CONSTANTINOPLE

and the Aesthetics of Cultural Inclusion

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Background

The beginnings of *Constantinople*, a seventy-five minute long multimedia work for violin, cello, piano, mezzo-soprano, an Arabic vocalist (alto) and surround sound digital audio date back to 1998 when Roman Borys, the cellist of the Gryphon Trio, Canada's pre-eminent chamber group of that configuration, approached me with a request for a new composition for the trio. He had caught me at a time when I was convinced that what the world did not need was one more twenty-minute piece of chamber music. I was thrilled on one hand by the idea of writing a work for this young, very talented and dynamic group of artists, but my own artistic disposition at the time was in favour of exploring larger forms. I was in the midst of writing a 70-minute *Kyrie* at the time of our first contact. I was particularly interested in the concept that a singe work by a single composer could sustain itself as the content of an entire evening's presentation.

It turned out that the members of the Gryphon Trio were at a similar crossroads in their own musical development as an ensemble and that the wish to get our feet wet at something that we had never tried before was mutual. I was waiting for an opportunity to do something that involved visual media, particularly media that incorporated some of the more recent technological breakthroughs in staging and audiovisual projection, in conjunction with virtuosic performance on stage. The latter was of particular importance in my conception. Quite often in such presentations, the live element is dwarfed by the heavy technology. To keep the focus on stage, the energy level of the live performers, and by extension of the music they play, must be the energy level of a chamber music performance multiplied to the power of ten. Pop musicians who perform in large stages

with a lot of audiovisual technology are keenly aware of this problem and address it with over-the-top stage presence, but it takes a lot of adjusting for classical chamber music performers to get into that mindset. It so happened that shortly before our meeting the Gryphon Trio had performed the *Seven Romances* by Dmitri Shostakovich with mezzo-soprano Jean Stilwell using a light designer to create appropriate lighting for the presentation. The success of that experiment had whetted their appetite for more along the lines of lighting and/or otherwise visually complemented performances of chamber music. This was of course a first step in the right direction. What we had in mind for *Constantinople* was much more than a discreet light scheme for primarily a concert performance.

All of us were quite impressed by the work of director Robert Lepage and his team of talented artists. Roman had already located Jacques Collin, the media artist who was responsible for some of the visual magic one associates with Lepage's projects and had already approached Jacques with the idea of a collaborative project at roughly the same time he had approached me. Roman and I agreed that for a work of this length and magnitude it might be preferable to involve a singer in addition to the piano trio. Jean Stilwell, still fresh from her previous collaboration with the Gryphon Trio, was the natural first choice. A few weeks later I heard Maryem Tollar, an alto specializing in classical music of the Arab world who also had experience as a 'blues' vocalist in concert. I was very impressed by her voice and her musicality and suggested to Roman that we consider incorporating her into the project. Maryem's voice was incorporated into the actual electroacoustic component of *Constantinople* and became therefore an indispensable component of the work. Jean and Maryem were the singers in the concert premiere of *Constantinople* on October 17, 2000 produced by Music Toronto and the Gryphon Trio at the Jane Mallett Theater, St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts, Toronto. A few months later (August 2000) we were preparing a second performance of the work at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa, as part of the Ottawa Chamber Music Festival. Jean was unable to participate in that presentation due to existing commitments, so we auditioned a number of singers for her part. Patricia O' Callaghan, a versatile singer

equally comfortable in the classical and the cabaret worlds emerged from that process as the singer of choice and has remained with the collective to the time of this writing.

The Music

My music up to the late 1990's fell into two distinct categories, both of which were informed by my constant search for a new musical paradigm that was distinct from the paradigm of classical western music (I call the latter the "Renaissance Paradigm")[1]. The first category is informed by this new paradigm (I call it the "New Age Paradigm")[2] directly. With the second category of works I tried to make sense of the music of our past and, to a certain degree, our present from this new vantage point. This latter approach to composition is hermeneutical and engages the listeners in a 'guided tour', if you like, of our rich cultural and historical heritage. It is actually more than a tour. It constantly probes the listeners to evaluate these cultural experiences, which are assembled and pitted against one another, in a manner that it would have been virtually impossible from *within* any one of these musical cultures alone. In these 'revisionist' works, I have been trying to investigate the means by which these experiences can unite rather than divide our modern and severely fragmented world.

Constantinople is such a work. The aesthetic of *Constantinople* were brewing in my mind for quite some time. I wanted to write a piece that was partly autobiographical, but which could also be viewed as a metaphor for issues which are of concern to a large number of individuals; a piece which would make a statement about the larger issues that occupied most of us then and even more so today, but articulated in a language that could be understood by a considerably larger number of listeners than my audience up until that time, regardless of their musical literacy.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we all grow up believing in some kind of utopia. Childhood fairy tales (Walt Disney nowadays) and our early schooling add to our innate desire to believe that under all the discord and dissonance in the world there is agreement

[1] Cf. my essay Towards a New Musical Paradigm (http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~chatzis/paradigm.htm)
[2] Ibid.

somewhere, a *topos* where everything makes sense and works in harmony with everything else. As we grow older, we carry this utopia within us and, regardless of whether we are conscious of it or not, we constantly build bridges between it and reality. My own path as a composer has led me to examine ways in which seemingly incompatible or mutually exclusive pieces of the human puzzle, particularly those which can be causes for conflict, could be fitted together in a way that they contribute to a greater picture, and yet at no cost to their individual identity. A great deal of my work to date is a series of musical propositions for the solution of this particular problem. At different times I have called this approach "cultural counterpoint", "cultural convergence" or "cultural utopia", although I have now distanced myself from the latter term (etymologically, the term "utopia" implies that there is no such place in reality and I stubbornly refuse to believe this).

In my own rather nationalist schooling and upbringing in Greece (my formative years as an adolescent were spent under a junta military regime), the term "Constantinople" came to signify such a utopia: a city frozen in time with no connection to present day Istanbul, but probably with little connection to the historical Constantinople too, except for one thing: As the capital of eastern Christendom, Constantinople was the host to a number of cultures, languages and religious beliefs and struggled for several centuries to strike a consensus and a balance between east and west. Today, for the residents of the Balkan Peninsula, it is hard to separate historical fact from fiction. A besieged group consciousness generates utopias so that they function as a less painful substitute for an actual hurtful loss. The "New Jerusalem" utopia was probably born soon after Emperor Titus razed the actual city of Jerusalem to the ground. The most painful event in the collective memory of eastern Christendom was the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, exactly 500 years before I was born. Soon after that seminal event, the myths of the "New Constantinople" and of the last king who turned into a marble statue to come back to life again in the fullness of time came to life and lasted for many generations all the way to my own time, reinforced no doubt by countless ethnic cleansings which have become and continue to be a dark fact of life in Asia Minor, the Balkans and the rest of the world. As we grow as human beings we are forced to re-

examine the myths that have nurtured us in our childhood and at that moment of reckoning we choose to either discard them entirely or transform them into something deeper and far more universal. For most Christians today, the New Jerusalem utopia is not associated with any actual territorial claims. It is a profound metaphor for life after death filtered through a certain belief system. In my own development as an artist and as a human being, the Constantinople utopia has gradually transformed into a similar metaphor. It is a place where East and West converged and coexisted in a dynamic but fertile cohabitation for the better part of a millennium. It is the meeting place between Islam and Christianity, between the monophonic East and the polyphonic West, a testing ground for possible solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems.

I carry these dualities and convergences within me as part of my heritage. These conflicts run much deeper than the differences between two very similar cultures, such as the English and the French for example, and yet in Canada, my adopted country, these smaller differences threatened often to tear the country apart and constantly ask the question "what are the cultural constants that set Canada apart as a country?" In the midst of this collective existential crisis, Toronto, my home since 1982, was quickly becoming what first millennium Constantinople used to be: a testing ground of cultural convergence, confrontation and cross-reference. It was at that time (and still is, I believe) a unique city anywhere in the world today in that the majority of its residents were born elsewhere; a city where the ethnic minorities formed the majority; a city probably better situated than almost any other city in the world to succeed in developing the culture of the future global village. In this sense it became also the answer to the question "What is Canada". Canada is not a country in search of cultural constants and national myths, but rather a country that exists and thrives in spite of their absence. Soon after I arrived here I realized that my Constantinople utopia could be easily transformed into a metaphor for what Toronto could potentially become: a meeting place for the entire world, its ideas and beliefs.

A lot has changed in Toronto in the post 9/11 era. The pressures from above and from regressive sectors of the population to regard multiculturalism as a breeding ground for terrorism and political dissension, the politics of exclusion that in Ontario preceded 9/11

and the resulting increase of poverty and homelessness, the SARS epidemic and the rising of the Canadian dollar which severely affected tourism and the city's buoyancy and confidence—all of these contributed to the retarding the city's forward momentum. *Constantinople's* place in post 9/11 culture changed radically too, accepted more literally and less metaphorically by post-9/11 audiences. At the time of composing the work, however, the music of *Constantinople* was imbued by this view of Toronto as a present-day Constantinople/Istanbul. It is an ultra-eclectic mix of musical genres many of which have absolutely nothing to do with historical Byzantium and have everything to do with present day North American urbanism. Classical chamber and 'larger' music with electroacoustic sonic extensions and a variety of 'sound effects' on one hand, jazz, nineteen-sixties pop, blues, Middle Eastern classical and folk music on the other. The texts are an equally eclectic assortment of Sufi poems, Eastern Orthodox liturgical texts, excerpts from the Latin Requiem Mass, and fragments from a Byzantine epic poem. All of these heterogeneous elements fuse together in one single statement about the richness of human cultural and religious heritage, which by now should be bringing us closer to one another instead of splitting us apart. The message is simple; the means of conveying it are rather complex. It is easy for an undertaking of this kind to sound either fragmented, or to simply degrade into a musical travelogue of some kind with no cohesive centre. *Constantinople* happened at a time when 'world music' seemed to be the vogue in both the popular and the classical music worlds, and we were inundated with the kind of 'East meets West' collaborations that didn't seem to go further than the level of a cultural handshake or where one of the contributing viewpoints subjugated the other. To go beyond that, a clear and passionate understanding of competing viewpoints is required, as well as an understanding of how all these viewpoints fit into the larger global puzzle in a way that the contributing parts, but also the larger picture they all contribute to, can be seen for what they are. This line of questioning eventually leads to the very essence of what composition is.

My approach to this question, particularly in *Constantinople*, was rather eccentric: if the listeners feel that the music works in spite of the ingredients, then this compels them to re-evaluate their notions about what composition actually is, which more often than not is

either confused with narrower recipes of surface organization of similar (and therefore predictable) musical material, or with something so magical that is totally removed from the listener's field of vision. Many devoted listeners of classical music, even those who are somewhat musically literate, are mystified by the compositional process, but not by the music itself, which they have grown to know and love, *and* understand to a certain degree. By that I mean that even if a listener has enough theoretical knowledge to be aware of the underlying structural processes in operation during the aural experience of a classical work, he/she may still have no understanding of the compositional forces that forge this piece of music together. Brilliant theorists are not necessarily brilliant composers. Even to a theorist, certainly to an average concert listener, the essence of the compositional act remains a mystery.

Unlocking the compositional process for the listeners is tantamount to unlocking their creativity, or at the very least demystifying the compositional (creative) process. We are reaching a time in human evolution when most of us no longer wish to be passive observers to someone else's creative explorations. As listeners we are no longer in awe in the presence of creative genius, at least not the way pre-infoculture listeners have been for centuries. We want creative genius to be a utility serving us, not the other way around. In such a climate the works of art we are increasingly attracted to are either interactive (where the artist creates an environment in which we, the end users, are the navigators) or engages us in an active manner into the most fundamental aspects of the creative process. The former approach to this new public attitude towards creativity explains perhaps the popularity of interactive video games among the younger generation and some recent attempts at interactive composition, like Tod Machover's *Brain Opera*[3]. This is the simplest of the two approaches because the role of the creator and the end user are clearly defined: the creator sets the operating parameters and the end user can freely navigate within these operating parameters. The latter approach is a bit more complicated. While the listeners don't make actual decisions that affect the outcome of the composition, they are the center of gravity of the communication process by virtue of the fact that the composer 'optimizes' the composition for his/her target audience and that it is the

[3] http://brainop.media.mit.edu/indexold.html

composer's target audience towards which the compositions are directed. It is very difficult to make a qualifying distinction between works that center on the listener and those that center on the composer. In many cases two works with two radically different centers of gravity may sound deceptively similar. Yet invariably one works with listeners and the other may not.

Before I continue with this thought let me address a couple of assumptions. They are: (1) there is a listener out there that can be defined beforehand by the composer and (2) a concert audience is *one* sort of listeners. The first is not really an assumption. The difference between a listener-centered composition and a composer-centered one is that in the former, the composer does have in mind a specific listener who can decode in real time (during the performance) the information the composer has encoded into the music. The number of listeners that are capable of doing this type of decoding is the composer's target audience. The second assumption too is warranted. Listeners who are also subscribers to the local symphony concert season, for example, are to varying degrees aware of the specific, principally common practice repertory that most orchestras like to program, and also they are either consciously or unconsciously aware of the vocabulary and syntax of the common practice musical language Again in this case the difference between the listener-centered and the composer-centered work is in whether or not the composer is encoding musical information for a specific target audience to decode, in this case the average symphony orchestra concertgoer.[4]

Beyond the question of encoding and decoding, there is also the issue of empathy with regards to the listeners. In the case of a pop music concert, listeners are already 'primed' by the electronic media of music dissemination so that they are totally familiar with the music they are about to hear. Most listeners have sang these tunes so many times in advance that they in fact 'own' them by the time they enter the concert space. When they sing along with their favourite pop stars during the concert, they become active participants in the communication process, not just passive listeners. This empathy between the audience and the stage was also evident in classical music during the common practice era. Listeners understood the operating language enough so that they

[4] Cf. my essay The Orchestra as Metaphor (http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~chatzis/orchestra.htm)

actively engaged in a guessing game with the composer (with regards to harmonic progression, for example) while the composer either confirmed or betrayed audience expectations through the music being performed. Beyond this intellectual game that may or may not have been conscious on the part of the audience or the composer, for that matter, the listener *and* the composer navigated on compositional waters that were familiar to both and therefore the listener felt at home during the navigation process. This familiarity is breeding ground for empathy on the part of the listener. The occasional musical innovation in the score was evaluated against this background of familiarity and because of this it had a startling effect on the listener. In *Constantinople,* the foreground music actively cultivates this familiarity with the listener. The melodic and harmonic profile of the music constantly 'teases' the listener's memory, and the predominant structural means in the work is repetition and/or continuous variation. In *Kyrie*, for example (the second movement from *Constantinople*), the vocal line constantly repeats the main melodic idea while the instrumental lines are engaged in continuous variation of the accompanying music. This not only allows the listener to become familiar with the music with even a single hearing, but it also allows for the sections of the music where this is not happening to be offset as special moments in the work, thus enabling the listener to connect to the background structure of the work, which is articulated in terms of semantic density among other things.

Another factor contributing to this condition of empathy on the part of the listener is the rich semiotic connections that exist in the music. In *Kyrie*, each variation of the accompanying music is in a style that is geographically and chronologically distant from what precedes and follows it. This interplay of chronology and geography in the work is another perceptual game for the listener to engage in, but it is also central to the main (extra-musical) theme of *Constantinople*, which is cultural inclusion. From the beginning, *Constantinople* has been conceived as a listener-centered work. At a conscious level certain decisions have been made in advance that are geared towards making the work an immersive experience for the listener. These include:

1. The development of the theatrical aspect of the work that is not based on text, but on acting out the music itself in a way that it engages the listener viscerally rather than intellectually.

2. The creation of visuals and lighting tightly coordinated with the sound and the performers on stage that match in content and presentation the intensity of the music.

3. The use of quadraphonic sound system, with sound reaching the audience from the front and the back.

4. The use of musical styles, vocabulary and syntax that goes beyond the conventions of classical and/or contemporary-classical music.

5. The use of 'choreography' and stage direction, so that the performers become considerably more than the incorporeal musical interpreter one is accustomed to in classical chamber music, and begin to assume aspects of the "performer persona" as the latter has been visually and gesturally developed in the world of popular music.

One may ask what is the difference between this and music theater? Fundamentally one: music theater is text driven or at least has some linear story line at its core, while *Constantinople* is first and foremost musical composition and concert performance visually, theatrically and sonically expanded. Conceptually, it is closer to the MTV type music video or concert performance, but of course with a completely different orientation and goal. Furthermore, the work and its stage presentation will alternate rapidly between the small and intimate (sections of acoustic music for piano trio with minimal visual and acoustical amplification) to the full-blown (maximal outbursts of visual and acoustical information more akin to a rock concert than to chamber music) with everything in between.

The Movements

Constantinople is in eight movements. The movements are:

1. *Creeds* for mezzo-soprano, alto, and digital audio followed by the piano trio
2. *Kyrie* for mezzo-soprano, piano trio and digital audio towards the end of the movement
3. *Odd World* for piano trio
4. *Ah Kalleli* for alto and digital audio with an interlude for the piano trio
5. *Dance of the Dictators* for piano trio
6. *On Death and Dying* for mezzo-soprano, alto piano trio and digital audio with the recorded voice of Lambros Vassiliou on tape
7. *Old Photographs* for piano trio
8. *Alleluia* for mezzo-soprano, alto piano trio and digital audio with a cameo appearance by the English Chamber Choir.

Creeds, the opening movement, starts with "*Christos Anesti"*, the Byzantine Easter chant of the resurrection sung in Greek by the mezzo-soprano, while the Middle-Eastern singer (alto) intones and whispers similar texts from the Islamic faith. After this vocal introduction of religious dichotomy but also beauty (both the Christian chant and the Islamic vocal improvisation are especially beautiful), the cello enters with new material which occasionally sounds like variations of the *"Christos Anesti"* opening motif accompanied by predominately drone-like material in the digital audio most of which originated from a CD developed by Ernest Cholakis.[5] The combination of the occasionally "industrial" sounding drones and the amplified cello introduces an element of pop music into the mix the first of several in the piece. The solo cello section leads into a Turkish dance for the piano trio common among Balkan music cultures (in Turkey it is called *Chiftetel*) which places great technical demands on the violin with its semi-improvisatory (but strictly notated) material and to the piano trio as a whole with its constantly shifting metric modulations.

The main melody of *Kyrie* is borrowed from an earlier work by the same title, my 70-minute *Kyrie* (1997), but it is presented here in a completely different light. This latter

[5] Ernest Cholakis: Drone Archeology. Numerical Sound (http://www.numericalsound.com/)

incarnation of the melody undergoes a series of geographic and chronological displacements in the instrumental part while it maintains its medieval character throughout. These displacements emphasize the universality of the original melody and the renewed relevance of Medieval thought to 21st century thought in general. First there are three separate settings of a long string consisting of twelve statements of the words "Kyrie Eleison" ("Lord Have Mercy Upon Us"), a standard orthodox ritual practice. These vocal utterances are accompanied first by string harmonics and ambient piano chords, followed by piano alone and finally by the violin and the cello creating contrapuntal lines that emphasize the medieval character of the vocal melody. In the last of these repetitions/variations of the main melody, the digital audio introduces a rather sudden pop element into the mix made more dramatic by the low bass punctuated syllables on the speakers and the "blues" vocalizing of the mezzo-soprano. The latter is in a 7/8 meter running constantly against the 7/4 meter of the rest of the ensemble (in other words with off-the-beat downbeats every other measure). As in the following movement, odd meters are used to heighten the tension in the music. Since these odd-numbered structures repeat constantly, however, they are not "odd" for long as far as the listeners are concerned. Soon these meters establish in the listeners' mind a different kind of symmetry than the one most listeners are familiar with and entice them to enter this unusual musical world.

Odd World, the third movement and the first of two purely instrumental movements in the entire work, follows. *Odd World* takes its name from its rather eclectic musical content, which shows stylistic indebtness to Celtic fiddling to Stravinsky, Brahms and anything in between, but also from the fact that the work has an odd-numbered rhythmic and formal structure. The piece is in 5/8 and each phrase is 7 measures long. Larger sections of the movement also reflect odd-number relationships. After a while these odd meters and phrases come to be expected as a matter of course so the music sounds much more symmetrical and consistent than one might expect given its numerical makeup.

Ah Kalleli is an electroacoustic setting of an old Sufi song designed to highlight Maryem Tollar's haunting voice. The music of the original song was composed by Muhammad 'Uthman (Egypt 1855-1900), but the texts are considerably earlier; they were written by

Sana' il-Mulk (Egypt 1155-1211). The text is a poetic adoration of clouds and goes as follows: "*O clouds adorn the crowns of the hills with garlands/And make the bending stream a bracelet for them/O sky, in you and in the earth there are stars/Every time a star sets, many other stars rise*". Partly due to the atmosphere created by the text and partly due to the Maryem's peculiar voice and my desire to bring to the fore certain aspects of that voice which normally lay hidden, the bulk of this movement consists of pre-taped segments of her voice processed by a number of DSP software and then sequenced on a Steinberg VST sequencer. The aural effect is that of vocal "clouds" into which Maryem's voice dissolves and then emerges again. This very ambient treatment is interrupted in the middle by an instrumental interlude for the piano trio in which the main theme of *Ah Kalleli* is treated in a manner reminiscent of "cocktail" jazz music. Maryem joins the trio briefly before joining the digital audio again for the closing segment of the work which includes an extended vocal *cadenza*. *Ah Kalleli*, was originally the end of the first part of *Constantinople* which for the most part introduces musical elements and genres but does not attempt to synthesize them, at least not to the degree that is evident in the remainder of the work.

Dance of the Dictators is an afterthought. It was composed two years after the original concert performance of the rest of *Constantinople* took place in Toronto. In the original concert performance there was an intermission between *Ah Kalleli* and *On Death and Dying*. It was decided afterwards to have the work performed in its entirety without any break and, when it was performed in this manner in Ottawa a few months later, it became clear that something was needed to musically bridge these two movements. There was also the need to spread the piano trio movements within the work in a way that made more structural sense and to balance the unique composition style of *Old Photographs* (the 7th movement) with something similar elsewhere in the work. *Dance of the Dictators* addresses all these needs. The title is a sardonic reference to the fact that, during my adolescence in Greece under a military junta regime, cultural nationalism was preached but, in the higher echelons of power, tangos were danced. It was also influenced by the fact that during the time of its composition there was a strange and unholy "dance" for

public opinion taking place by the principals of the escalating Iraq conflict which eventually led up to the American invasion of that country.

In *On Death and Dying* the tone of the composition deepens both in terms of subject matter and musical treatment. This movement, one of the most powerful movements in the entire work marks the first time the two female voices—representing two different worlds, two cultural paradigms—sing together. Up until now the mezzo-soprano (the Christian west) and the alto (the Islamic east) have represented their separate worlds separately. *On Death and Dying* was composed during a trying period in my life, as my father was in the last weeks of fighting a loosing battle with cancer. This man and his heroic stance against life and death has always been for me the standard against which I measure myself as a human being and find myself lacking. He was a man of uncommon courage and, as I was contemplating his life and his influence on me, the very old poem of "*The Death of Dighenis*", a Byzantine frontier hero, came to my mind. In the poem *Dighenis* (which in Greek means "one of dual parentage or heritage", in his case Greek and Arab) the hero engages in a physical struggle with Death, and Death cheats in order to win while the Earth shudders at the thought of covering this powerful hero. This medieval popular view of death and the dread of death are in sharp contrast to the opening chant of the resurrection ("Christ has conquered Death through [His] death") but up until now has been resonating more with most of us than the wonderful metaphysical message of life after death proposed by the Easter chant. The *Dighenis* song, an original song composed in the style of old Cretan folk music, is introduced by Maryem as a *passacaglia* or a ground. She is gradually joined in this *miroloi* or funeral song by the mezzo-soprano, the cello, the violin and the piano—in that order. At the climax of this *passacaglia*-like treatment, the digital audio introduces sounds of human struggle and heavily processed synthesized fragments of the opening of the *Dies Irae* from Giuseppe Verdi's *Requiem*, and the music on stage quickly shifts to a rendering of the *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath) text featuring frantic writing for the instruments accompanied by sounds of modern warfare assaulting the audience from both the front and back speakers. After the *Dies Irae* setting is completed, the music returns to the *Dighenis* setting and introduces the first of the two 'virtual' performers in *Constantinople*, Greek singer

Lambros Vassiliou on tape. Lambros' haunting voice initiates a new *passacaglia*, which, like in *Kyrie*, undergoes stylistic transformation with each repetition. It starts as a Cretan folk song, followed by a setting reminiscent of Renaissance counterpoint, and finally in a full instrumental and vocal configuration it turns into nineteen-sixties pop music featuring an electric guitar-like solo for the violin.

Old Photographs provides an antidote to the heartrending intensity of the previous movement. It is the other purely instrumental movement in *Constantinople* and is totally based on western musical idioms. It starts with an introspective theme for solo piano slightly reminiscent of Robert Schumann, which is gradually joined in by the violin and the cello and transforms slowly—'morphs' is a better word—into a tango in the style of Astor Piazzola, a light-hearted moment in the work which also foreshadows the rather exuberant and celebratory *finale*. *Old Photographs* and the previous *Dance of the Dictators* "frame" *On Death and Dying* in a way that the latter is highlighted as the emotional climax of *Constantinople*.

Alleluia, the finale of *Constantinople* is a long setting of the word *Alleluia*. It starts by revisiting the multitude of themes and musical genres that have appeared in isolation in the work so far, often combining two themes from different movements in counterpoint with one another. The main theme of *Alleluia*, which first appears in the piano, has an interesting story attached to it. It was offered spontaneously by Maria, my daughter who was ten years old at the time, one day as we were driving to Ottawa. She was bored in the back of the car and started making up tunes to occupy herself during the ride. During the days preceding the trip I was wondering how to bring *Constantinople* to a conclusion. A work like this that had already included so much in it needed something different for its conclusion and nothing that I had tried up to that point was different enough to function in the manner that I expected the closing movement to function. When Maria started making up this "Alleluia" melody, it hit me that a child's song—that particular spontaneous song—was the fitting conclusion to this work. In *Alleluia* the melody appears in an unabashed manner every time the music raises a dilemma of some kind with regards to one's attitude towards the human condition. It provides a prompting from the heart each time the mind stumbles and stalls. And the mind stumbles a few times in

the course of this movement. When for example *"Hristos Voskrese"*, the Serbian Easter chant sung by the English Chamber Choir (the second 'virtual' performer in *Constantinople*), gradually turns first into a tragic climax and later into a still moment of nowhere to go, the *Alleluia* theme intercepts the musical indecision by affirming humanity in the midst of human cruelty. When the music of *Kyrie* returns as a prayer for forgiveness, the *Alleluia* theme takes over the quietness of the moment of prayer and leads it into the closing celebration of life and perseverance. The theme itself became not only the central element in the closing movement but also the refrain of a pop song, which originally followed the finale of *Constantinople* but was eventually withdrawn from the work to find its place in a subsequent cycle of songs for Maryem Tollar called *Mystical Visitations*.

The Theatrical Development of Constantinople

The story of the music of *Constantinople* is not complete without the chronicling of the theatrical development of the work. In many ways it is a "from rugs to riches" story with all the tenacity, defiance against adversity and perseverance that is usually associated with such stories. It is also the story of Roman Borys, the cellist of the Gryphon Trio, coming of age as a producer of ambitious works beyond the scope of classical chamber music, which was his domain until this particular project. Looking back at the blazing trail that the theatrical development of this work has left, I must confess that without Roman, many people who now love and connect with this music might have otherwise not been aware of its existence.

Even though multimedia was embedded into the original conception of this work, neither Roman, nor I had initially a profound understanding of the complexities involved in articulating a musical vision for other artistic practitioners and of the "translation" process that was necessary for ideas from one discipline to successfully and advantageously migrate to another. It was difficult therefore, to have a fail-proof understanding on how to proceed in attracting the appropriate collaborators for the process, if such understanding is ever possible, or establishing beforehand the right context for an interdisciplinary collaboration. I knew what would not work if I saw it, but

I was not very successful in communicating constructively what would work before someone attempted to follow a certain path of inquiry, or rather I was unable to convincingly argue away from what my instinct informed me frequently that it would be a wrong path of inquiry. Our collaboration was complicated from the outset by the fact that the music was already more or less completed and therefore not amendable to radical changes and, furthermore, by the fact that the music occupied a religious and spiritual centre, away from which I did not feel at liberty to artistically negotiate during the subsequent stages of the theatrical development.

Most interdisciplinary collaborations that I am aware of start with a group of artists who come together as a result of their interest in and respect for each-other's work and then start exploring either a commonly agreed upon "theme" or improvise relatively freely at the start until something perks everyone's interest and then that becomes the theme that is further explored. These spontaneously created "themes" hardly ever become aesthetically or ethically prohibitive to any of the cross-disciplinary participants; if they are, then they are either abandoned in search of new ones (a not so difficult proposition, since no significant amount of energy has been already invested in them) or the participants in question begin to adjust their aesthetic/ethical viewpoints accordingly in search of a group consensus.

Clearly, if this process is followed to its logical conclusion, the artistic result can never be deeper than the narrowest viewpoint held by one or more of the participants. In most cases, all you get in projects of this nature is mere coexistence of various independent artistic activities: some musicians playing a pre-existing piece, an action painter creating something on canvas in real time, dancers reacting to the music and the painting and a light design that somehow binds together all these independent tangents. There may even be a theme to all this activity, like an overall motion "from darkness to light", or something elemental like, "fire", "water", etc. From the outset of our project I had communicated to Roman my artistic opposition to collaborative projects in which the whole was less than the sum of the individual parts and he was of the same mind on this issue. The music of *Constantinople* was already such a complex and "loaded" world that it would only benefit from a theatrical treatment if the other art forms limited themselves

to fleshing out what was already there in the music and not impose yet more layers of independent meaning in the process.

This was easier said than done in the beginning. In addition to not having a script that other artists could latch on to, *Constantinople* was in many ways a work resentful of categorizations. It didn't fit into any clearly recognizable musical category (opera, concert piece, etc.) and that became painfully clear during our early efforts to raise funds for it, particularly from the Canada Council for the Arts. Perhaps because if this, quite a few of the invited artists were intrigued by the music enough to want to go with it where their imagination would take them, but they were not necessarily willing to take the ideas and deeper values that created the music along in their own artistic journey. Although a loosely defined spirituality was within everyone's radar screen, a deeply held regard for religion, as a unifying force that holds the world together, was not.

This became the first stumbling block in this collaborative effort and it confronted me with a powerful and painful dilemma. To me the music of *Constantinople*, all my music for that matter, is the product of my faith in the Divine; it has no other independent authorship or reason for being. To use the music in any other disagreeable context simply meant unethical appropriation on my part or someone else's. My instinct informed me that I had to stand on guard that the concept of the work and the music were protected at all times from artistic intrusions that would have sent the listeners/viewers in directions that were not in accord with the spiritual premise of the work. But what does it mean to "stand on guard" in this case? Prohibit other people from exploring their own sensibilities and artistic interests, particularly when their desire to go their own directions stemmed from their love for the music in the first place? How could my idea of cultural inclusion be served in the real world by forcefully excluding competing viewpoints from the work? How could one protect the work in the manner that I described and open it at the same time to competing viewpoints? Could *Constantinople* as a proposition for our world today survive if it was either artistically overprotected or, conversely, licensed to the point that it became conceptually unrecognizable?

All these questions came to a head during a couple of workshops of *Constantinople* at the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts. During the first (conceptual) workshop, initial soul searching into the questions of historical authenticity, Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, and western references to Byzantium (like William Butler Yeats' two poems on that subject) produced, if anything, a desire to steer away from historical particulars and specific story-lines and maintain a certain degree of abstraction that allowed for the music and the visuals to speak at some visceral level below consciousness. To facilitate this process, Banff-based playwright John Murrell created an abstract "script", drawn completely from the music which offered quite a few ideas for the staging. It was enormously helpful in the theatrical development of *Constantinople*. Both Murrell's script and the conclusions from the first conceptual workshop were in accord with my original desire for this work and with the metaphorical, historically non-specific character of the music. Steering away from historical particulars, however, did not mean ignoring them or contradicting them. Our original plans were for *Constantinople* to tour the Middle East and the members of the Gryphon Trio, Maryem Tollar and I had visited Cairo and Alexandria in the fall of 2003 to investigate the possibility of such a tour. Maryem and I in particular were very cautious that our gospel for peace did not callously, even if accidentally, stepped on anyone's toes in that very sensitive spiritually region of the world. This concern, however, was on a number of occasions on a collision course with other artists' desire for a clean slate to develop their own artistic vision of the piece.

Sometimes the tension became unbearable, particularly to me, for at a deep level it challenged my own belief that faith in God and in individual freedom are not contradictory concepts. There was one moment of crisis during our second Banff residency when it seemed that the artistic and spiritual differences between the participants were irreconcilable. Finding myself unable to function in any constructive manner during that crisis, I announced to everyone that I would formally withdraw from the project and surrender whatever control of it I had so that the rest of the participating artists could take the project to whatever direction they wished, disapproving as I was of these directions at the time. Upon returning to Toronto, I spent several days drafting a script of what visual and theatrical ideas I had when I was composing the music, sent it

off to Roman and then stayed away from the project for a while. It was an important time in the life of this work. A few months later, a further workshop in Quebec City which I did not attend, produced the first real seeds of the music theatre piece that *Constantinople* now is. In retrospect it is quite clear that my absence from this phase of the project was necessary for everyone else to find their place and space in it. Something inside me broke however, after that second Banff experience, and it has never quite healed. Psychologically and spiritually, it was one of the most trying moments of my career as a composer, one from which I have emerged much wiser. It was a moment when I temporarily lost faith in collaborative projects because their inherent interpersonal complexities prohibited the in-depth exploration that a solitary artist is capable of when left alone.[6] It was also the moment in the life of this project when its centre of gravity and artistic responsibility shifted from me to Roman Borys.

The development process of *Constantinople* inevitably transformed itself into a metaphor for the ideas it espoused. Hurtful as it was to me at the time, my voluntary abdication ultimately helped the development process turn around and revisit the original ideas behind the music. It retrospect it appears that I had to completely let go and relinquish all artistic control before this turning around was possible. Roman Borys, the tireless mediator and negotiator, was perhaps the single most important force in making this happen. In his own conversations with every artistic contributor he cemented a much needed consensus that started taking the project deeper into this space where the various art forms began to "speak" with one another and not simply coexist. Experts in Islam and Christianity were consulted; images and gestures were scrutinized for possible unwarranted implications and meanings that might have been missed by the contributing artists. By the time *Constantinople* premiered at the Banff Centre in the summer of 2004 as a piece of music theatre, the connection the work was making with its audiences was as profound as that which the music had made on its own four years earlier. We finally

[6] In retrospect, I think it might have not been the inherent nature of collaboration that was entirely to blame for this predicament. All this was happening at a time when my music was gaining visibility and "equity". The artists who loved it most also wanted to identify with it through some kind of ownership. For someone like me who is always on guard against such ownership (I remained unpublished for a long time because I was not willing to relinquish copyrights, for example), this felt like an infringement and a pushing aside of the composer.

had what we all wanted, and Roman Borys, as producer and contributing musician, was at the front and centre of it.

So far I spoke almost exclusively about the artistic/aesthetic aspects of the development. There is another part of course in any such project and that is raising the necessary funds and awareness to enable it to move forward. When the Gryphon Trio began this process of development, it was a classical chamber music group, quite entrepreneurial in its own management, promotion and outreach, but nowhere near the kind of organization that could support the budget and infrastructure that *Constantinople* requires and currently has. In the ensuing seven years, the Gryphon Trio and *Constantinople* have developed this quite remarkable infrastructure. The most remarkable thing to me is not the funds raised from government sources and/or even well-targeted private and corporate ones but the unlikely people who appeared out of nowhere in crucial parts of the project's development to contribute financially and with encouragement and who helped the development of the project overcome moments of crisis. Barbara Nickles', a CBC Radio 2 listener from Detroit, Michigan was one such person. Having lost her son, Michael, in a traffic accident a few months earlier, she heard the performers of *Constantinople* and me in a radio interview with Sheila Rogers as well as a few segments of the CBC broadcast recording of the work and inquired about the possibility of commissioning a new work from me in memory of her son. Due to my composing workload it was not possible to do so at the time, but I offered to dedicate the last movement of *Constantinople* (the one she heard on radio) to the memory of Michael. A few months later when we were doing our second workshop at Banff, Barbara visited the team there and became the first major private donor in the growing list of supporters of this work. And so it seems, every time the project reached a low point that limited our ability to move forward, something happened "out of the blue" that got the project back on its track and gave us all some more forward momentum.

Increasingly, these stories of people entering the *Constantinople* world are not my own to tell. The development of the tour and other phases of this project are happening within a production space in which I am not as active a participant. The mechanics of this larger machinery are as alien to me as they are inevitable, if such a project is to maintain its

forward momentum. At the time of writing this, there are major sponsors of *Constantinople* that I have not even met or been in touch with, even people to whom or relatives of whom movements of the work have been dedicated. It is now this time when the work assumes an independent existence from the person who brought it into being and begins to live a life of its own.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that *Constantinople* is, at least at the point of writing this, my best known and appreciated work to date. Its popularity from the outset has caught all of its original contributors by surprise—from the humble beginnings of raising just enough funds and support to be able to put a concert together in Toronto, to the subsequent theatrical development, the international tour, and the commercial release on CD and…(who knows what else the future holds, if anything). Both the music and the ideas behind it, and later the visuals and the theatrical components, have caught the imagination of listeners everywhere and there is "buzz" about this work far and wide that has initially spread, and still continues to spread, mainly through word of mouth.

To me, the interesting thing about this work is that its development has become a metaphor for the ideas it espouses; a blueprint for our own purpose upon this earth: to confront, to exchange, to learn, to connect and, ultimately, to love. I have written other works since *Constantinople* where this purpose has been musically explored further and deeper (like in my choral symphony *Sepulcher of Life* for example)[7] but *Constantinople* has become more things to more people than any of my other works to date. The reason may not entirely lie within the work itself but also in the history of its development: in the working out of the *karma* of the individual participants and the way this working out has functioned as a catalyst for artistic expression. The secret may lie hidden in the story that *accompanies* the work—that Mind is the builder and that people can do things when they put their minds to it and have faith in the outcome. As an individual artist and human being, I have learned a great deal from this process and I am sure there is still a great deal

[7] See the essay Music for God's Sake (http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~chatzis/MUSICFORGODSSAKE.pdf) which discusses this work

to learn, which I will carry with me in future projects, dreams and experiences. This "*u-topos*"[8] or un-place that *Constantinople* began as is becoming a real place for people whose paths cross with this work. It is increasingly seen as a "gospel for peace" in a world that has so little of it presently. May it continue to be so, God willing!

[8] The etymological root of the word "utopia"