first theme from *figure 1* is appeared to be played by an accordion. The accompaniment part is played by a harpsichord. In this part, only these two instruments are designed to be played.



Figure 12 The arrangement, *part b*

Part c is an interlude before the first melody shows up again in order to make the next part more exciting. This short interlude (*figure 13*) is written based on an instrumental variation of the original accompaniment and is written to be played by harpsichord, accordion, and tabla.



Figure 13 The arrangement, *part c*

After that, the first melody comes back in *part d*. This first theme is intended to be finished in this part, as a preparation for violin entrance in the next part.

The melody played by violin then makes the grand entrance in *part e*. It is arranged similar to *part b*, except that the melody is now assigned to a violin, and tabla is added for a clearer tango rhythmic. In the first half, there is no contribution from an accordion. In the second half, an accordion reappears playing the same rhythmic from *part c*.

In *part f*, the first melody is given back to an accordion. Violin does not have any presence here until the last two bars of this part, where it is contributing the accompaniment part that is played by strings in the original version, and a transition to the second theme, as shown in *figure 14*. The accompaniment is still playing by a harpsichord, as well as tabla as a rhythmic percussion accompaniment.



Figure 14 The arrangement, *part f*, last 2 bars

The second melody now shows up in *part g*. The melody here is given to an accordion, while a harpsichord and tabla play an accompaniment, shown in *figure 6*.

Part h presents the second melody, played by a violin and doubled by the harpsichord on an upper clef. The accompaniment is assigned to the harpsichord's bass clef, accordion, and tabla. The example of this part is shown in *figure 15*:

Figure 15 The arrangement, *part h*

Time signature is changed in *part i* from 4/4 (rhythmic equivalent of 8/8) into 7/8, as subjected to have a similar pattern to Indian popular music. This part, acted as a sort of interlude, gives the opportunity to tabla to contribute its nationalistic, while duet with harpsichord. As in harpsichord part, from the original c minor scale, it is as well changed into an Indian Raga scale from *figure 10*. This is a setting variation created by mode changing (Blatter, 1997, p.414). The example of this part is showed earlier in *figure 9*.

In *part j*, the time signature is now back to 4/4. However, the Indian Raga scale is still used. The first theme is played by a violin, while a counter melody is played by an accordion and violin plays long notes, as shown in *figure 16* below:



Figure 16 The arrangement, part j

Part k is a variation of the Indian Raga scale from figure 10 played by harpsichord with a tabla, shown in figure 17, before changing to an original key in the next part.

Figure 17 The arrangement, part k

After that, part l brings back the first theme with an original key (c minor). The melody is assigned to a violin. In the first half, an accompaniment is played by an accordion, while the second half the accompaniment moves to harpsichord with tabla as a rhythmic accompaniment. It is similar to part b and part e. In the last 2 bars of this part, the accordion is written to play an accompaniment transition to the second melody similar to what violin plays in figure 14.

In part m, the second melody is played by an accordion, then swap to a violin. In the second half where violin plays a melody, a role of an accompaniment is given to harpsichord and tabla, as well as an accordion before the ending, shown in figure 18 below:



Figure 18 The arrangement, *part m*

Part n, shown in figure 19, is the ending part of this piece, played by harpsichord and accordion. The accordion's part is arranged according to the original *Oblivion*, and the harpsichord's part is newly composed as a variation of the original part.

Figure 19 The arrangement, *part n*

5. Conclusion

This arrangement has been written down starting from many elements, with the intention to create a new and original composition, not only by using uniqueness of the instruments, but as well including improvisatory sections, newly composed parts and nationalistic elements. Intentionally, it is written as a form of art and not with the commercially-inclined approach. For this reason, in the arrangement, materials are not treated in the obvious or immediate way nor fulfill the expectation of listeners easily (Rooksby, 2007, p.15).

As a result, this composition should not simply be considered as a mere arrangement from a pre-existing work. This study is the exploration to a newly unique ensemble combination of violin, harpsichord, accordion, and tabla, which is written and created with a consideration of their maximum potentials. Moreover, this activity has been a valuable chance to learn and deepen our knowledge, and a way to approach existing works though a different compositional perspective, by working as composers, improvisers and performers as well.

As shown, there are many possibilities to work with pre-existing music, from simply arranging, giving parts to the different instruments, to improvising, and composing based on original elements. The combination of these 4 instruments creates unique sounds. A unique adding of tabla gives a nice touch of rhythmic and a clear rhythmic grouping, as well as giving the opportunity for a nationalistic element to be heard. With a presence of harpsichord, a baroque instrument, it creates a time travel, authentic *to-the-past* feeling to the listeners. The accordion provides a sort of link with the original work of the composer, as the closest to the bandoneon, while the violin recalls the traditional sound of the Western string ensembles.



This unique arrangement has been done by the authors: Dott. Alberto Firrincieli (Harpsichord player from Italy) and Natpynya Kosilp (Violinist from Thailand), along with contributions of Matthew Peter Terappel (Tabla player from India) and Linhan Xie (Accordion player from China), as in class activity of composition major students and ensemble.

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