

METHODS USED BY GORKA HERMOSA TO CHALLENGE FORM AND CONTENT IN
SELECTED SOLO ACCORDION WORKS

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Music 498B: Music Research II

INTRODUCTION:

This paper is an investigation of the use of form and content of solo accordion works by Basque composer Gorka Hermosa in the pieces *Gernika* (1994), *Fragilissimo* (2000), and *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* (2012). This survey is an analysis of the methods in which composition techniques are used to push the limits of contemporary accordion performance and composition. However, in studying this collection of works, there is an undeniable concomitance between identity, nationality, and extramusical expression captured in Hermosa's compositional style.

This paper will serve as an inquiry into the use of form and content in this selection and demonstrate how these elements challenge contemporary compositional practices. In examining the history and evolution of the accordion, I will be providing a comparative analysis with other modern accordion works that utilize and expand upon contemporary accordion literature. The investigation of the use of extended accordion techniques throughout these works in tandem with traditional and familiar sounds will illustrate how these pieces stray from any defined area of contemporary compositional style. Furthermore, this paper will examine the cross-sectional characteristics of these pieces that have defined these pieces within the Western accordion canon alongside other historical pieces. Characteristics of extended techniques adopted from 20th-century contemporary predecessors such as Sofia Gubaidulina and Vladislav Zolotaryov, alongside other contemporary composers, will provide an analysis of how these works are evolving with modern trends of composition. Furthermore, I will be examining how these characteristics work alongside the philosophical nature of these works. I will not only examine how these techniques are utilized to enhance messages reflecting on human brutality, but also an analysis of the semiotic nature of extended techniques throughout this literature. These works serve to challenge not only the limits of the instrument but also the performer and the listener.

CONVERSATION WITH THE COMPOSER

Born in 1976 in Urretxu, Gipuzkoa (Basque Country), Gorka Hermosa is a self-described “Classical Composer” who attended the “International Centre for Accordion Studies” where he studied under the infamous Russian accordionist, composer, and arranger, Friedrich Lips. Hermosa then went on to complete his studies in Avignon, France. Hermosa now teaches as a professor at the Conservatorio Jesús de Monasteri in Santander, Spain. His compositions display a strong background in the classical tradition while infusing international cultures, drawing from musical traditions of various countries and regions.¹ Over time, Hermosa’s compositions have become well known for experimental infusions and challenging extended techniques. Paired with deep influences from his culture and his own experiences, these pieces have been celebrated throughout the accordion community for their distinctive personality.

Hermosa’s Basque nationality is a significant influence on his compositional work. Not only is this an important part of his musical aesthetic, but his identity also extends to the philosophical framework from which he composes. *Gernika 26/4/1937*, composed in 1994 when Hermosa was 17 years old, commemorates the bombing of the Basque town of Guernica. Executed by Spain’s Nationalist Faction and its allies, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, the bombing of Guernica was one of the first aerial bombings to capture national attention due to the tactical involvement of civilian deaths². Hermosa admits the political tensions in the Basque region have impacted the genre of his compositions as he was born during a time of high conflict between Basque Independence fighters and Spanish Nationalists.³ In an interview with Hermosa, he states, “For me, being Spanish or Basque was something that you must decide when we were

¹ Gorka Hermosa, “Curriculum”.

² BBC News. “Guernica: The Day They Dropped the Bomb,” *BBC News*, April 26, 2007.

³ Annaleis Winten, *Op ‘t Roodt: Het accordeon, mijn passie*, 20.



(*Guernica*, Pablo Picasso, 1937)

very young because it was a very present problem. I'm simply Basque but legally, I'm Spanish."⁴

Prominently, throughout his solo works are references to the effects of human brutality and political ideology, which he relates to the construction of identity and human nature. This theme often presents itself in his approach to challenging conventions related to both form and content.

One influence of Hermosa's work is Pablo Picasso, particularly the work that shares the same title, *Guernica* (1937). "I discovered Picasso and I discovered the history of the War. This special Picasso painting made a big impact on me, and after that, I became a very big fan of Picasso... I went home again and I took my accordion and in only one afternoon I composed [*Gernika*] at 17 years old."⁵ This conflict that Hermosa experiences in the examination of human brutality and nationalism appears to be the genesis of various themes of dualistic thinking present in his works. As he expresses it, "This problem is very present in all my works because I know people from both sides, I understand them, and I respect them. You have very good people on both sides, very intelligent people on both sides, very sensitive people on both sides. And if you

⁴ Naomi Harris, *Video Interview with Gorka Hermosa*, January 15, 2025.

⁵ Ibid.,

are a little empathetic, of course, you understand both sides. This clash inside me is the birth of most of my compositions.”⁶

These ideological tensions present themselves in a distinctly dialectical nature when examining the aesthetic content of his works, not only in extramusical expression but also regarding the forms utilized in his works. In conversation about the piece *Fragillissimo* (2001), Hermosa expressed his frustrations with the classical world early in his career, particularly regarding the social conventions shaped in classical environments. This resulted in Hermosa finding refuge in the anti-establishment and disruptive qualities of the punk scene, such that when he was commissioned for another original work, Hermosa drew heavily from the anarchic nature of punk music: “I preferred the mood of the rock concerts, I consider it more sincere. You listen to the band or you don't, and if not, you speak with your friends or you dance. In classical culture, for respect to the player, you must be silent, even if you don't like it. I wanted to kick it in the face, this classical world, you say was punk at that time and, that is so punk.”⁷ In efforts to challenge this rigidity, Hermosa describes his use of audience engagement in this work to be symbolic of the breakdown of the alienation that exists between performer and audience in classical environments.

In gathering Hermosa's thoughts on his works, I found that much of his compositional process seemed to be oriented around the expression of various motifs present throughout his life and musical education. Through the process of gathering Hermosa's thoughts on his work, it appears that he draws from a variety of influences to craft a particular vision for his pieces. This foreshadows not only his philosophical perspectives on humanity and music but also a distinct

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid.,

style in which he creates a synthesis of both contemporary and traditional performance practices in these works.

MUSICAL ANALYSIS

As the accordion has developed over the 20th century, the diversity and flexibility in moving parts have allowed composers to expand beyond traditional tonal music to explore percussive, timbral, and pitch-bending elements along with composition techniques unique to the construction of the accordion. As this instrument has evolved, so has the notation used to communicate expressive extended techniques for composers to achieve their intended effects.⁸



(“Diagram about the origin of the accordion” Gorka Hermosa, 2017)

⁸ Eva Zöllner, *Composing for Accordion*.

The modern free-bass accordion is a relatively new instrument. The converter keyboard of the accordion was developed in 1929, with the current converter system being developed in 1959.⁹ Therefore, technical possibilities for this instrument have seen its evolution in tandem with not only the arrangement of Western Art music but also contemporary works in its most recent development.

Hermosa utilizes various extended techniques and contemporary performances. Many of these are utilized to express extramusical messages, however, many are evidently employed to demonstrate the physical limits of the instrument. To demonstrate how he uses these techniques for his intended purposes, this analysis will begin with examining *Fragilissimo* (2001), which provides some of the most clear examples in Hermosas' solo works of this compositional method. *Fragilissimo* utilizes various timbral and percussive passages in its introduction, along with pitch bending. Measures 1-11 demonstrate a rapid succession of unconventionally organized extended techniques. *Fragilissimo* crafts an unsettling atmosphere by illustrating the accordion's unique ability to be highly adaptable to rapid changes in tone, percussion, and articulation.

Modern accordion methods of artistic presentation with articulation, such as bellow shakes, are found in various forms throughout *Fragillissimo*. These bellow articulations in their expressive function appear throughout this piece in both percussive/mechanical and tonal functions. For example, in the introductory passage of this piece, the articulation of bellows serves less as a musical rendering of a tonal character, and more as an expression in itself as a sonoric expression of mechanical function. As this piece changes in character to become more metric and tonal, Hermosa experiments with different kinds of bellow shakes which contribute more to the enhancement of traditional rhythms.

⁹ Gorka Hermosa, *Organologic Evolution of the Accordion*.

cluster 12''

♩ = c. 92

lento accel...
vibrato

sfz

pppp

fff subito

sf ppp subito

ff

pp subito

sfz

air button

lento accel...
vibrato

ppp

mp cresc...

simile 3

cresc...

sfz

f

p

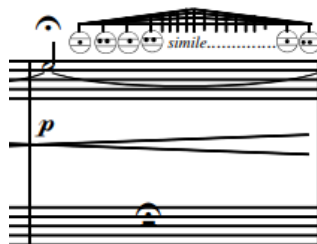
simile

(*Fragillísimo*, 2001, Gorka Hermosa, mm. 1-11)

This can be seen in passages of *Fragillísimo* where Hermosa adopts a syncopated tango rhythm into the piece. This is a stark contrast from the usage of articulation seen in measures 1-11 of this piece, as there are several methods, such as clustering, vibrato, air buttons, and bellowshakes are seen both enhancing each other and demonstrating the mechanical abilities of this instrument. A more traditional method of arrangement is used to highlight rhythmic and tonal changes, as seen with each beat being demarcated by individual bellow shakes.



From a timbral perspective, the use of reed registration in the arrangement of this piece becomes very intentional, enhancing both mechanical manipulation and the rendering of musical character. Similarly to the demonstration of the mechanical articulation of the bellows throughout the introductory passage of this piece, Hermosa uses a single note and indicates to the performer to improvise changes in reed registration. Changing the texture of this one held note forces the listener to experience different changes in timbral density through rearranging reed registration, a feature that is unique to the ability of this instrument to rapidly change timbre.



(*Fragillissimo*, Gorka Hermosa, 2000, mm. 11)

Fragillísimo incorporates an optional epilogue that reflects on the philosophical nature of barbaric acts in a vocal performance. From the final cluster-glissando, this piece transitions to this epilogue, beginning with low notes in the bass and an accelerating vibrato. Hermosa then makes a timbral change to a single reed register, which is more effective for reed/pitch bending. The rhythm of this monologue corresponds with various sonic events such as reed bending and improvised bellowshakes, both complementing and defining one another. This is then extended as a dialogue to performers in the audience, who contribute to the line of questioning, becoming extensions of the vocal performance and breaking the divide between audience and performer. The monologue is spoken traditionally in Spanish, translated as “I think, that I have found the solution of the great question. The question that has been the locomotive of the train of human thinking. Why? And why not? Because every concept and every reason depends on the point of view. There is only Fragillismo. All is Fragillismo” (Epilogo *Fragillismo* 2001, mm. 1-23). This passage serves as a framework for the line of questioning adopted within this work, constructing the human identity and its motivations by tying it to ideology.

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esp. he en-con-tra-do la res-pues-ta a la gran pre-gun-ta

eng. I have found the so-lu-tion of the great question

bend

simile

(Epilogo *Fragillismo* 2001, Gorka Hermosa, mm. 3-4)

Fragillissimo is a textbook example of how Hermosa intends to communicate his extra-musical ideas in notation. “The piece starts with a very high cluster, and the piece ends with a very low cluster, so it's like two points of view. In the text, this reflection – that all depends on the point of view – is about the Basque problem. It could be for any two different points of view, the classical world, or any two different opinions about one subject.” Parallels between timbral and percussive elements within this piece appear to demonstrate Hermosa’s vision in representing juxtaposed thoughts throughout his work. Furthermore, bridging various binary and seemingly incompatible elements through various performance techniques demonstrates Hermosa’s compositional style, defined by the integration of these elements.

However, the use of successive extended techniques has not always been a defining



(*Gernika 26/4/1937*, Gorka Hermosa, 1994, mm. 23-26)

presence in Hermosa’s work. One of Hermosa’s earliest works, *Gernika 26/4/1937* (1994), is absent of these more extreme features yet communicates as powerful a message. This piece gained notoriety for its provocative nature and subject matter, as written by a Basque national at such a young age. Despite being an adolescent expression of his subversive activist inclinations, there are features of this piece that foreshadow the compositional trends seen in his later works,

such as *Fragillísimo* or *Ka Mate*, that capture the same provocative characteristics seen in *Gernika* 26/4/1937.

Hermosa's expression of barbarism and brutality is a powerful motivator throughout all of his works. *Gernika* 26/4/1937 was the first of these works to forge this compositional style, capturing dimensions of war and ideological violence through various motifs. For example, Hermosa indicates in our interview that the repetitive diminished motions in both the right and left hands represent the dropping of bombs and planes throughout Guernica, with the melodic passage most clearly introduced in measures 23-26 (G-Ab-E-F) in the left hand depicting the motif of the scream from the woman holding her child in Picasso's *Guernica* according to Hermosa when describing his compositional process for this piece.¹⁰



(*Guernica*, Pablo Picasso, 1937)

¹⁰ Naomi Harris, *Video Interview with Gorka Hermosa*

This same motif of the scream is then framed with an arpeggiated diminished motion in the left hand and major seventh chords interspersed with tone clusters representing sudden bombings seen throughout the piece. These clusters are spread throughout this piece with quick striking motions. As in parts of *Fragillissimo*, Hermosa uses a very forward-driving metric motion here (and in other pieces) to direct the listener's ear in a climactic and ascending pattern. This passage from 78-86 provides an example of how Hermosa integrates the effects of the



clusters within the screaming motif, crafting a violent image for the listener.

Though a simple passage, it is also evident how the accordion is an instrument capable of orchestral arrangement with polyphonic capabilities that serve to maintain and layer motifs throughout this piece. An expansion of this style can be seen in his later work *Ka Mate* (2012), a piece written for New Zealand performer Grayson Masefield. This piece is defined notably by its use of the “Haka”, a ceremonial dance and war cry that originates from the Indigenous people of New Zealand known as the Maori People. *Ka Mate*, *Ka ora* also translates to “It is life, it is death”.¹¹ This piece requires an incorporation of vocal and performative elements, extending performance beyond the instrument as seen with *Fragillissimo*.

¹¹ "Māori haka," NewZealand.com.

The vocal elements of this piece ultimately become an extension of the instrument, with dynamics and rhythms corresponding and layering onto the existing polyphonic textures throughout this piece. The voice and body become natural extensions of the instrument itself, much like the epilogue in *Fragillissimo*. As a result, when the piece transitions to the performance of the Haka, this performance does not exist as a separate sonic event from the piece itself.

Esultante ed energico

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system includes a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment with choreography instructions. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment with further choreography instructions.

System 1:

Vocal line (Bass clef):
 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3
 kia ri te kia ri te kia ri te ka mou ri a ka ma te ka ma te kao ra kao ra

Piano accompaniment (Grand staff):
 Treble clef: *fff* (P.B.)
 Bass clef: (P.B.)
 Instructions: Keep off your accordion and put it on the floor, Stand up, Hit your thighs with the palms of your hands, Hit your chest with your palms, Raise your hands to the sky

System 2:

Vocal line (Bass clef):
 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3 > 3
 ka ma te ka ma te kao ra kao ra te nei te tan ga ta pu hu ru hu ru na na nei ti ki mai wha ka whi ti te

Piano accompaniment (Grand staff):
 Treble clef:
 Bass clef:
 Instructions: Hit your thighs with the palms of your hands, Hit your chest with your palms, Raise your hands to the sky, Take forward your right fist, Take forward your left fist, Put your right hand between your legs and make a vibrato with it, Put your right fist under your left elbow, Raise your right fist on your right side 90°

Hermosa does not intend to make these pieces solely avant-garde works; rather, adding these contemporary features and using this instrument to its full ability serves to enhance the character of these pieces. As you can see in the Energico passage of *Ka Mate, Ka Ora*, there are very clear contrapuntal features with traditional elements like a pulsing ostinato and tonal voice leading. Hermosa then adds even more density to an already polyphonic texture, adding another voice into this third line and creating various polyrhythms. Although there are clear elements of traditional Western art music that are visible in this piece, you can already see how dramatically

the complexity and form of these pieces change when elements such as ricochets, glissandi, and performative vocal elements are added to a piece like this. This piece is not only technically challenging but also physically challenging.

The image displays a musical score for an accordion piece, consisting of four systems of staves. The top system includes a vocal line with lyrics 'kia', 'mau', and 'hi' and a piano accompaniment featuring triplets and a 'ricochet' technique. The second system is marked 'Energico' and 'sf' (sforzando), with a piano accompaniment featuring a 'subito' (sudden) change in dynamics. The third system is marked 'mf' (mezzo-forte) and 'subito', with a piano accompaniment featuring a 'subito' change in dynamics. The fourth system is marked 'sf' (sforzando) and 'mf' (mezzo-forte), with a piano accompaniment featuring a 'subito' change in dynamics. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, glissandi, and dynamic markings.

THESE WORKS WITHIN ACCORDION PEDAGOGY

In an examination of this material and emerging canonization within greater accordion literature, it is evident that there is a particular nature in the works of Gorka Hermosa that carries contemporary traditions from experimental composers. However, it is clear that these works

maintain a level of conventionality that fosters familiarity with a listener more familiar with Western art music. Furthermore, there are various semiotic features of extended technique used throughout these pieces to describe sonic events, which vary within modern accordion literature and inform the reception of these pieces.

Contemporaries such as Sofia Gubaidulina and Vladislav Zolotaryov laid a foundation for the experimental repertoire that has come to exist in modern accordion composition. For example, Zolotaryov's incorporation of the bellow ricochet seen for the first time in accordion literature in *Sonata No.2* (1971) and the first use of the five-part ricochet seen in Gubaidulina's *Sonata "Et Exspecto"* (1985)¹² among other experimental methods paved the way for modern composition to explore different possibilities of the modern free-bass system. The use of bellowshakes, along with other methods of extended technique mentioned throughout this paper, were used not in the aims of arranging classical works but to enhance the character of the compositional style seen throughout this era through percussive manipulation as an extension of brutal-modernist language.

Traditional conservatories continue to lean toward keeping canonical collections as part of their pedagogy, training their students in Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Wagner, Liszt, and Chopin, etc. These conservatories perpetuate the idea that all that can be learned in music can be taught through the studies of these dominant Western classical composers.¹³ However, as modern European conservatories for higher-level accordion studies have changed over time, the demand for expansion in stylistic diversity has also increased. Throughout the 20th century, many contemporary compositions followed post-tonal practices reflected in modern Western European

¹² Friedrich Lips, "The art of Arranging Classical Music for Accordion"

¹³ Georg Schulz, "Pleading for a stylistic diversification in accordion's higher music education", in *Modern Accordion Perspectives #3: An International Overview of Accordion Pedagogy*, ed. Claudio Jacomucci, 58.

conservatory repertoire. Compositions that followed this trend served to challenge form through the abandonment of tonal practices and the expansion of extended techniques involving the manipulation of instrumental mechanics. This is evidenced by the integration of diverse stylistic literature that both Gubaidulina and Zolotaryov introduced into conservatory culture¹⁴. As a result of pushing toward incorporating many different styles into conservatory culture, many 21st-century contemporary compositions place their importance heavily on elements and serve as an antithesis to traditional and tonal practices. This spurred the creation of institutions dedicated solely to the practice of mastering contemporary music¹⁵.

However, the divide of pedagogical approaches between academies throughout Europe limits the expansion of repertoire. The accordion's polyphonic possibilities, along with its wide range of mechanics, demand an expansion of original repertoire as with any other instrument. Accordion scholars have pushed for this change to be integrated into modern institutions to reflect the accordion as a unique instrument. Limiting the pedagogy in traditional institutions to teach the accordion as a vehicle for the arrangement of classical keyboard music continues to be contested within these traditional institutions. Academics such as Claudio Jacomucci have compiled critical selections of modern accordion works to encourage conservatories to expand literature and promote a more modern perspective on accordion pedagogy.¹⁶ Ultimately, this strikes a balance in the necessity of promoting original contemporary compositions for the instrument while maintaining valuable aspects of baroque and classical keyboard music¹⁷.

¹⁴ Pascal Contet, "Choosing the Accordion in 2013," in *Modern Accordion Perspectives*, ed. Claudio Jacomucci, 15.

¹⁵ Vincent Lhermet, "European Cooperation," in *Modern Accordion Perspectives*, ed. Claudio Jacomucci, 10.

¹⁶ Georg Schulz, "Pleading for a stylistic diversification in accordion's higher music education", 59.

¹⁷ Miloš Milivojević, "Development of the Classical Accordion in the United Kingdom." in *Modern Accordion Perspectives*, ed. Claudio Jacomucci, 26.

With Gorka Hermosa listed as a prominent composer in these Jaccomucci's selections, Hermosa's works have been performed in distinguished conservatories for graduating examinations and throughout prestigious competitions.¹⁸ He admits that both Zolotaryov and Gubaidulina have been big influences on his work outside of his classical education and personal experiences. Hermosa's work is his fast-paced virtuosic blend of highly traditional melodies and rhythms and contemporary techniques. Reinstated many times throughout this paper, it is this key element that places these works in opposition to either highly experimental or conventional works. This collection of works draws clear influence from experimental predecessors; however, the incorporation of traditional rhythms and contrapuntal tonal construction demonstrates Hermosa's intention of using these methods to complement his works rather than engulf them. Rather than expressing extended technique in these pieces in an improvisational nature, Hermosa incorporates these carefully to express extramusical functions.

Throughout these pieces, Hermosa is fascinated with expressing his ideas about war and human brutality. The mature nature of these pieces in their intentions of expressing questions around the perception of experience and defining morality sets these pieces apart from those that solely intend to demonstrate the technical and physical characteristics of this instrument. Hermosa maintains two interactive and dialectical streams of expression throughout his works. The tonal and contrapuntal elements of these pieces with clear motific intentions are consistent throughout these works. It is not the purpose of these pieces to necessarily break from these conventions to expressly explore post-tonal possibilities. The experimental characteristics of these works, therefore, do not exist as the defining feature of these pieces. In these works, however, he demonstrates the performer and audience as an extension of the instrument itself. The physically and technically challenging aspects of these pieces are dependent on the

¹⁸ Hermosa, Gorka. "Curriculum".

performer's adaptability outside of conventional performance practices. He demonstrates this through the seamless integration of these elements, ultimately creating a body of work that forges a unique style of composition and performance.

In observation of the development of the instrument throughout the 20th and 21st centuries in both pedagogy within institutions and original compositions, it is clear to see the shifting demands in how this instrument is performed and experienced.

PERFORMANCE AND RECEPTION

The performance of these works has existed in several contexts, whether they are performed by the composer himself, students, or widely regarded performers. Western European accordion culture, however, is widely legitimized by the prestige of competitions, concert performances, and conservatories. When reflecting on the semiotic value of these works, there is a salient critical element of extended technique and extramusical messaging that exists in the performance of these works. Although the description of extended techniques and extramusical intention used throughout these works primarily describes Hermosa's intentions and compositional process, the reception of these pieces can also be analyzed largely through the venues and performances where these works exist alongside others.

A prominent performer who must not go unmentioned when speaking of the performance of these works is New Zealand accordionist Grayson Masefield. Born in Auckland, New Zealand, he took private studies with accordionist Frederic Deschamps and completed a Master's in Specialized Music Performance at Haute École de Musique in Lausanne, Switzerland, and a Master's of Studio Pedagogy from the University of Auckland.¹⁹ He is often invited to adjudicate international competitions (several of which he has previously won), such as Coupe Mondiale,

¹⁹ Grayson Masefield, "About," *Accordions Worldwide*.

Trophée Mondial De L'accordéon, and Primus Ikaalinen.²⁰ Masefield is not only known for his prowess as a classical performer but also for his performances of virtuoso works.

Hermosa has had an ongoing relationship with Masefield, as previously mentioned, writing the work *Ka Mate, Ka Ora*, dedicated to Masefield's New Zealand heritage. Being a close friend of Frederic Deschamps, Hermosa came into contact with Masefield as a young student, where he initially introduced *Fragillissimo* for him to play in various competitions. After this encounter, Masefield participated in competitions such as Coupe Mondiale, Premio Internazionale Fisarmonica, and many other competitions with this piece.²¹ The performance of this piece in “Classical” categories spurred mixed reception among adjudicators, questioning the legitimacy of this piece to be included in competitive repertoire due to its contemporary nature.²² As *Fragillissimo* was approved for selection in this performance category, Masefield went on to sweep these competitions and ultimately introduce this work into the canon. However, the contested features in *Fragillissimo* as a “classical” work in competitive performance can largely be seen in how these extended techniques are commonly used in “virtuoso” repertoire among these competitions.

For example, Vladimir Zubitsky’s solo work *Ommaggio ad Astor Piazzolla* (1993) has often been part of accordion competition repertoire. In *Ommaggio ad Astor Piazzolla*, Zubitsky shares many features of the extended technique used in Hermosa’s works; however, this piece is defined in “virtuoso” categories despite their extensive similarities in the use of extended technique. The introductory passage of *Ommaggio ad Astor Piazzolla* features successive uses of percussive techniques similar to those of *Fragillissimo*. Zubitsky directs the performer to snap and click the tongue along with striking the keyboard to produce a vibrato effect. These percussive

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Naomi Harris, *Video Interview with Gorka Hermosa*.

²² Ibid.,

Vladimir Zubitsky

Allegro ritmato

fingers+tongue (f) strike in keyboard

fingers+tongue (f) strike in keyboard

tongue (f) strike in keyboard

tongue (f) strike in keyboard

bellows shake mp

sim.

(*Ommagio ad Astor Piazzolla*, Vladimir Zubitsky, 1993)

techniques are then used to accompany jazz arrangements of chords commonly used in Astor Piazzolla's works with a glissando into each chord. *Ommagio ad Astor Piazzolla* then transitions

into the second section, where below-shakes are used to mark rhythmic changes, similarly to those in Hermosa's works. However, the use of these techniques is highly rhythmic, used to enhance syncopated tango rhythms throughout this work while adding an explicit element of performative virtuosity. Subsequently, *Omaggio ad Astor Piazzolla* tends to exist in "virtuoso" categories alongside works that share similar styles of jazz, tango, musette arrangements, such as works by Richard Galliano and Jerome Richard. These techniques are not individual sonic events like they tend to exist in Hermosa's works, but rather are utilized towards the totality of the tonal value of this work.



(*Gorka Hermosa Fragilissimo TVE*)

Fragilissimo is also performed in concert settings, where the performer has more liberty in the performance of the epilogue. This is observed in performances where audience members are covert members of the performance, standing up during the "Por que?" sequence, subverting

expectations of audience members and dissolving the traditional barriers that exist between the stage, performer, and the audience.

Several provocative elements of these works and various performance venues furthermore shift the context in which these works are received and valued. This extends to Hermosa's performances of his own works, particularly the activist values in works such as *Gernika 26/4/1937*. Gorka Hermosa is known as the first Spanish solo accordionist to perform for the Spanish National Radio and TV Orchestra.²³ This has been followed by several concert performances throughout Spain and the Basque Country, primarily to spread awareness around historical Basque independence struggles. For example, Hermosa's performance of *Gernika 26/4/1937* with "Et Incarnatus" string orchestra broadcast on August 6th, 2022, by Basque TV for the commemoration of the Battle of Amaiur in 1522.²⁴ This large outdoor performance begins with an audio track of air raid sirens with audible screams, accompanied by a large projector displaying war imagery and flashes of Picasso's *Guernica*. This performance, alongside invitations from Spanish political leaders to hold performances, reflects the value of these works in their reflection on the brutal elimination of national identity and political ideology. The various clusters and motifs that represent the air raid are effectively translated into the public consciousness, producing a reflective value in memorialization.

²³Omaha Chamber Music Society, "Gorka Hermosa, Arranger,"

²⁴Gorka Hermosa, *Gernika 26/4/1937*, YouTube video, 6:57, posted by Gorka Hermosa, April 26, 2023.



(Gernika 26/4/1937 Gorka Hermosa with "Et Incarnatus" string orchestra, ETB)

The performance of *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* is a compelling example of how cultural elements are woven into performance. Although this piece was commissioned for Grayson Masefield to celebrate his New Zealand heritage, it is still performed at various festivals and concerts by performers who do not share this same heritage. Various versions of this performance exist, particularly in the interpretation of the *Esultante ed energico* section, where the performer is directed to do the Maori Haka. As the Haka is traditionally a group dance and chant, iterations of *Ka Mate, Ka Ora* include performers joining the soloist on stage to engage in the *Esultante ed energico*. This piece often captures audiences with its unexpected transition, as the performer is reiterating “Ka Mate, Ka Ora” throughout the piece. The extension of the solo performance language into a choreographed piece is often juxtaposed with a selection of solo works with largely Western European influences. So, in the introduction of this performance, there is a stark contrast in both contemporary and indigenous elements that catch audiences off guard.

CONCLUSION

The selection of these pieces by Gorka Hermosa represents not only an evolution of his works, but an evolution of accordion literature in the modern day. From examining the trajectory of composition methods used through works over this 18-year period, there is a thread that weaves a historical, philosophical, and personal narrative that is expressed through a rich usage of contemporary styles. These pieces reflect a cutting-edge modern usage of extended technique with the evolution of the accordion that has shifted consciousness around the accordion as an instrument and compositional trends. Hermosa has not only provoked audiences through the unique character of these works, but also through developing an experience for the audience that forces a deep reflection on the human condition. I want to thank Gorka Hermosa and his kindness in taking the time to share his personal experiences and provide insight into these pieces. It was a special experience to be able to speak to a composer I have admired for so long and to be able to share a discussion about these amazing pieces. I also want to thank Dr. Joseph Salem for guiding me through this research and introducing me to a breadth of ideas and knowledge.

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