<u>*Music Street*</u> - <u>**Experiences & Practices**</u>   **[17 Mar 2017]**

This file contains additional information for the performance of *Muziekstraat / Music Street*. The text score contains the essential information to perform this work. Feel free to ignore, re-use or get inspired by the content of this file with extra documentation...
(This text is written by Hans Roels.)

General clarifications

The main (text) score of *Music Street* was made after the first performance in Ghent (January 2017).

I am convinced that a performance of *Music Street* is impossible without a close collaboration with a neighbourhood committee or local organisation. The main *organisational* challenge is to find enough houses, buildings and other locations (in a small area) from which musicians can play.

Music Street is most effective in a narrow street with high houses because this architecture creates a natural reverb and amplification of the acoustic music, which is played at different locations along and around the route of the parade.

On a musical level *Music Street* has a linear structure, determined by the trajectory of the parade, and the walking tempo of the participants in the parade. It is a challenge to find a balance between this linear (musical) development and the individual wishes of participants to stop walking and listen to specific music fragments.

The text score speaks about a bass instrument in the parade. In the first performance I used a trombone. As a bass instrument that can play glissandi and has a wide dynamic range, this was a very good choice. It sounded different compared to most of the other instruments in the houses (there weren't many bass instruments and no other instrument was playing glissandi). When I was writing the text score I was doubting between writing "bass instrument that can sustain a tone" or "trombone" (and specifying the glissandi as transition sounds between the sections). In the end I choose the first. Suppose *Music Street* would take place in a neighbourhood with many brass instruments! In that case I guess the trombone wouldn't be a good choice….

1. Performance in Ghent (Zeemstraat and Biekorfstraat)

Date: 21 January 2017
Performers: Aya Suzuki (bass drum), Thomas Moore (trombone) and local performers
The following text was written in February and March 2017.

There were 20 houses from which musicians could play at this performance. This means about one in four houses participated because there were 81 houses along the trajectory. In total about 25 musicians (plus two in the parade) performed, a part of these musicians played from the house where they lived, another part (19 musicians) did not live along the trajectory and mainly came from the neighbouring streets. The ensembles of the musicians mainly consisted of solos and duos. There was one trio and a quintet of accordions. Illustration 3 shows the map of the parade and the abbreviation of the instruments in the houses. One instrument – the saxophone – played on the street because of a sudden (crying baby) problem in the guest house. There were five sections in the trajectory (the green letters on Illustration 3). At the end of the trajectory the parade walked along the same section of two streets, thus the route – with the repetition included – was A-B-C-D-E-B-C. In total the trajectory was about 300 meters long and the performance lasted about 25 minutes.

A stereo recording was made by Kristof Lauwers while he was walking in the parade. He was using a Soundfield microphone. Apart from removing some clipping sounds (from the bass drum!), no editing was done on this live recording. There are two video recordings: both focus on the musicians playing from the houses. These video recordings give a stationary and less mobile image of the parade.

The audio recording is available at
http://www.hansroels.be/muziekstraat21jan17_2017-01-25_1058.wav
The video recording by Jan Timmerman is at
http://www.hansroels.be/muziekstraat-2017-gent.mov
The second video appeared on the local television AVS (a TV program called 'Achter de Toren' of 23 January 2017, www.avs.be)

This is **a short chronological accoun**t of how *Music Street* was prepared and rehearsed. In October 2016 I decided to stage a performance of *Music Street* and it seemed wise to organize a moderate version because this was the first performance. I had chosen two possible neighbourhoods in Ghent with narrow streets and made a rough calculation about the minimum number of houses (one out of five I guessed), necessary for a successful performance but I should say – as a retrospective remark about the period between October 2016 and the actual performance in January 2017 – that the preparation process took more time than expected.

Illustration 1: Biekorfstraat

Illustration 2: Zeemstraat

At the end of October 2016 I contacted social workers to know if local committees existed in both neighbourhoods. Next I started talking to a select group of people, I got to know the local group 'de Biekorf' and they tried to bring people together. We agreed to couple *Music Street* to a New Year's drink after the parade. Finally, in the beginning of December I had a meeting together with this local group. In the following weeks we first posted flyers about *Music Street* in all the houses along the trajectory and next, rang the bell of all these houses to ask people to play music or host a local, guest musician in their house (during the parade). This process lasted several weeks: some people were not at home, did not know yet if they had to work on the date of *Music Street*, had to contact somebody else first, etc. At the end of December I also started to look for extra musicians in the neighbouring streets through direct contact, digital announcements and spreading (paper) flyers. On the fourth of January there was a new meeting with the local group and from the 10th of January on, I started confirming the participation of all the houses and musicians.
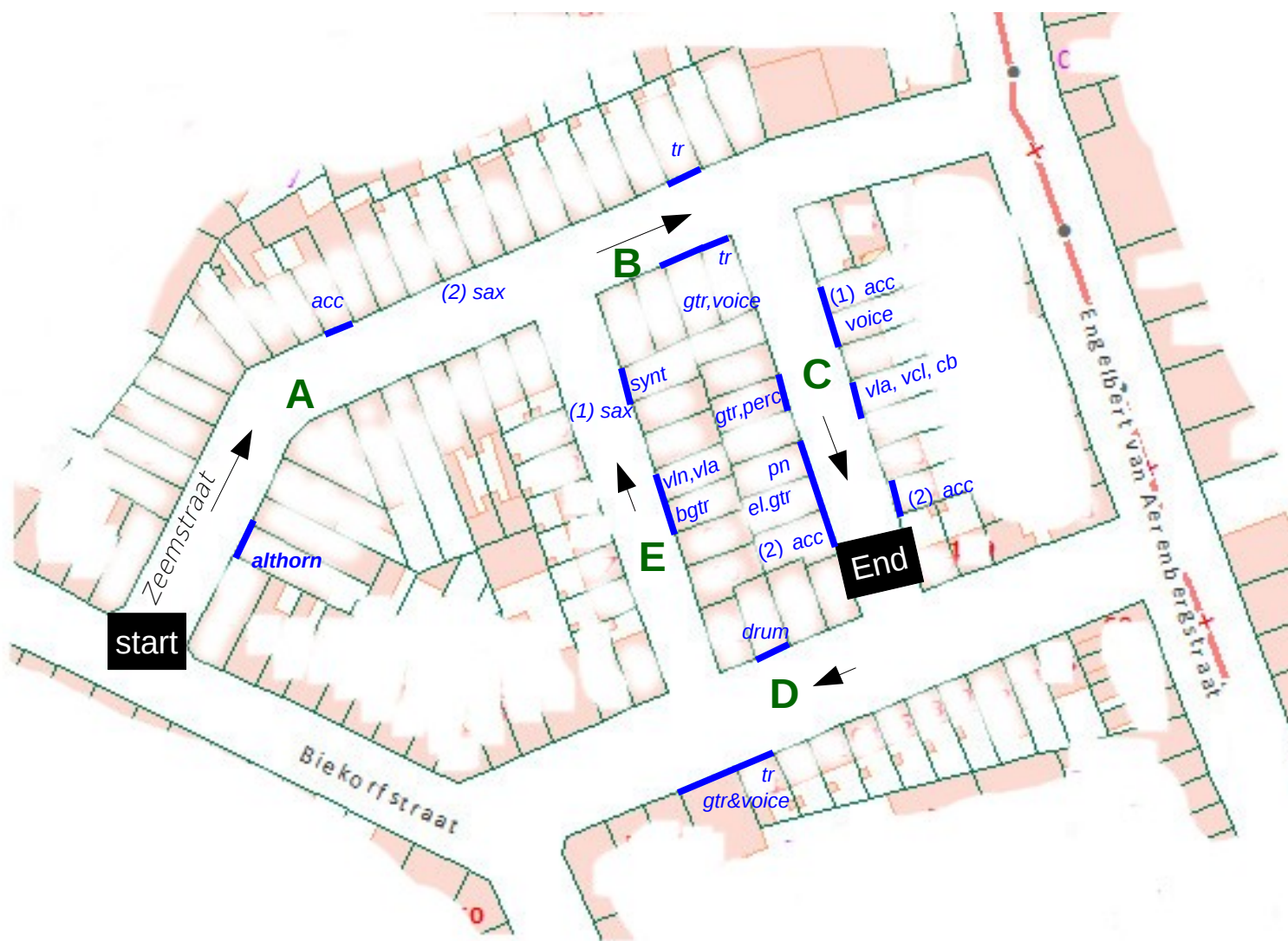
Illustration 3: map of the performance January 21, 2017 with musicians and houses

On 21 January, the day of the parade, there was one 'rehearsal' (walk-through) at 14.00, followed by a short meeting with all the musicians in one place. In the rehearsal the amateur musicians could get used to playing while other musicians were performing different music and in the meeting we could check if everybody understood where and when they had to play. At 15.00 the performance started. One week before this date I had organised individual rehearsals with the trombone and percussion (bass drum). These were the only two professional players from outside the neighbourhood. Together with the bass drum player I also rehearsed how to walk on the street and play local objects on the route. I had also given the (amateur) musicians in the houses instructions in the weeks before the parade.

The following illustrations 4 and 5 show the 'scores' for the bass drum and trombone player. These were a set of instructions, the musicians did not carry the 'score' at the performance. [There are some differences between the trombone score and Illustration 3 concerning the participating houses and musicians because the trombone score was made before the performance on January 21.]

Next follows an example of an instruction for the amateur musicians (in the house in section B with guitar and voice on Illustration 3) where the parade passed twice:

> **The first time** you start to play when the parade arrives at your house (thus when the bass drum arrives at your window). You play until the parade has disappeared after the corner of the street. This will last about one to two minutes I guess.

The second time the parade will come from around the corner. If you hear the parade coming –
from behind that corner – you start to play until the parade has passed and disappears after the
other corner of the street. This second passage will last longer than the first one: two minutes
or more I guess. Maybe you can sing a different song for this second passage...

Muziekstraat (21jan17 Hans Roels)

MAIN PATTERN

Bass Drum · Wood block · Bass Drum · Cymbal

VARIATIONS based on the 3 motives in the pattern

Short low note & Rest/Silence · *Fast high notes* · *Resonating slow notes & soft attack*

A · B · C

create simple variations and/or repeat A, B or C once or twice within one pattern

play on street objects (fit them into the motives A, B or C according to their sound)

EXAMPLE PATTERN with variation (and repetition) on B

At the beginning of new street (in the bend or corner): improvisation with fast rhythms in bar 1/4 (similar to pattern B
but not limited to high and short sounds).

End: accordeon quintet plays from two houses, play the main pattern (or a variation) together with the quintet in the same tempo.
If they have finished, continue playing the pattern and slow down gradually (trombone plays a slow downwards glissando).

Illustration 4: score for the percussion player (with bass drum) in the parade

You are playing at the end of the parade, the percussionist (bass drum) is at the head.

A. Play long sustained bass tones, mostly soft (*piano*), now and then a slow crescendo or diminuendo. Listen to the surrounding music from the participating houses, adapt your dynamics if necessary.

B. (Now and then play soft sustained tones one or two octaves higher, with slow glissandi up and/or down within a narrow range (less than a whole tone).)

C. As you come nearer to a crossroads or bend: a slow glissando upwards from the bass note (duration approx. 20 seconds).

D. In the bend (crossroads): a few short loud glissandi upwards, ending in the pitch range 2 or 3 octaves above the new bass note of the upcoming road; these short glissandi are followed by short rests.
(next contue with the long, soft sustained bass tones of the new road).

E. End: from two houses 5 accordeon players start playing, this is the cue for the other 'house' musicians to stop playing. When the 5 accordeons finish their piece, start playing a glissando downwards (ending in the bass note of that specific street). Simultaneously the bass drum makes a ritardando (of one rhythmical pattern).

Illustration 5: score for the trombone player in the parade

Evaluation and ideas for a next performance

After the performance I sent an email with questions to get feedback and with links to the recordings of *Music Street*. Eleven musicians or owners of houses answered this email. I also talked to five other people that were involved in the parade as musicians, recorders or audience. The following remarks are based on this feedback and my own impressions and thoughts.

In general most musicians and people walking in the parade really enjoyed the *Music Street* performance. There was a positive atmosphere with a lot of people taking part in the performance. The people in the parade enjoyed walking through a neighbourhood, hearing different music styles in different settings, and getting to know this neighbourhood. I was also glad to hear that people not only talked about individual performances (in the houses) but also experienced *Music Street* as an overall experience. A local collaborator – not a musician – spontaneously remarked that the whole performance was 'harmonious'. Several people also remarked that they enjoyed the social character of the performance. It created an opportunity to get to know and meet (new) local people.

The fact that the musicians could play in an informal setting (from inside a house), and not on a stage, proved to be important to find (amateur) musicians. In the first contacts people often raised the fact that they couldn't play very well. I could convince them by assuring that they were playing in a house and telling that the overall soundscape was one of everyday sounds (practising and starting musicians included).

In advance I didn't have a realistic estimation of the necessary preparation time and all the tasks involved, this was the main critique of this first performance of *Music Street*. For example it was only a few days before the performance that I exactly knew which houses and musicians were going to participate. Because the final map of the parade took so long to settle, the instructions for all musicians were given quite late (10 days to one week in advance). To avoid confusion, these instructions were not revised any more when houses or musicians still changed in the last 10 days. Some musicians and houses cancelled their participation in that period while new people popped up.

Ideally, there would be two to four weeks between the final performance and the preceding moment when the large majority of houses and musicians are fixed. This would give extra opportunity:

- to contact all houses and musicians again and reconfirm their participation. Contacting all musicians would also enable to explain their musical instructions if necessary and show them at the spot how to interpret the timing (before, during or after the parade) in the instructions.
- to organise meetings between the musicians and guest houses to get to know each other;
- to check and explore the location and loudness (as perceived on the street) of the instruments of some musicians. For example, the electric guitar sounded softer than expected because the guitarist was playing in his house through computer speakers, located away from the window. The electric guitar was playing in the last section C which was expected to form a (loud) climax.

It should also be said that several people enjoyed the informal and spontaneous character of the performance a lot, for example some musicians started to play on the streets (because the weather was nice or they just liked to do so). Finding a nice balance between structured organisation and informal spontaneity is a challenge for such a local event. The local committee really shaped and co-organised the event together with me. For example, their help in ringing door bells and finding guest houses was crucial. It was as much their event and feast, as it was a performance of my composition *Music Street*. The spontaneous character of the music parade was also an outcome of the informal working methods that this local group of the Biekorfstraat had.

All the musicians from the neighbourhood, except one, were found through direct contact. I asked people on the street if they knew any musicians living in that street. I contacted these musicians and at the same time received information about other local musicians. In this way I gradually found more and more musicians. Additionally I also asked local organisations, not necessarily music or culture organisations, if they knew musicians. I ended up having a (long) list of musicians and even then, there were still streets, very near to the parade trajectory, where I hadn't looked for musicians. I am quite sure it was possible to find more local musicians, if there had been more time in the weeks before the performance and if there had been more guest houses along the trajectory. This is why I believe that the main organisational challenge is to find enough guest houses. These guest houses are crucial for the trajectory – and thus the structure of the soundscape composition – of the parade. Additionally, these guest houses ensure that first, the whole project is anchored

in the local area and second, that local musicians and inhabitants meet each other.

It was a good idea to attach information to walls or windows of the guest houses. A sheet of paper with the name of the local musicians was not only a matter of politeness and information but it also helped the people in the parade to search and listen for (invisible) 'softer' instruments, which weren't easily visible.

The walking tempo of the parade was fast enough to shape the overall, musical structure and slow enough to give people the opportunity to stop and listen to specific musicians. The trick with the bass drum at the head and the trombone at the end of the parade worked well. On the one hand the walking tempo was slightly slower that I wanted (my personal taste) because people spontaneously stopped to listen but on the other hand, the people responded (not always immediately) to signals and gestures of the bass drum and trombone players to move on. But based on the experience of this first performance of *Music Street*, I believe that it would become difficult to make the parade walk in a specific direction and 'tempo' if the parade would be larger (more than 50 people). The parade would risk to fall apart with people walking in all directions (to hear the musicians in the houses). Therefore in future performances it might be a good idea to set a limitation to the number of people in the parade and repeat the parade at different starting hours if more people are expected.

Composing the live soundscape of *Music Street*

Two weeks before the actual performance I approximately knew which guest houses and musicians were participating and I designed a musical structure which started quiet and ended in a climax. The beginning of the parade (section A in Illustration 3) only had two musicians in houses, in section C there was a first climax with more musicians performing. Section E with less musicians and softer instruments (vln, vla and bass gtr) functioned as a rest point before the end climax in C. For this second passage at section C I had asked the accordion quintet to play from two houses across the street (indicated by *"(2) acc"* on Illustration 3). The trombone and bass drum were standing wider apart in this end climax to give the people in the parade the opportunity to walk from one house to another in section C during two minutes. There were less musicians than I had expected a few weeks before in (the second round of) section C on 21 January and the electric guitar sounded softer because he wasn't using a real guitar amp. Thus, the end climax didn't really sound loud...

I discovered new artistic possibilities while organizing and composing this parade but there wasn't enough time to implement these new ideas in the performance of January 2017. Thus, the following two remarks are ideas for new performances of *Music Street*.
1. Initially I really focussed on musicians playing in houses through windows or doors. Although I still believe that this is the main idea of *Music Street*, I could have looked for other locations along the trajectory of the parade, such as a parking lot, garage, yard, storage facilities, cars, roof deck, etc. for a small number of musicians. I had only looked for locations in the houses along the trajectory but these other locations are to be found in the houses and streets around the street of the parade. For example, louder instruments (brass, percussion, etc.) could still be audible if they were placed further away from the parade street.
2. In this performance in Ghent there were only two houses/musicians which sounded very soft and muted (piano in section C and bass guitar in E) but in a future performance it should be possible to organise/compose a whole section – for example one street – with very soft instruments. [The instrument itself may be soft or it may be muted by closing the doors and windows or locating it further away from the street.] There were also no cellars or basements in the houses in this performance but hearing music from a cellar seems a nice and fascinating idea for a next performance!

On the flyers and online announcements of the performance, I had made a call to bring small instruments and sound objects, and to ring them at the houses of friends and acquaintances along the trajectory. I hoped that this would result in a sonification of the relations in the neighbourhood. At the same time this call also made sense in a musical way. Unique sounds would be added to the performance by people bringing an instrument. They would not sound these small objects continuously and there would be enough silences to not overrule the other performed music. But this didn't work out as expected. There weren't many people bringing sound objects, perhaps because the most active people in the street were already playing guest or music instruments

at that moment. Moreover, through the collaborative creative process I realized that the locations of the musicians already (partially) disclosed the social relations in the neighbourhood. The trajectory shows how in certain sections of the parade people know more (or less) people in their street (or how the organizing local committee knew more people in some sections and less in other ones).

Three children did bring some small, soft (rattling) instruments and played together (or tried to) with the bass drum and the music that was performed in the houses. Because the location of the guest houses already (partially) revealed the social relations in the neighbourhood and this continuous layer of small instruments created a musical connection between the independent musical voices of the instruments in the parade and the houses, I added this element to the score. I like how this spontaneous and rhythmically unstable layer fits with the complexity of the moving and listening parade.

I wrote a blog post about the composition process of Music Street. The English version is here: http://location.hansroels.be/#post5
and the Dutch version: http://locatie.hansroels.be/#post6
It has some additional information but there is also some overlap with the current text and specifically this paragraph "Composing the live soundscape of Music Street".