

PARALLEL WORLDS

Multimedia-Composition from Tam Thi Pham



Forum, Hochschule für Musik und
Theater Hamburg.



19:00, 17th. June 2022

P R O J E C T D E S C R I P T I O N

Being in Germany made me, maybe paradoxically, more interested for the various traditions in Vietnam. Even before I moved to Europe, I have already started studying traditional singing and playing the Dan Bau and Erhu – used a lot in Vietnamese traditional music. But coming here, I have delved deeper and deeper into various facets of my cultural roots, finding it an immense source of inspiration and ever more appreciating the depth and the fragility of it. In 2019 I did my “Dark Alleys” piece for a performer and live electronics, where I reflected on the connection between the dead and the living, and on the role and meaning of ritual. In Vietnamese religious practice, we reflect on that and perform special rituals every month – with their special sounds, movements, objects and atmosphere. The more I researched and thought about these topics, the more fascinated I became. In our beliefs, both worlds – that of the living and that of the dead - support each other and work together to build a better future for all. Even after the piece was finished and performed several times, I couldn’t stop thinking about the richness of the stories and rituals I’ve (re)discovered. So I’ve decided to expand and incorporate it into a bigger, more comprehensive project – something that drew inspiration from the Hungry Ghost Festival.

The origin story of the modern Ghost Festival, ultimately originated from ancient India, and is derived from the Mahayana scripture known as the Yulanpen or Ullambana Sutra. In it, the character of Maudgalyayana discovers that his deceased mother was reborn into the hungry ghost realm. Maudgalyayana tried to help her by giving her a bowl of rice, but as a hungry ghost, she was unable to eat the rice. Buddha then explains how one is able to assist one's current parents and deceased parents in this life and in one's past lives by willingly offering food and performing rituals.

The richness and variety of activities practiced during the festival filled my imagination and paved the way for my multimedia dance-theater piece. What better way to re-imagine its atmosphere and put a spotlight on some parts of it then through combining music, movement, sound, images and light?

In my project, I have decided to have the 4 part structure based on the distinct activities during the celebration of the festival.

1. Opening the gates of Hell – for performer and live-electronics

The performer is simultaneously the musician, albeit playing a rather strange instrument: the 2 shinais (bamboo swords) produce vibrations that are amplified through the use of contact microphones – these sounds are in turn heavily processed by the live-electronics musician sitting outside the stage. The interplay between the ritualistic movement, sound and lights opens the gates of Hell and invites the destitute ghosts to join our world.

2. The Chant – for dancers, 3 voices, 2 traditional Vietnamese instruments and electronics

Each of the voices tells a different story and addresses the ghosts in their own, individual manner – with reverence, hope or fear. Here I also drew my inspiration from the great famine of 1945, when millions of Vietnamese starved to death. But, as stated above, both the living and the dead work together to create a better future, so the main goal of chanting is to help and transform the hungry ghosts into benevolent spirits. The perspective is from the world of the living and our efforts to help the deceased in their journey and metamorphosis. The tonal basis of this part is deduced from the microtonal scales used in traditional music.

3. Receiving the offerings – for dancers, 3 voices, 2 traditional Vietnamese instruments and electronics

Dancers, representing the ghosts, interact and dance with the paper-made offerings – reacting to the chants and prayers of the living. Opposite to the previous part, this is the perspective of the deceased, of the starving, the lost and the deranged.

4. Closing the gates of Hell – for dancers, 2 traditional Vietnamese instruments and electronics

In a whirlwind of emotions, both the living and the dead feel regret, sadness, happiness, and peace – many complex emotions, as some ghosts ascend, but other do not. The gates are closed, and the worlds are separate again.

The transitions between the segments will be ushered by the percussion interludes. On the technical side, the dancers will be equipped with sensors that will enable them to influence the sound and the visuals, and the audio will be spatialized, representing the fluidity of the borders between our and the unseen world. All four layers present on stage (sound, movement, visuals and light) will weave together to complement and enhance one another, transporting the audience into the imagination of the creators and performers.

TEAM

Composer/Projectleader (Musik, Video, Concept) – Tam Thi Pham

Story – Goran Lazarevic

Choreographer – Teresa Hoffmann

Costume design – Antonia Kate Ever

Project manager – Thu Hang Nguyen

Dancers Hannah Scharrer, Marian René Menges, Fei Han & Dulguun Chinchuluun

Performance (Bernhard Fograscher) Singers (Mai Linh, Nathaniel Ouzana, Lennart Meyer), eine Percussionist (Irina Aravidou),

Traditional vietnamese instruments: (Nguyen Thanh Thuy und Stefan Östersjö)