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THIS IS MY INSTRUMENT: AN APPROACH TOWARDS PERFORMANCE PRACTICE FOR INTEGRATED CONCERTS

Abstract: The Belgium-based Nadar Ensemble is a new music ensemble that specializes in performing curated and integrated concerts. In this case 'integrated' infers that all aspects of the concert are taken into consideration. Questioning, developing, and instrumentalizing video, light and sound design (including live electronics), costuming, decor, and even personnel such as a conductor and other roles typically inherent to an ensembles' tradition, have become an integral part of Nadar's and other similar ensembles' concert programming. In this paper I will specifically lay out the manners in which the musicians of Nadar Ensemble approach what they have grown to see as their broadened instruments, including the use of live electronics, game controllers and newly made instruments. I will also discuss ideas surrounding the so-called 'attacca concert' and post-instrumental practice by delving into two cases, the event *Dead Serious* (2014) and the concert program *Extensions* (2015).

Keywords: integrated concerts, post-instrumental practice, transdisciplinary performance practices, curated concerts.

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Introduction

During an interview, Pieter Matthynssens, artistic co-director of the Belgium-based new music ensemble Nadar Ensemble, said that he and Stefan Prins (his partner co-director) aim with Nadar to create 'curated concerts', programs in which "video, scenography, the lights become a total concept" (Matthynssens 2020). I will argue in this article that in order to reach this artistic goal, they not only actively question, develop, instrumentalize and integrate video, scenography and light, but many other aspects of the performance, and that this has also become an inherent definition of Nadar. The ensemble is of course not just made up of its artistic directors, but includes ten fixed members[2] who, as part of this 'curated concert' artistic practice have, in a relatively short time period needed to expand their own artistic and instrumental practices to include performing on a broadened array of conventional and newly made instruments as well as live electronics. They have also taken on non-conventional roles such as operating drones, smoke machines, and show-calling. I will attempt to frame these performers' strategies and performance practices that have been developed for this relatively new evolution. To do so, I will examine two of Nadar's more prominent curated concerts: the event *Dead Serious* that was made for the Darmstadt Summer Course in 2014 and the concert program *ExTensions*, premiered at the Gaudeamus Muziekweek 2015.

As a way of introducing Nadar Ensemble, I noted that they[3] utilize aspects of the performing arts that are not necessarily considered when putting on a concert that, although contemporary, is still rooted in the contemporary Western art music tradition. I like to call this approach 'integrated concerts' and use this term to sharpen and delineate the subgenre that I have studied (Moore 2023) and, thus, will refer to throughout this article. By integrated concerts I mean concerts in which, among other aspects of a performance, video, light and sound design (e.g., live electronics), decor, and utilization of a conductor (and other roles typically inherent to an ensembles' tradition) are all integral parts of the concert curation and/or programming. This definition is derived from the research of Tanja Orning (Orning 2019), Martijn Mulder, (Mulder and Hitters 2021) and Iga Batog (Batog 2020) and from personal conversations with Pieter Matthynssens (artistic co-director Nadar Ensemble) (Matthynssens 2020), Bas Wiegers (principal guest conductor Klangforum Wien) (Wiegers 2019), Koen Kessels (music director Royal Ballet, London), and Nico Couck (professor of

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2   Myself included.
3   Though a member of Nadar Ensemble, I will attempt to remain objective and thus refer to the group as 'they'.

guitar, Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp) between 2017–2020. In regard to this paper, it is important to note that Nadar is not the only ensemble pursuing this path. Other groups include Ensemble Pamplemousse from the US, Sound Initiative in Paris, ICTUS in Brussels, and MusikFabrik in Cologne.

It may be clear to some readers that this definition is also very closely related to (and inspired by) what composer-performer Jennifer Walshe wrote in her well-known 2016 manifesto on *The New Disciplines* ("The New Discipline" n.d.). Musicologist Monika Voithofer stated in her detailed analysis of Walshe's concepts that:

> music here is no longer autonomous; it is interdependent with the other arts, and defiantly so. In particular, the digital transformation influences and offers new possibilities of interweaving these various media … The New Discipline is an intermedia art practice, since it integrates various media such as dance, theatre, film, video, the visual arts, installations, literature and even stand-up comedy (Voithofer 2020).

While Nadar's approach (integrated concerts) is very similar and there is obvious overlap between the two approaches,[4] I would argue that Nadar applies an approach that is distinct in two manners. First, Nadar (usually) presents concerts with pieces by different composers. This necessarily requires a piece-by-piece perspective. Not all the works that Nadar presents are as heavily influenced by Walshe's manifesto. And second, Walshe's concept seems to be all encompassing. She writes that in her works (and other works she sees as being 'New Discipline'), "the ear, the eye and the brain are expected to be active and engaged. Works in which we understand that there are people on the stage, and that these people are/have bodies" ("The New Discipline" n.d.). From personal experience, Walshe typically enhances a performer in a more complete fashion. As I will show below, Nadar is more willing to pick and choose aspects of a performer and other (arts) disciplines and retool them, devising new instruments and perspectives for their programs.

I also introduced Nadar Ensemble by mentioning that the ten musicians in the group have had to learn new instruments and roles through the years that they have been members. Many of the players have learned oddly specific percussion instruments like IKEA baskets, dog clickers, and light switches as well as mastered balloon scratching, chair squeaking, and match sticks. Håkon Stene, in his research on post-instrumental practice, calls this kind of musician a "nomadic gatherer [whose practice] becomes an attitude directed towards re-thinking and invention" ("Artistic Research: 'This Is Not a Drum' – towards a Post-Instrumental Practice | Håkon Stene" n.d.). Researcher and percussionist Louise Devenish,

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4   Nadar has also performed several of Walshe's works.

building on Stene's research, further defines post-instrumental practice within four parameters: instrumentality, plurality, transferral, and integration (Devenish 2021). For the purpose of this paper, and especially upon reflecting on the inner workings of ensembles like Nader, Devenish's definition of transferral is especially relevant: "Utilizing 'technique transferral' as a means of exploration and execution, and subsequent development of performance practices specific to individual works, rather than individual instruments". As was discussed in an earlier article for this journal (Gielen and Moore 2022), an essential part of productions like Michael Beil's *Hide to Show* involve Nadar's musicians being asked to step back from their principal instruments and apply their expertly honed single instrument skills in new transferable ways. It takes musicians to perform *Hide to Show*, however only 1/6th of the piece is performed on instruments. The rest of the performed material consists of acting, dancing, lip-syncing, singing, or movements, all of which have been notated in great detail.

Devenish's definition of 'plurality' (in post-instrumental practice) is also relevant for this study. She writes that the "use of instrumental materials [fulfils] a plurality of sonic and non-sonic roles in performance". As noted above, Nadar's musicians apply multi-instrumentalism to fluidly combine several 'non-sonic' roles, both as performers as well as essential artistic roles played out behind the scenes. For example, Marieke Berendsen is both the violinist as well as the scenographer. Nadar's flutist Katrien Gaelens is our yoga coach. Pieter Matthyssens is the ensemble's cellist and artistic co-director. I worked for many years as both the technical coordinator as well as the trombonist and conductor. Our pianist doubles on percussion and our percussionist doubles on piano. And lastly, all the players in the group have become experts on game controllers and other electronic-based instruments.

Nadar as an ensemble is in the business of presenting concerts, so before continuing with the cases studies I would first like to briefly pause and reflect on a few observable and current trends in the curation of new music today. Defining curation is admittedly no simple task. However, music critic and researcher Holly Tessler offers a good starting point:

> Modern curation work is narrative in nature: telling a compelling story not just through a static collection and presentation of artefacts to a single, monolithic audience but through dynamic and multiply iterated discourse with a range of audiences, communities, and stakeholders (Tessler 2020).

Renowned professor of curation Dorothee Richter goes further and proposes that curation specifically of new music[5] should be a "practice that is deeply

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5   In this article, I use 'new music' to mean music written since 1950 and in the western art music tradition.

involved in the politics of display, politics of site, politics of transfer and transla-
tion, and regimes of visibility" (Freydank and Rebhahn 2019, 11). If we under-
stand politics as, according to Jacques Rancière, giving form to society or to our
living together (Rancière and Corcoran 2016). then Richter appears to suggest
that every thinkable manner in which "audiences, communities, and stakehold-
ers" relate can, and more importantly, should be taken into account when pro-
gramming a concert. According to Richter, new music curators should consider
thus how relationships in our world are displayed, the interplay involved on site
(e.g., the history of specific concert venues), the participation (or lack thereof)
of an audience, the participant's ability to understand, enjoy, and be entertained
(or not), and even the audience's and presenter's perceived position in society
and how those interplay in (a) concert. In other words, all aspects appear to
be open and fair game to a curator's artistic notions. Returning to Tessler, the
discourse with and position of certain 'stakeholders' in new music, namely the
performers, has grown to be very dynamic in nature, fluid even (Moore 2016).
Professional players (as shown above) are asked to learn new instruments and
take on new roles within organizations, fluidly changing from, as Stene points
out, their specialized instrument to "embracing the variety and complexity" of
the post-instrumental strategy ("Artistic Research: 'This Is Not a Drum' – to-
wards a Post-Instrumental Practice | Håkon Stene" n.d.). I would thus dare to
add the following to Tessler's and Richter's definitions: curating, in addition to
presentation, is also actively choosing specific tools and roles, and the way they
are used and instrumentalized.

Nadar Ensemble's artistic co-directors, Pieter Matthynssens and Stefan
Prins, describe their manner of programming as creating 'curated concerts', in
which each piece is "representative of its author" (composer, writer, improvis-
er, etc.) while maintaining "the whole presentation as one event" (Prins 2019).
Furthermore, these curated concerts can also be understood as integrated con-
certs, meaning (again) that all aspects of a performance are considered (as is
suggested by Richter). This may also include the active choice of how certain
roles will be instrumentalized to meet specific artistic aspirations. For example,
Prins and Matthynssens have on several occasions described the conductor as 'a
visual element', stating: "if you program concerts in which you think the visual
element is really important, then putting it simply, with a conductor, you have
a dancer on stage" (Prins 2019) – a component, a role and a person, flush with
tradition, and thus ripe for customization and instrumentalization. A work that
exemplifies this practice and which Nadar performs regularly is Alexander Khu-
beev's *Ghost of Dystopia* (2014, rev 2019). Here the composer required a bound
conductor to tell the story of the rise and fall of a dictator. The instrumentalized
role, who again is a person, becomes a tactical leader, stepping forward from
the 'assembly' as a tool "to be wielded and discarded when no longer required"

(Moore forthcoming; Hardt and Negri 2019, 22). Another example (and one I will go into greater detail below) can be found in Nadar's artistic directors' instrumentalization of the conductor in their "curated concert" program *Ex-Tensions* (2015). Here each piece distinctly questioned the role of the conductor. As the performing ensemble, Prins and Matthynssens took the active decision to curate the concert in such a fashion that not just the works and the order of presentation were arranged, but the role, its instrumentalization, and apparent tactical deployment of one of its musicians as well.

This brings us back to the heart of this article, Nadar's performance practice and curation (and inherently thus, instrumentalization) of all the aspects of their artistic practice. I would like to discuss this further by going through two example programs, examining each for the manner in which musical and extra-musical elements were integrated into the whole as well as how the musicians applied strategies of post-instrumental practice. The first is Nadar's 2014 program titled *Dead Serious*. This was presented at the Darmstadt Summer Course for New Music in August 2014, on the Georg Brüchner Platz. The program represents a close collaboration with Iraqi artist Wafaa Bilal and the belly dancer Meiver De la Cruz.

Dead Serious

Dead Serious was an evening length show that took over the entire public square. It consisted of an introductory film, and four pieces that were each placed in different parts of the Platz, with at one point the performers standing more than 70 meters away from each other. A short video clip of the fourth piece can be seen via the link provided in the footnotes.[6] In the video one can see De la Cruz belly dancing with three drones. The same players who piloted the drones (non-sonic performing roles) also played traditional instruments in this program, namely cello, clarinet, and percussion. The clarinetist also played the game controller in one of the works. Furthermore, Nadar incorporated guest performers into the program, namely hot air balloon pilots for *EXIT F* (2011) by Michael Maierhof, the belly dancer, and light operators who played important roles throughout all four pieces. *Dead Serious* is furthermore an example of, among other characteristic approaches, Nadar's attacca-style concert curation. All the pieces are played one after the other with detailed, thought out, and most importantly rehearsed segues between pieces.

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6   DEAD SERIOUS (extract): Dancing with Drones (live @ Darmstadt 2014): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gIz_pltxO2o, accessed on 13 April 2023

Prins and Matthynssens apply and have further developed this attacca approach because they are fully persuaded by the need to create and especially maintain an arc in a concert's program (Matthynssens 2020). Any breaks, be that for applause or technical transitions, would disturb the curated tension (Huizinga 2014) (and also disturb their active care (Groĭs 2022) for the audience). To create this attacca style there are many factors, both artistic and pragmatic, that are taken into consideration. In the first place the artistic arc (or tension) must be considered and that is representative in their choice of pieces and their order, presentation, and choice of players. However, just as importantly, the practical possibilities in changing between pieces are reflected upon. As discussed above, the musicians' roles are fluid and thus the individual players in each piece, in large part, remain the same. As such, the ensemble works together on getting from one position and/or instrument as smoothly and unobtrusively as possible. The production team (which also includes a few of the players) writes and leads the rehearsals of these transitions just as fanatically as if they were working on a pre-composed work, devoting precious production time to each 'changement'.[7]

For *Dead Serious*, the musicians played in the first, third, and fourth pieces of the evening (the second piece, *The Patriot Act* (2014)*,* was a film produced by Wafaa Bilal and the introduction was also a film that will be discussed below). The fourth work was for three drone pilots, the belly dancer, and follow spot operator. Nadar's scenographer and artistic team staged the belly dancer in the center of the square. The third piece, Stefan Prins' *Generation Kill* (2012)*,* was positioned at the edge, giving the musicians, who surrounded the audience in Maierhof's *EXIT F* (the first piece), the chance to move position without being noticed by the audience. The drone pilots Matthynssens (cellist), Dries Tack (clarinetist and game controller) and Yves Goemaere (percussionist) flew using remote controls, which also gave them the chance to change positions on the sly. Furthermore, lighting and sound effects were used to draw and hold the audience's attention between works.

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7   A name adopted during rehearsals of programs that included Michael Beil's pieces (Beil 2019).

Figure 1. Nadar Ensemble performing *Exit F* by Michael Maierhof during 'Dead Serious' 2014. © Nadar Ensemble

Nadar's idiosyncratic segues and transitions consistently seek to incorporate all required technical details (such as staging, lights, backdrops, etc.) into the style of the program. Another example Nadar program that demonstrates this approach can be found in the various iterations of the 'Doppelgänger' concerts.[8] Here, the ensemble's musicians and crew must transition often between *Generation Kill* and *Exit to Enter* (2013), a work by Michael Beil. Both pieces have a fixed setting that is vastly different from the other. In *Generation Kill,* the ensemble sits in two rows of four musicians spaced five meters apart with the musicians sitting upstage and each staged behind a semi-transparent screen. In *Exit to Enter,* the ensemble sits bunched together on stage left, while the middle of the stage must be kept free for video recordings and projection. Because of the disparate staging, this represents one of the ensemble's more complicated *changements*. Since both pieces use video as an instrument and because Beil admittedly was heavily inspired by the film maker David Lynch (Gielen and Moore 2023), it seemed appropriate to Matthynssens and Prins that the ensemble's musicians mimic the filmmaker's style and practice and record themselves doing the transition backwards during rehearsals. This recording is then played back (projected on a horizon screen) in reverse during the very same concert segue and, of course, in synchrony with the live version.

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8   https://nadarensemble.be/events/der-doppelganger/.

Giuseppe Torre and Kristina Andersen, in their paper on designing digital musical instruments, define an instrument as a tool when it is "developed and continuously redefined by the artist to fulfil artistic and musical need" (Torre and Andersen 2017). Following this line of thought, two tests arise if one is to determine that a physical tool, performed role, or even a concert transition has climbed from utilized tool to curated instrument. First, it must be "developed and continuously refined by an artist" and, second, that development and refinement must occur to "meet an artistic need". In regard to Nadar's concert curation and especially transitions between pieces, Prins and Matthynssens have explicitly expressed an artistic need to maintain tension and an arc in their programs. The tools they choose includes not just the pieces in a program and their order of presentation, but the manner in which the players and technical team segues from one to the next. As discussed above, they have developed a practice of literally performing transitions. In *Dead Serious*, they did this with the help of technical devices such as hot air balloons, lighting, and drones. For example, when the drones first appeared, the pilots launched them from their seats in *Exit F* while the sound technician spread a recording of the drones' whining sound through the octophonically arranged speakers. Practically, the musicians needed to move unobtrusively from the stages surrounding the audience to a set-up roughly 25 meters away. However, the artistic need at this point in the show allowed no lulls in sound and tension between composed works. Both the remote controls for the drones and the shifting soundtrack turned the technically required transition into an instrumentalized segue. In the example provided in the 'Doppelgänger' programs, the ensemble doubled themselves, turning the practical action of moving a chair or lowering a projection screen into a well-choreographed and slightly bizarre ballet. Transitioning between pieces is a requirement of concerts and Nadar has developed and continues to refine these transitions into artistically functional elements of their performances. In this sense we can then consider Nadar's transitions in attacca-style concerts to have been instrumentalized and as an inherent part of their concert curation. Perhaps more interesting is that this transition-instrument is performed collectively by the entire ensemble.

Dead Serious as an event and program can also be considered an integrated concert. Not only are the transitions performed and part of the curation, so too was the manner in which the audience was welcomed to the square. As an opening act, the hot air balloons were only inflated twenty minutes prior to the beginning of the show. They were also subtly lit, drawing the public's attention to the literally rising tension. Also, during the balloons' inflation, a video of a top-down view of Darmstadt was shown, recorded during a hot balloon flight made a few weeks earlier. Nadar's integrated curation of the evening further included:

- Video: Both the material shown and the manner of presentation were taken into account during preparation. The opening film and video piece by Wafaa Bilal, *Patriot Act,* was projected on the four sides of a cube in the center of the square. The videos for the third piece, Prins' *Generation Kill*, were not only projected on original 1.8m wide semi-transparent screens, but they were also doubled on to a large horizon screen behind the musicians, allowing a larger audience to also enjoy the avatars. And finally, live video, recorded from the perspective of the belly dancer, was also projected on to the outside of the box while she was both inside the box and dancing on top of it.
- Light design: Light in this performance was not simply functional. It was used to guide the audience throughout the performance, for example, beginning with the atmospheric light provided by the hot air balloons' cannons, continuing through the overheads in *Exit F* and the foot-switch controlled LED lamps in *Generation Kill,* and finally to the follow-spotter in the piece with De la Cruz.
- Sound design: Because the ensemble and pieces were spaced around the square – sometimes performers were 70 meters from each other – the amplification was also designed by Nadar's sound engineer in a manner that guided the audience through the performance. For example, when the drones entered for the final piece of the show, a pre-recorded tape of drone sounds accompanied their flight, drawing the audience's attention to their presence.
- Décor: Nadar's scenographer and violinist Marieke Berendsen, along with the production team, specifically designed décor for the performance that would best deliver not only the four pieces, but carry the entire evening.
- Personnel: It is key to note that Nadar considered the balloon pilots for *EXIT F* and the light operators (both desk operators and follow-spotters) to be performers in their own right throughout the concert. The regular ensemble members rehearsed pieces and transitions with these performers as well as provided instructions via track-sheets, something very much akin to what Nadar's musicians could consider to be scores.

In regard to post-instrumental practice, evidence of 'technique transferral' and 'plurality' are in abundance throughout the performance of *Dead Serious*. During *EXIT F,* the percussionists play composer-made and piece-specific instruments. Maierhof wrote three percussion parts, however for Nadar's performance only one of these players was classically trained as a percussionist. The other two players transferred techniques developed on their home instruments to Maierhof's percussion instruments (including electric toothbrushes, sandpa-

pered fishing wire, sponges, and thick plastic cups), 'exploring and executing' piece-specific performance practices. During the work with the belly dancer, the three drone pilots, also musicians in the ensemble, took on 'non-sonic roles' demonstrating a 'plural' post-instrumental practice. And lastly, during *Generation Kill,* (which will be discussed in greater detail below) all four game controllers found ways to transfer their expertise on their main instruments (respectively: piano, flute, violin, and clarinet) to playing Sony PlayStation 3 controllers.

ExTensions

The second example I would like to discuss is the concert program *ExTensions,* premiered by Nadar at the Gaudeamus Muziekweek in 2015. The ensemble opened the program with Alexander Khubeev's *Ghost of Dystopia* (2014, rev 2019)*,* pictured below. Second on the program was Simon Steen-Andersen's *AMID* (2004), from which you can see the Gravity Guiro[9] pictured in the bottom right corner of Figure 2. The third piece was Alexander Schubert's *Point Ones* (2012). And the final work on the program was Stefan Prins' *Generation Kill.*
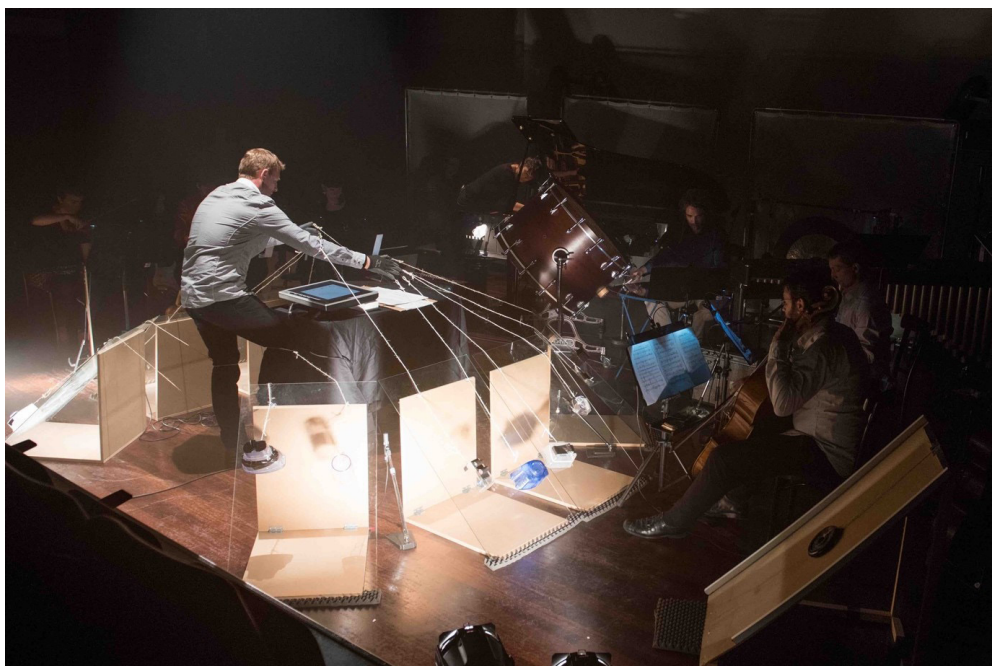

Figure 2. Nadar Ensemble Performing *Ghost of Dystopia* by Alexander Khubeev at the Gaudeamus Muziekweek. © Anna van Kooi

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9   A full description of the instrument can be found in the score (Steen-Andersen 2004).

The first three pieces on the program have a unique role for the conductor and it was the explicit intention of the concert's curators, Prins and Matthyssens, to question the contemporary role of the conductor within the context of the Western art music genre (Matthynssens 2020). As with the segues in the previous example, here the artistic co-directors instrumentalized the conductor to meet their specific artistic and curatorial goal. This is especially apparent in the Schubert and Khubeev, in which both composers created new instruments (and new notational methods) to bind the conductor to respectively create a tension between reality and the virtual world and, in the latter case, to tell the story of a rise and fall of a dictator (Moore 2021).

In Alexander Schubert's *Point Ones* the conductor's movements fulfill two sometimes simultaneous functions. They are choreographed to trigger live electronics and are utilized to conduct the live ensemble. Both sets of gestures, those choreographed and the conventionally employed, fall within the realm of generally recognizable movement repertoire (Schuller 1998). The latter functions as we might expect in a performance ritual (Schwartz and Godfrey 1993); the conductor's gestures mark time and cue the musicians who then respond accordingly. The choreographed and electronic-cueing gestures also look like normal conductors' movement repertoire. However, they are instead deployed to trigger live electronics. By instrumentalizing exactly these conductorial key gestures, the conductor's conventional responsibility to direct and cue the live musicians has not been limited, but rather augmented and enhanced. Their gestures cue both live performers and trigger virtual musicians, sometimes at the same time (Moore n.d.).

In the opening piece, Alexander Khubeev's *Ghost of Dystopia,* the role of the conductor is instrumentalized as the subject of the piece in order for the composer to tell his tale of the rise and fall of a dictator (Moore 2022). The conductor-soloist begins the piece bound hand and foot to a composer-made instrument. As the piece progresses, he/she breaks the bindings and, using conducting-like gestures, appears to take charge of the ensemble. As the piece comes to an end, Khubeev has the conductor take up a Christ-like pose, purposely begging the questions, 'Is he dead? Who killed him? Is he a god?' Though Khubeev attempts to make it appear as though the conductor continually finds more freedom, it is only a veneer. In an interview, Khubeev admitted that "the more freedom [he] wants the audience to see, the more he dictates" (Khubeev 2019) the role to his performers. Khubeev, therefore, was very clearly willing to instrumentalize and develop the role of the conductor to meet his artistic needs.

AMID, the oldest work on the program, is arguably a preface to Steen-Andersen's self-described 'hyper-concrete' (Steen-Andersen 2010) manner of composing (Steen-Andersen 2019). Hyper-concretism is the practice of tenaciously applying the same technique and playing method uniformly across a range of

instruments. In *AMID*, Steen-Andersen first rationalized the winds' breathing in percentages, which were then directly transcribed to each of the other five instruments. For the strings (violin and cello) that was articulated as bow movements. For the piano and guitar, the composer used range. And for the percussionist, Steen-Andersen designed a new instrument he dubbed the Gravity Guiro in which the player must raise and lower a weighted piece of sandpaper across an incline. Each instrument was assigned a full potential (100%): full lungs for the winds, at the frog from the strings, low registers for the piano and guitar, and at the top of the incline for the percussionist. They were also assigned a 0% potential that is respectively the opposite for each instrument. In *AMID*, the composer zoomed in on, applied, and employed the musicians' movement repertoire, turning what is normally associated with preparatory and production gestures into the musical material itself.

Steen-Andersen's compositional practice is applicable to not just writing music, but also to performing it. For Nadar Ensemble, this has conceivably become a central pillar in their artistic practice as an ensemble and also serves as an example of post-instrumental practice. By applying a hyper-concrete 'transferral' of instrumental skills, the musicians can switch dexterously between instruments (which are mostly composer made) and the respective new styles of notation. Furthermore, they apply the embodied and ingrained skills gained on their principal instruments (such as breath control and coordinated timing) to both live electronic instruments and even more non-conventional instruments such as light switches and non-sonic roles like show-calling.

The final piece on the *ExTensions* program was Stefan Prins' *Generation Kill,* pictured below. In this piece, I am often fascinated at the manner in which each of my colleague game controllers hyper-concretely applies their personal instrument techniques to the 'new' instrument. Elisa Medinilla, the pianist, for example, wrote all the finger settings for her game controller into her part as if the instrument were truly a piano. Dries Tack and Katrien Gaelens, both woodwind players, did something similar. The three wind players, myself included, also applied breathing structures to help play in a more chamber music-like fashion. It is key to note here, that each of the musicians accepted the game controllers as their instruments. They bought the computers, sound cards, game controllers, and webcams to use and practice at home, practicing in the concert conditions. The musicians do not view the electronics as something extra that a technician will handle and play. Instead, they all view them as their personal responsibilities and take the initiative in finding and practicing the material. For all four pieces in the *ExTensions* program, all the new instruments were practiced at the players' homes (or in the case of the Khubeev at the ensemble's rehearsal space) in concert conditions. This may sound simple, but of course it takes time (and precious funding) to realize.

Figure 3. Nadar Ensemble performing Generation Kill by Stefan Prins at the Gaudeamus Muziek Week. © Anna van Kooi.

Nadar's program *ExTensions* is a straightforward example of the instrumentalization of one of its musicians' roles, namely the conductor. Schubert and Khubeev explicitly developed the role for their artistic ends, and in *AMID* Steen-Andersen deployed musicians' movement repertoire as a compositional tool. Though the role of the conductor was not originally envisioned, it has become the common performance practice for the piece (Steen-Andersen 2019). And since the conductor can only use movements, it is arguable, in the words of Matthynssens, that the "conductor's movements become a visual extension of the musicians" (Matthynssens 2020). Furthermore and as mentioned, Prins and Matthynssens specifically programmed and curated these three pieces as a way to explore the dimensions and complexities of conducting new music today. They began with the Khubeev, literally chaining the conductor to the stage before the audience entered, knowing as well that the freedom gained throughout the piece is simply an illusion, thus immediately questioning "performance ritual" and contemporary understanding of hierarchy on stage (Schwartz and Godfrey 1993). *Point Ones* was the second piece presented and, in Nadar style, it was played attacca. In other words, while the conductor may now have been free of Khubeev's instrument, he was charged with immediately banging off into the rock'n'roll-style introduction of *Point Ones*. Unlike the first piece, Schubert's bindings are far less restricting. However, specific composer-made choreography does make up roughly 80% of the piece (Moore n.d.). In *Point Ones*, the conductor becomes an instrument to question the tension between the virtual and real in our daily (musical) lives. The question posed in *AMID* is more subtle. Here, he/she fulfils a role closer akin to a chamber-musician (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) helping to articulate and highlight physical gestures as musical sound.

These three uses of the conductor and their piece-required performance practice are also direct evidence of post-instrumental practice. Khubeev and Schubert required the conductor to learn a new instrument, one electronic and the other acoustic. The performance practice for *AMID* is also quite restricting, requiring the conductor to match specific patterns and timings to the musicians and leaving little to no room for spontaneous artistic interpretation or even correcting gestures (Moore and Gielen 2021). If we understand the practice of conducting to have a basic and trained skill set (Schuller 1998), than each of these three composers and the curation thereof appears to choose which (available or created) skills are required for their pieces and program and then are reassembled, à la carte, to meet their artistic needs.

This tactical deployment of the conductor also demonstrates a key component of integrated concerts, in which multi-disciplinary elements are implemented into the curation of a concert. Besides the clear curation of the conductor's role, Nadar also integrated costuming in *Generation Kill*. Here the musicians must match their pre-recorded avatars in all possible detail, including clothing, instruments, and even haircuts. Lighting and scenography were also designed and integrated in the program for all four pieces on the program. The conducted works were integrated into one stage setting (a traditional U-form), however the lighting for each piece was designed to highlight the players, draw attention to specific instruments, and enhance the artistic vision of each composer. In Khubeev the spider-like glass plate instrument was lit from below, creating shadows of the plastic boxes and the conductor on the ceiling and walls of the venue. In Schubert, the musicians were back lit, turning them faceless players. And in *AMID,* each player was isolated from the rest with top spots to emphasize each sound and movement. And lastly, the curators' intention to integrate extra-musical elements into their presentation of the concert program is demonstrated by their decision to begin the program with the Khubeev, in which the audience is presented upon entry with a bound conductor.

This is my Instrument.

As a performer in Nadar Ensemble, I think perhaps the defining element of our performance practice is that each of the players claims or owns each new instrument presented. In *Dead Serious,* not only did Matthynssens, Goemaere, and Tack learn to expertly fly the drones, they learned to dance with them, acting out both a scripted scene as well as gaining enough proficiency with the instrument to improvise with an experienced belly dancer. For two of the examples cited from the concert program *ExTensions*, *Point Ones* and *Ghost of Dystopia*, I personally spent many months in the physical concert setting of both

Schubert's electronics and Khubeev's bindings. I, too, became proficient enough to improvise comfortably on both and can now (for reprisals) practice them outside of the setting, visualizing the feeling of each instrument. Each new approach cited here demands significant study and ownership on the part of the player involved. Though not specifically cited by Devenish (or Stene), ownership seems to be inherent to post-instrumental practice and 'technique transferral' which, to repeat, is a "development of performance practices specific to individual works, rather than individual instruments". To develop piece-specific performance practices, the musicians of Nadar have persisted in claiming these instruments as their own, drawing on previously created expertise to incorporate them into each musician's artistic practice.

Regarding integrated concerts, Nadar's artistic co-directors, Matthynssens' and Prins', have an approach towards concerts and the ensemble that is founded on caring for the audience. The two cases cited above suggest that this has created an intrinsic need as artistic directors of an ensemble to curate a broad array of aspects of the concert program, including the personnel of the ensemble, their roles, lighting, sound, and video design, décor, and most importantly creating segues that become part of the artistic presentation itself.

On a final note, the instrumentalization of roles and musicians' movement repertoire, skills, expertise, and abilities discussed in the two cases above has for the most part appeared to not only grant more artistic freedom and stability to the instrumentalizers (composers and artistic directors), but also to the musicians themselves. As composer Michael Beil noted in an interview, he "writes [pieces] for certain people. People [he] knows well" (Gielen and Moore 2023), making each player essential to any further reprisal of a show. In other words, the flexibility demanded of the musicians allowed the composers and artistic directors to explore new artistic horizons while also offering, by consistently working with the same team and simultaneously pushing them to expand their own (post) instrumental practices, socio-economic stability.

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THIS IS MY INSTRUMENT:
AN APPROACH TOWARDS PERFORMANCE PRACTICE FOR INTEGRATED
CONCERTS
(summary)

This article serves as an introduction to Nadar Ensemble, a Belgium-based new music ensemble known for their innovative approach to 'curated concerts'. Led by artistic co-directors Pieter Matthynssens and Stefan Prins, Nadar Ensemble actively explores the integration of video, scenography, and lighting as integral elements within their performances. The ensemble's core members have embraced a diverse range of instruments, including unconventional choices such as balloons, IKEA baskets, and dog clickers, showcasing their versatility in exploring unique sound production techniques. Moreover, the musicians have expanded their roles to include non-musical responsibilities, such as operating drones, managing smoke machines, and show-calling. In this article I will emphasize the ensemble's deliberate selection and development of various performance components, which have become inherent to their artistic identity. I adopt the term 'integrated concerts' to describe these meticulously curated events which encompass video, lighting, sound design, stage design, as well as the roles of its players, all thoughtfully interwoven to create a cohesive experience for the audience. Nadar Ensemble's commitment to incorporating multiple dimensions and instrumentalizing roles is studied as a means of further exploring the artistic directors' artistic vision. Furthermore, I will briefly delve into the ensemble's strategic instrumentalization of the conductor's role, emphasizing how it enhances the visual and tactical dimensions of their performances.