George Oro

Transcending the Darbuka

An Experimental Approach
George Oro

Transcending The Darbuka

Master Examenskonsert

sön 28/05 kl.15:00
Nathan Milsteinsalen
Kungl. Musikhögskola

George Oro – darbuka/doholla
Jiro Kevork – trummor
Liliana Zavala – congas
Mårten Hillbom – trummor

Saint sträkkyartett
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STARTING POINTS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUESTIONS AND ISSUES</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Darbuka/ Doholla have a central role in a concert? Can Darbuka/ Doholla be a solo instrument?</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is this instrument still in the background?</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND AND INSPIRATION</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACKGROUND</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE INSTRUMENT</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSPIRATION</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misirli Ahmet</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levent Yildirim</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab Music</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin Music</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Percussionists with Similar Works</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen Velez</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zohar Fresco</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petter Berndalen</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHODS</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Musician Role: From Secondary to Primary</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music, Concept and Type</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Technique, From Technical to Human</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvisation in order to get out of the role</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounds</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compositions</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Concert</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“6” composition (Doholla, Qanun/ Length: 05:20)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duetto, (Doholla, Drum set/ Length: 06:26)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“9” composition (Doholla, Qanun/ Length: 04:34)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Arab Rhythm” (Doholla, Loop percussion/ Length: 05:22)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Open Improvisation” (Doholla/ Length: 03:46)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“2 in 1” (Doholla, Darbuka/ Length: 03:20)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Trio” (Doholla, Conga, Drum set/ Length: 06:06)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“SS” (Doholla, Violin 1,Violin 2, Cello, Double Bass/ Length: 06:24)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Longa Nahawnd” (Doholla, Violin 1,Violin 2, Cello, Double Bass/ Length: 04:46)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY AND RESULTS</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A SPECTRUM OF SOUNDS</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A CENTRAL ROLE</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHALLENGING THE TECHNIQUE</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARAB PERCUSSION CURRICULUM</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPLORE INDIAN MUSIC</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

Transcending the Darbuka is a project that was inspired by my musical experiences, education and various artistic influences. My diverse musical influences encouraged me to challenge myself as well as my role as a percussionist, to think about music and possibilities outside the box. The project aims to present Darbuka (with the other instruments in the family: Doholla and Sunbati) as a solo instrument and break the norms and expectations ruling it by using new techniques and by giving the instrument new and different roles in my compositions.

I would like to thank each and every person, teacher or musician who contributed and helped to nurture those seeds in me, making me the musician I am today. Special thanks to Darbuka and Doholla Masters, Misirli Ahmet and Levent Yildirim, for developing the instrument and taking it into new places that were not possible before, as well as being my teachers and source of inspiration during this project. Special thanks to my teachers and mentors at KMH Folk Music Department: Professor Sven Ahlbäck for leading my way through the theoretical part of my project, Olof Misgeld for his continuous support and guidance in writing this thesis, and Petter Berndalen for his artistic support.

Introduction

Starting Points

Born with a passion for music and percussion, I started my musical journey early in life when I was around 7 years old. Growing up I was exposed to a variety of folk music styles due to the culturally diverse nature of my hometown. Through my academic music years, I acquired the proper western and Arab classical music education in addition to participating in different workshops revolving around folk music from all over the world.

I started thinking and analyzing what I had learned, and I was impressed by the role of Western classical percussion instruments, how much they have been developed and how thoroughly their possibilities were utilized as main and solo instruments. Contrary to that, I was puzzled by how little effort was done to develop the role of Darbuka/Doholla in Arab music, although individual attempts have been made by composers and players, nothing has been done to document those in a formal manner and these attempts are still considered experiments. If we, for example, make a simple comparison between the snare drum in classical western music and Darbuka/ Doholla, we find that even though the snare drum has a traditional role and have been used in orchestras in a quite limited role, still a lot of work was done to promote and utilize its potential to the maximum through composing music specifically for snare, creating methods and curriculum, making it a main instrument; meanwhile I do believe that the potential sounds that one can get from the Darbuka is much bigger and wider than that of the snare drum.

Moreover, the role of a Darbuka/ Doholla player in classic and traditional Arabic music, is mainly merely to memorize rhythms with limited variations, and when the music is composed usually the part written for him/her is an ostinato (or “loop”) part based on a
traditional rhythm. *Transcending the Darbuka* is my way to challenge this traditional role of the Darbuka and explore possible solutions to present Darbuka/ Doholla in a new leading role from the perspective of Arab music.

**Questions and Issues**

**Can Darbuka/ Doholla have a central role in a concert? Can Darbuka/ Doholla be a solo instrument?**

In many musics the percussionist has a central role to set the tempo and hold the piece together, being the “time-keeper”. This applies to Arab music, but in this case the percussionist is also quite limited to this function; the Arab percussionist plays generally only as an ostinato/loop part for the accompanying instrument with specific pre-determined rhythms. Can this role be changed and how? Can the Arab percussionist be more dynamic, challenging the role of a mere “time-keeper”? Or even play music specifically composed for Darbuka/ Doholla for example, where the percussion has a leading role?

**Why is this instrument still in the background?**

Arab percussion is traditionally taught to students by asking them to memorize the specific Arabic rhythms with some variations in a specific context; it does not encourage students to develop or expand the rhythms, if a specific rhythm is played with a specific time signature then it will always be played this way. The player is not challenged to try a different rhythm with the same time signature or vice versa because he was never allowed or challenged to do so.

And because classic Arab music is composed and built around certain rhythms that determines the metrical structure, it becomes hard to break the circle, because since the education is limited, the player has also limits which in turn could make the composer hesitant when it comes to writing new percussion parts for lack of confidence in the player’s knowledge or capabilities. As an example is the standard Semai form always used with Semai Takil rhythm (10/8). Why not another time signature? or even the same time signature with a different pulse or rhythmic grouping?

**Background and Inspiration**

**Background**

Self-taught, I started playing darbuka when I was 7 years old. Like most percussionists, I started drumming on daily objects at home, and as my eighth birthday gift I got my first percussion instrument, a clay Darbuka.

From day one my exposure to music was very diverse, given the cultural, historical and musical diversity in my city, *Qamishly* in North Syria. The city being bordered by Turkey and Iraq, I learned from the start that there is a whole spectrum of different cultures, of different music styles and heritage. I was listening to folk and classical Arab music recordings with influences from Assyrian, Armenian, Iraqi, Turkish and Arabic music and
cultures. I started to play complex rhythm patterns without knowing that they were challenging - like 10/16, 10/8, 6/8, 7/8, 9/8 in addition to basic rhythms like 4/4, 2/4.

I started participating in school competitions and concerts as an amateur percussionist. My parents were very supportive, and eventually they sent me to a music teacher who taught me how to read rhythmic notation, and how to play the Darbuka parts in Arab classic music pieces. At this time, I started to learn more about the Arab classic music forms like Mowashah, Samai, Longa, Door…etc.

At the age of 14, I started performing on stage with local singers, church and folk music choirs. At some point I switched to drums, I enjoyed it but I did not feel connected to the instrument and mallets – I loved playing with my hands and loved to have this direct contact with the instrument. I sold my drum set and bought my first conga, which was the first conga both in my life and actually, in my city. I started playing what I knew from the Arab music on drums and congas, but later on, I started expanding my knowledge e.g. by searching on the internet. This was not very easy since Internet was not available everywhere in my city, and when it was available, it was very slow and limited. I was trying to find western music songs and tracks with those instruments like Latin music and Rock and Roll.

After high school, I started my academic musical path by studying at the Music Conservatoire in Damascus. The Bachelor program in Percussion comprised of classical and Arab percussion studies. I studied for 5 years and during those years I participated in many workshops with world known percussionists, and I played with many bands and famous singers in Syria and the Arab world. I also played in many Arab and European festivals. Those five years opened many doors for me to understand and explore different music styles in addition to classic percussion; I learned more about different instruments and their usage in different parts of the world. The knowledge I gained in addition to my background was leading me gradually to a new view on myself as a musician. I noticed that every time I was in a new country I was amazed and interested in the local folk music and instruments, especially hand percussion, and found myself coming back with recordings or percussion instruments from those places. This is what made me decide during my fourth year of conservatory studies that I was a “hand percussionist” in the first place, not a mallet player. My interest has always been hand percussion instruments and folk rhythms from different cultures, and I decided to pursue this path after graduation.

I started thinking and analyzing what I learned during my studies; I was impressed by the role of western classic percussion instruments, how much they were developed and how thoroughly their possibilities were utilized as main and solo instruments. On the other side, I was puzzled how little effort was done to develop the role of percussion in Arab music in contrast to other Arab music instruments like Nay (flute), Oud (lute) or Qanun (cither) that have been developed during centuries and has gained more central roles in the music. Meanwhile the role of a Darbuka/Doholla player is often merely to indicate the rhythms, and when the music is composed usually the part written for this instrument is an ostinato part
based on a traditional rhythm without space for creativity, all is left to the player’s own taste and preference.

On one occasion during my study time, I accidentally watched a video that changed my life. It was of a Darbuka/Doholla player playing something very different from what I had seen in my life. I was startled: Why is he using a clay doholla? How is he using it in a live music video at a time when no one uses it anymore except in recordings? What is the technique he is using while playing? Why is he using fingers we do not use in traditional Arab rhythms? How is he using a doholla in such a way when it was only used to play basic rhythms with no special techniques? What are those sounds I am hearing? Who is this superb player?

Those questions were storming in my head and this video was always on my mind, what was this magic? Is it only an individual effort and style? Could it be learned? Does it have rules? Will I ever be able to play like this? I started trying to find more videos of this person and tried to copy his technique from the videos and apply it on the rhythms I play. It was hard to change my muscles memory, my “I Know How” memory was already programmed to play the traditional technique and changing to a new technique was not easy. When I tried this out I started to receive negative remarks and questions from musicians I played with concerning those new things I was doing; questions I had no answers to, since I had no idea about what I was doing. It was then when I decided to find that person and see if he teaches this amazing technique and that was when I learned about “Misirli Ahmet”.

Misirli Ahmet, Darbuka and Doholla Master who lives in Turkey, the inventor of Split finger technique and founder of Galata Rhythm School.

I did an intensive two months course with Misirli Ahmet. On my first day there, I discovered that I will be playing on a clay Doholla, an instrument I had not been playing since I was ten years old, I was both surprised and happy. This instrument that was starting to disappear in the Arab music culture was brought back to life by Misrili Ahmet with his new technique and the new sounds that he discovered. My passion and inspiration were brought back to life just like the first time I got my first ever Darbuka and this passion led me to spend endless hours practicing and to discover completely new ways of playing rhythms which I already knew in addition to new ones.

During my time at Misirli Ahmet’s School, I was always surprised with the compositions he was teaching, 90% of the compositions were composed of Arab traditional rhythms, rhythms I knew very well but when I was trying to play those at the same speed and with the same techniques as they were using I was unable to follow. I felt I was missing something. Giving my academic background, I started to search more and try to find patterns and movement rules to understand the order they are using and which fingers are allocated to which sounds. I started changing my way of playing, practicing the rhythms I knew using the new technique. My first lesson with the advanced students was the biggest surprise, the same phrases he used to play in his concerts were being taught by him to his students at a time when I thought those were improvisations on stage. At that point I had two contradictory feelings, I was thrilled to be there, to be able to learn personally from the master the things
that I have been passionate about in a long time, but at the same time I wanted to leave the place and go home, I was not sure if I would ever be able to change everything that I knew and start over again. Master Misirli was able to read this just by looking at me and during the break he called me and answered all the questions I had in mind without me saying anything. He gave me a big push of confidence and explained that this is all normal because I had a different background, it takes time to translate this new technique and match it with the technique I already have, nothing is impossible and practice makes perfect. He gave me special exercises to help me understand the techniques he uses. And that was the start of a new chapter in my musical life.

Misirli Ahmet was also the man behind the resurrection of the doholla instrument, by inventing the revolutionary split-finger technique, in addition to the limitless ways with which he was approaching the instrument and playing different music styles and techniques on this traditionally oriental instrument.

All this felt connected to my questions and thoughts about the instrument and the role of it as a solo instrument. Misirli Ahmet opened the horizons and inspired me to believe that the possibilities are endless; my approach to the instrument started shifting and changing. Combined with my previous education and musical experience and influences I started to believe that I am able to develop my knowledge to a certain level to present Darbuka/Doholla as a main instrument, that I can play percussion pieces accompanied by melody sometimes or just pure percussion.

**The Instrument**

To better understand the ideas that I am trying to present, it is essential to present the instrument i.e. the darbuka/doholla, in its different sizes.

[Here somethin should be mentioned about the instruments and briefly about the history etc. Does the Doholla, the Sumbati and the Darbuka have different functions in the musical culture/in the ensembles? Etc. – Which sources can you refer to? Has anyone been writing about the instruments?]

The instrument with all its different sizes is a traditional music instrument and was only introduced into classic Arab music in the middle of the 20th century. Darbuka and Sunbati are usually used to play variation parts accompanied by other instruments in an ensemble, while Doholla is used to play the basic rhythms without any variations.

The instruments are hand-made, the body is made of clay and can be decorated by different styles, most popular however is using the mother of pearl mosaic shells as seen in the below photo. The head of the instrument is made of goat or fish skin depending on its size as per below table.

Nowadays, darbuka is manufactured from aluminum with a plastic head, but in this project, my focus was on the original clay instrument because the natural skin and a clay body allow a variety of rich sounds not found in the synthetic one.
Moreover, to maintain the tuning of the original instrument, we use a light bulb on a stand that fits inside the instrument’s body, to heat the skin and maintain its temperature.

The instrument has different names across the regions and countries where it is used, some of those are: Dombak in Turkey, Tabla in Egypt, Derbakeh or Darbuka in Syria and Lebanon, Tombak/ Tonbak /Zarb/ Dombak/ Donbak in Iran.

Current doholla has three sizes:

![Figure 1. My instruments collection- taken by me- 2016](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Darbuka (Solo)</th>
<th>Sumbati</th>
<th>Doholla (Ultra Bass)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Height (cm)</td>
<td>43- 44,5</td>
<td>44,5- 45,5</td>
<td>46,5- 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle diameter (cm)</td>
<td>27-28</td>
<td>28- 29,5</td>
<td>31,5- 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working area diameter (cm)</td>
<td>20,5- 21,8</td>
<td>23- 23,5</td>
<td>24,5- 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Skin</td>
<td>Fish Skin</td>
<td>Fish or Goat Skin</td>
<td>Goat Skin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: different sizes of the instrument. Source: www.darbukashop.com

**Inspiration**

I always look for sources of positive energy whether in life or music. It could be a person, a state of mind or a musical style. In this project, I had different factors to be thankful for, those played a significant role in my personal and musical life, I would like to briefly describe those and their effects on my project.

**Misirli Ahmet**

Misirli Ahmet is a permanent source of inspiration in my musical and personal life. With every encounter I have had with him he has given me hope, strength, and new challenges. I learned from him that in music nothing is impossible and nothing is forbidden. You need to set a goal and work to achieve it with all you have. His constant advice was that if you want to be good or special in music you need to do something different from everyone else, you need to be yourself, find something inside to say and present that is only unique to you. It is
very easy to do what everyone else is doing but it is more difficult and more beautiful when you do something that only you can do.

**Levent Yildirim**
Levent Yildirim, the brother of Misirli Ahmet, is a Turkish darbuka and doholla master, and is considered a phenomenon in the world of darbuka.

Unexpected, full of energy, highly focused, talented, loyal; just few words to describe Levent.

I decided to meet him because he was the first one to follow Misirli Ahmet’s thoughts and new technique; I expected that by working with him I would be following the same methods and ideas; to my surprise, Levent had taken this new knowledge to new horizons. Levent proved to me and gave me hope that nothing is impossible; he taught me that not all questions could be answered through technique or long practice hours, sometimes the answer is found inside of you and not through someone else’s vision. He taught me again to be unique.

**Arab Music**
I was born in a small city rich with different cultures, languages, and music of course. This mixture carries with it a richness and diversity of rhythms and musical patterns that are unique to the area. You can hear the same song with six different languages. In addition, I was exposed to the classic Arab music that is rich in turn with its special forms, like muwashah, qaseed, and other musical forms. This richness raised the level of my accumulated musical exposures and experiences to make me the musician I am today.

**Latin Music**
My start and passion has always been hand percussion even though I studied the western classic percussion. The classic study provided me with the musical discipline that was very important for me as a musician, but through all the study years I was always attracted and more inclined towards hand percussion instruments and folk music. I started to be drawn towards conga, bongos and different sorts of hand percussion. I started to be convinced that I am not a stick percussionist, the physical interaction with the instrument through my hands was very important to me. I became interested in the polyrhythmic structures of Latin music how they were played and the relations between the different rhythms on the different instruments. Some examples of musicians I was interested in would be: Giovanni Hidalgo, Carlos Patato, Poncho Sanchez and Changuito.

**Other Percussionists with Similar Works**
**Glen Velez**
Glen Velez is an American percussion master who was behind the modern frame drum movement.
I heard a lot about the legendary percussionist Glen Velez, whenever I met with international musicians during my study, the name was always mentioned to me, but I had not heard about him back then.
In 2011, I started to find out more about Velez through videos and recordings. I decided to meet him and listen to his methodology since I was very curious to understand where his style came from and how it had spread all over the world. I met him in 2014 in a workshop in Germany. Glen Velez, is the founder of the modern frame drum movement and created his own style for playing the frame drum through experimenting with techniques inspired by different cultures and musical styles. His achievement was a source of inspiration for me because he took the instrument to higher levels opening new horizons for it and for percussion in general.

**Zohar Fresco**
Zohar Izhak Fresco is an Israeli percussion master known as a pioneer of the tof Miriam, the ancient frame drum originated in the Middle East more than three thousand years ago.

I met Zohar Fresco for the first time at Misirli Ahmet’s Rhythm School in Istanbul. Even though it was a very short time, and I did not have the chance to play with him; still his words had a great effect on me. Zohar talked about how his late teacher used to be strict with him when it comes to playing traditional music, he would not accept to listen to him trying new sounds or techniques. Today, Zohar remembers his teacher with every beat, explaining that this strictness has made him master the traditional sounds, cherish them and develop further without risking their value. His words are something I always remember during my work on the project, because my aim is to develop the tradition without spoiling it.

**Petter Berndalen**
Petter Berndalen is a groundbreaking percussionist. Deeply rooted in the Swedish folk music tradition, he is the first percussionist in the world with a degree in Swedish folk music.

I met Petter when I first started at KMH as he was my mentor in this project. My first exposure to Swedish music was through him. Berndalen's project aims to translate the Swedish folk rhythms that are typically played on the violin to be played by percussion instruments.

Petter’s achievement was to interpret the music from a melody to a rhythm and to find corresponding sounds for each note and play it using percussion instruments while preserving at the same time the originality and uniqueness of the folk music form without losing its connection with folk dance, which is a vital part in folk music. (Berndalen, Petter. (2008) Rhythm of Sweden- Master Thesis).

Every time we met and he listened to me playing, he would give me relevant feedback and aspects to develop based on his research, creativity and accumulated experience.
Methods

The Musician Role: From Secondary to Primary

As a Soloist
When I started working on the project, the challenge I had was how to present myself in a leading role and not an accompanying one, to move from a secondary to a primary role. The role I had earlier was limited to mainly playing the same rhythm with some variations alongside other musicians. Even though the responsibility of the percussionist is essential, as he needs to maintain the tempo, the groove and control the time, still it is a limited role.

I always had solo parts where I would improvise and play very passionately, and at such occasions I used to derive my passion from the mutual energy between all the musicians I am playing with, and it piles up to get me into the state where I am more in the right mood and feeling. However, if I am trying to prove that Darbuka/Doholla can be a leading and solo instrument, it means that I will be on stage alone with my instrument, what will then be the source of my energy?

To make this work, I needed to reach the point where I am the main player on the scene, where my energy comes from within and not dependable on other factors. So, I started looking for a solution; one way is that I tried to find a certain state by using images for each piece I am writing, so that whenever I play this piece, it gets connected automatically to that state and gives me the right energy or feeling to play it right both musically and technically. For example whenever I play composition 9. I remember the state of folkloric dabke, a traditional group dance, which starts with random sounds on the big doholl to announce the start of the dance. And then I move to a more varied images of the dancers’ different moves. Another state I associate to when I play the Arab composition is my first ever solo performance in 2004 in The Royal Concertgebouw in the Netherlands, I re-live the same feelings and reflect on how much my performance and skills have developed.

With Other Musicians
I also wanted to move from secondary to primary when playing with other musicians, to break the expected image of a loop part, to have other musicians change their expectations and be ready to accept a new more central role for my instrument.

To start understanding this, I was playing jam sessions with musicians, where I try playing in a different way than expected, playing my way and observing the reactions of those musicians and discussing it later, to see the difference between their expectations and my experimentation. After a session I wrote down my reflections on how it had worked and what had happened. The following description is from these accounts of how I experienced the situations.

I would start the jam session as expected, giving other musicians this feeling of comfort, that I am providing the groove part. Once we start and are more comfortable with the interplay, I
would start to drift away from the loop part, playing different phrases with the same time signature; for me those phrases are well thought and composed on purpose not improvised, but I start noticing here how they are accepting this; it is natural that the musician expects that I am improvising. Some would stop confused on what to do, others think this is an improvisation and give me the space to do a solo. I continue playing and play again the same phrases, here it either becomes clear or more confusing to some since it shows I was not improvising and that those are planned phrases. Afterwards during discussions, I would explain that what I need is to switch the roles, that I want them to keep playing the same groove as if they had the percussion role. Many thought this was interesting and asked to understand more on how I am doing this and why. Of course this varies per instrument, for example when I play with a guitarist, and since a guitar has a rhythm and groove role, it is easier for the musician to understand this concept of repeating the same phrase, however if I ask a clarinet player to do the same, to repeat the same phrase for two minutes while I am changing the phrases it would be more difficult because I am asking to change the whole mental expectation that the musician usually has, and this takes time and practice to work.

This concept of switching roles and giving percussion the role of changing, and keeping the melodic part looping is something found in Indian Music; however, I did not build on this during my project since I do not have enough information and knowledge about it. I tried to use my way to achieve this change of roles. Understanding more about this concept in Indian Music and how it works is something I am planning to explore more closely in future.

**Music, Concept and Type**
What type of music I am using is quite wide, however the base of my musical storage is widely oriental or Arabic. And to make things clear, I would like to explain briefly how I see and deal with traditional music.

For me, traditional music is a source of inspiration and forms a base for musical history and form, however I truly believe that reviving the traditional playing or using it in new ways with improvements does not hurt or change the authenticity of it. The more traditional music and forms are being experimented with, the more exposure and longevity that they get. Music in its very own essence is creative and beyond boundaries, why should we put limits to creativity then? In that sense I derive many of the music I am using from traditional Arab rhythms.

**The Technique, From Technical to Human**
I started with the technique. I dedicated a lot of time and attention to the development of my technique by practicing different speeds on the same phrasing in order to understand all the details of the phrase. I wanted to master the technique and know it by heart, to have it implanted into my “I know how” memory.

I started showing my progress to selected musicians from different backgrounds and styles, to get their preliminary feedback, like Petter Berndalen, Rafael Sida and other musicians.
The feedback I received from different persons had one thing in common, that the impression they received was that I was playing with high technique, but I need to think more of the expression and feeling in the piece I am playing, to think about it as a musicians and not only as a percussionist.

**Improvisation in order to get out of the role...**
One of the problems I was facing whenever I practiced is that I am unconsciously drawn to the classic way of playing ostinato/loop parts in a structured repetitive way. I worked on breaking this norm by practicing open and free longer improvisations, playing non-stop for half an hour or so. I were trying out all the materials I have, focusing on one single idea or approach at a time., and building on it as long as possible to get out of the limits I have.

Some of the approaches I tried out in improvisation
- Sticking to a time signature and trying out
- Variation in one phrase
- Finding different sounds

I documented these practices on video and listened and watched the recordings after and during each session. This was important because it made it possible to produce material that I used in compositions. Through this I could also find out things about my playing technique, e.g. my body position.

**Sounds**
In an effort to expand the instrument’s range of expressions, I started experimenting with getting sounds from different places of the instrument by using different positions and strokes. Sometimes I tried to get out old sounds but with a different technique, like finding different ways of doing a glissando, using nails on the instrument skin, placing my hand on it and playing over it, etc. This opened for me a limitless horizon of new sounds, but the way to use those sounds was by saving and formalizing them to be used in a more systematic way. Not all sounds were attractive by themselves, so I tried finding a combination of those to give the result or musical feeling I am trying to create.

I began to use the knowledge I acquired from my contact with Latin music on Doholla. I wanted to experience those same sounds on the Darbuka/Doholla, for example the sak sound on Doholla is produced with the same technique of the slap sound on conga but when I am thinking to play Latin music, the sound is different and has a different feeling than when I’m thinking to play an Arab rhythm.

It is important to mention that I do not take credit for all the sounds I am using. It is basically a mixture of new sounds found by me, or by other musicians, sounds used with other instruments, and traditional sounds. My contribution is formalizing and documenting those sounds, so they can be used in a more systematic way.
Traditional sounds were documented to some extent in a book by Jammal Al Sakka (Sakka 2005). As for Misirli Ahmet’s’ sounds, I have created a way of notation since those have not been documented before.

Below are the sounds used on Darbuka/ Doholla, both traditional and new sounds along with the notation guide that I use to express those sounds.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Hand</th>
<th>Finger</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Notation</th>
<th>Traditional Sounds</th>
<th>New Sounds By Misirli Ahmet</th>
<th>New Sounds by Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dum</td>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X Traditional sound</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Different hand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R+L</td>
<td>R+L</td>
<td></td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Dum</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>2-3/4</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tak</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>2+3+4</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Traditional sound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Different technique</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>3+4</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td>3+4</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sak(slap)</td>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tak Gliss</td>
<td>L+r</td>
<td>🄢��ватие</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tak gliss R</td>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry Tak</td>
<td>L+r</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R+L</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trr</td>
<td>R/L</td>
<td>2/3/4</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>🗕️</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compositions
My project aims to build a complete solo concert to show the instrument in a new role whether I am playing as a part of a band or as complete soloist. Ways I came up with to achieve this include:

- Composing duo or trio percussion pieces: it could be played as a solo but my goal in adding other percussionists is to compare how the same sounds are produced differently regardless of the musical style.

- Playing a classical piece with a band but not adhering to the dictated role of the instrument, to try and play more freely and out of the norms.

I challenged the role of the instrument using different approaches:
• Putting the instrument in the role of the leading melodic instrument
• Switching the roles between instruments, the role of the melodic player and the ostinato player
• Creating solo compositions
• Playing solo and accompaniment at the same time

The Concert
I tried to design the concert in a balanced way, since the audience and listeners are a mix of musicians and non-musicians, I wanted it to be interesting and varied between conventional, totally new and a mix of old and new.
“6” composition (Doholla, Qanun/ Length: 05:20)
The “6” composition has a conventional structure with an intro and outro, however the internal structure is new, because the melody assumes the fixed role and percussion the changing one, I present the melodic part with two variations of the same theme. The result was showing doholla in a new context. I used new sounds and new techniques in playing different phrases in the same time signature of 6, in addition to a part of improvisation. I discovered that doholla can be in the center. The qanun part was a recorded phrase repeated by the loop machine, which is something I would like to improve in future project by applying this with other musicians and instrument in a live setting.

Duoeto, (Doholla, Drum set/ Length: 06:26)
In this composition I wanted to present doholla alongside with a non-arabic instrument. In this concert I am using drums, but the same composition can be played by a different percussion instrument. However, I preferred the drums since the music was written in a funk style, in order to show doholla in a new context. The piece starts with a 9-beat polymetric phrase that is played in repetition. The piece then continues in a 4/4 meter but the idea here is using drums rudiments played on doholla with the finger technique. Then move again to the main rhythm of the composition and alternate improvisation between drums and doholla. Then move to a funk rhythm. One of the instruments is playing a specific phrase while the other plays a different phrase with different combinations of beat groupings (see example in notation below). The composition ends with a unison outro between the two instruments. My goal was to show that the doholla can be played in new styles with new rhythms: Funk style in this case, the resulting sound is a new sound and not a specific Arabic sound. To show that doholla can be used to play written rhythms outside the borders of the traditional Arabic rhythms using modern concepts like polymetric rhythms.
“9” composition (Doholla, Qanun/ Length: 04:34)
This composition is built on the concept of my project, as it’s giving the percussion and doholla the role of changing and the melody instruments the role of playing a fixed looped ostinato. Doholla was the central instrument through all the parts of the composition while the melodic phrase recorded on a loop machine was looping in the background.
In the composition I used new sounds discovered by Misirli Ahmet, like the *meaw*, and I also tried to adapt the new sounds I discovered to the different styles in a way I see more suitable to every specific style.
Phrases were inspired from different sources and cultures with modifications to match the “9” time signature in addition to phrases composed by me and phrases taken from Master Misirli Ahmet presented in my way.
In this composition, the melody was fixed, and the result was that I found that the doholla can be the main engine holding up the composition; this composition was all new in its structure with no conventional parts as in the composition “6”. My goal was to test how successful it would be as a musical piece and the result was satisfying to me, the richness of the sounds of the doholla helped me to build a complete new composition.

“Arab Rhythm” (Doholla, Loop percussion/ Length: 05:22)
For this composition, I chose a collection of Arab rhythms, recorded in their basic form. I replayed the recordings on a loop machine as a background, and played solo darbuka along with the looped recordings.
I did not add something new here besides playing the split-finger technique. Traditionally this would require two players, my idea was to play along a recorded set of chosen rhythms in a specific format. The result I was looking for, and found, was a way of using technology as an aid for applying the split-finger technique with pure Arabic rhythms.

“Open Improvisation” (Doholla/ Length: 03:46)
In this piece, I pour out everything I discovered and learned, the new sounds and the new techniques. My aim is to show that the instrument does not need a background to improvise or play against nor follow a specific groove. To show that it can fill the whole spectrum and take all roles in one piece.
The presentation is open, no specific tempo or time signature to be tied to. Without any rules to limit the improvisation, I present everything I have from sounds, phrases, techniques and rhythms. This could be easiest understood in comparisons to Taksim in Arab music. (Taksim: is the improvisation style for melodic instruments in Arab music)

“2 in 1” (Doholla, Darbuka/ Length: 03:20)
This composition is a traditional piece in nature, based on improvisation depending on two percussionists, one ostinato/loop percussionist and one solo percussionist. Rhythms usually used are Baladi, Saeedi and Maksoum… the traditional Arab rhythms.
In this context, Misirli Ahmet presented this composition in a completely different way that was made possible by his new technique. One percussionist instead of two plays this piece. Using split-finger technique on the left hand covering the solo part and the right hand covering the ostinato part. This new way has raised the bar and increased the difficulty level
and challenging nature of this type of compositions since now it doesn’t only require a good soloist but also an advanced level of technique to manage playing two parts at the same time. I wanted to present this piece in order to show that an Arab percussionist can be a solo player without any companion. Also I wanted to show that this technique can be used in a traditional context to produce the same expected traditional sounds but, on a higher level of technique. Thus, to create a challenge for the percussionist to develop and work more on his technique and consequently develop the traditional music and the ways of presenting it. This composition helps in presenting my projects main goal - that darbuka/ doholla can be a solo instrument even in traditional contexts.

“Trio” (Doholla, Conga, Drum set/ Length: 06:06)
Inspired by Misirli Ahmet rhythmic phrases and arab traditional rhythms, the idea in using conga and drums is showing how one can produce sounds on doholla that is close to congas Latin rhythms and drums funk rhythms.

“SS” (Doholla, Violin 1, Violin 2, Cello, Double Bass/ Length: 06:24)
Composed by Syrian composer, Maias Al Yamani. This composition has big focus on percussion, all rhythms used in it are not traditional arab rhythms and are played by me using the new sounds and techniques that I have developed through my studies.

“Longa Nahawnd” (Doholla, Violin 1, Violin 2, Cello, Double Bass/ Length: 04:46)
A classic arab and turkish musical form, arranged in this version by Syrian composer, Maias Al Yamani. Time signature 2/4. Rhythms used are Al Taer rhythm or Malfuf that are traditional arab rhythms but are played by me using new sounds and techniques.
Summary and Results
As stated before, the questions I was trying to find an answer to through my project were: Can the Darbuka/Doholla be a solo instrument? Could it have a more central role in a concert? And if so, which techniques could I use and what type of music could I compose to show and distinguish its role?

A Spectrum of Sounds
Through my work in this master, I discovered that Darbuka/Doholla can produce a spectrum of new sounds using unconventional techniques and experimenting with new areas of the instrument’s body as well as trying different positions. The result was that I managed to break the monotony in sounds, going beyond the instrument’s range traditionally limited to the main two sounds Doum (Low) and Tak (High). The new set of sounds opened new possibilities for the instrument. I would now classify them in three groups: a group of Doum sounds, a group of Tak sounds and a group of new sounds. All the sounds can be played in different positions. All this contributes in expanding the expression of the instrument.

A Central Role
Through practice and experimentation, I have managed to show that Darbuka/Doholla could be a leading instrument in a concert, through changing the roles between melody and percussion; this was best shown in my graduation concert through two compositions played alongside a qanun melody. The melody is repetitive and taking over the loop function of marking the metrical rhythm patterns, while the Darbuka/Doholla has the leading role in a composition specifically written for it.

Challenging the Technique
I presented a new way to play Arab percussion compositions, based on improvisation, that was originally for two percussionists, one loop percussionist and one solo percussionist. In this context, Misirli Ahmet was the first to play it in this completely different way that was made possible by his new technique. One percussionist instead of two plays this piece. Using split-finger technique on the left hand covering the solo part and the right hand covering the loop part. This new way has raised the bar and increased the difficult and challenging nature of this type of compositions since now it doesn’t only require a good soloist but also an advanced level of technique to manage playing two parts at the same time and preserving the traditional nature of the composition.
This composition helps in presenting my project main goal that is emphasizing that a percussionist can be a solo player even in traditional contexts.
Conclusion
To conclude, I think that my project was successful in answering the questions I had. I wanted to test with Darbuka/Doholla and see if it can have a more central role and if it can be a solo instrument in different musical contexts. Through investigating possible ways to reach that, I came to believe that the instrument is capable and has a big potential to fill this central role. I tried playing techniques and places on it to get new sounds, I tried with changing its role in a music composition from a looping one to a more varied one, as well as writing compositions designed to highlight the instrument and give it a more comprehensive role whether as a solo instrument or as a leading instrument alongside other instruments. The results and feedback I got were very good and satisfying, both the instrument and the new music were met with interest and curiosity to understand more about what I was doing with the instrument and with the music in general. I think that a lot of music can be written for this vibrant original instrument to highlight its role and make it more distinguished.

Arab Percussion Curriculum
One of the areas I would like to work on in the future is to develop a structure for how Arab percussion could be taught. To apply open-minded methods for teaching Arab percussion, that makes it possible to master the traditional rhythms as well as tackling them in a more creative and open way. The aim is to create a percussionist, not only an Arab percussionist. This idea is ongoing, I use it when I teach my students and a formalized curriculum is under process, the aim is to inspire Arab percussionists that there are no limits to what they can do with the instrument, that traditional rhythms are enriching and not binding.

Explore Indian Music
The concept of switching roles and giving percussion a leading role and letting the melodic instrument take the looping part is something I have found in Indian Music; however I did not build on this during my project since I do not have enough information and knowledge about it. I tried to use my way to achieve this change of roles. Understanding more about this concept in Indian Music and how it works is something I am planning to explore more closely in future.
References

Al Sakka, Jamal. (2005) *Al Sahih Fi Al Iqaa*. Dar Ekrema,
http://rhythmofsweden.com
Levent, Yildirim. (2005). *Dialog* [CD], Le Chant Du Monde
Levent, Yildirim. (2007). *Neverland Fusion* [CD], Le Chant Du Monde
Levent, Yildirim. (February 2016). Personal Interview conducted by George Oro
Misirli, Ahmet. (2000). *Mel De Cabra* [CD], Mega Müzik
Misirli, Ahmet. (2001). *The Search* [CD], Mega Müzik
Misirli, Ahmet. (2002). *Percussion* [CD], Imm Muzik
Misirli, Ahmet. (October 2015). Personal Interview.
Velez, Glen & Cotler, Lori. (2009). *Breathing Rhythms Duo* [CD], Glen Velez & Lori Cotler
Velez, Glen. (2009). *Glen Velez Solo* [CD], Glen Velez & Lori Cotler
Zohar, Fresco. (2015). *Tof Miriam* [CD], Zohar Fresco