

# Dissertation Defense Presentation

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## Introduction

Respected members of the examination committee, dear colleagues, and friends, before starting the presentation of my work, I would like to acknowledge those without whom I would have never been able to complete the present work. First of all, my dissertation advisor Dr. Lanei Rodemeyer who has offered me her guidance in the last few years; then, Dr. Evans and Dr. Lampert who have helped me to refine the text by carefully examining each chapter; and along with them, Dr. Bertinetto and Dr. Carlson who have kindly agreed to be part of the present dissertation committee and sit with us today. Finally, I would like to thank all the musicians who have spent some of their time answering my questions.

I don't know if you are musicians, maybe some of you are, maybe some of you have only had some music classes, maybe you are not but you can still somehow grasp how it feels. I invite you to imagine how you would practice your instrument if you had one. Imagine that you have your instrument at your fingertips. A piano. A saxophone. A violin. Whatever you like. Imagine some music that you truly like and that you could play with that instrument. First, play it in your head. Do you hear it? How does it sound? What kind of energy would you give it? What kind of emotion would it carry for you? Now, if you can, imagine how you would play this music with your musical instrument. Do you have it under your fingers? What you are imagining is the object of my research: the "inner song."

I want to offer some background to explain how the present research is grounded in the "thing itself," in "experience." I have been playing the cello since my childhood. However, when I reached my late teens, I could feel the music and sing musically, but my interpretation with the cello was somehow flat and not very musical. In order to correct that, I had to rebuild my whole technique, relearning almost from scratch. After a while, it was a little better. However, it is only when I started to truly do what my cello teacher was teaching me, i.e., to listen "internally," "sing in my head," eventually out loud, and then play from that singing, that I started to really improve. Intrigued by that positive and tangible musical and technical evolution, I started to question that experience. How could "listening internally" improve the instrumental playing so much? What

was I listening to when I was “listening internally”? How did that imagined melody interact with my instrument practice? This moment of musical questioning coincided with two important discoveries: first, my discovery of phenomenology at Jean-François Courtine’s seminar on Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* at the Sorbonne, and second, my discovery of a little book written by the French cello pedagogue Xavier Gagnepain called *Du musicien général... au violoncelliste en particulier*. With the first one, I discovered a possible method of exploration of intimate experience; with the second one, a name for that mysterious imaginary singing that Gagnepain called “chant intérieur,” in English, “inner song.” The research I am presenting now is an attempt to philosophically answer the questions I had as a cellist.

As for now, it has three distinct and complementary parts: (1) the dissertation called “Inner Song: Phenomenological Description of a Musical Object of Phantasy”; (2) a 1000 page Appendix composed of the 72 interviews on this topic that I have done since 2010; and (3) a regularly updated website making both the interviews and the philosophical work available to a larger audience (<http://www.ellenmoysan.com/>).

Today, I will focus on the dissertation and demonstrate how the specific musical phantasy object that I call “inner song” is both the key to music practice and a unique occasion to renew the phenomenological understanding of inner consciousness.

## I. Literature review.

### a. *Husserl.*

I unfold my description of the inner song within a Husserlian framework. The main literature is therefore Husserl’s corpus. As the concept of phantasy evolves a lot through his work, I tend to use those of his middle/late period [*Phantasie*] and not those of his earlier period [*Einbildung*]. When it comes to time which is another main notion in my own description, I start using his understanding of time in the *Phenomenology of Consciousness of Inner Time* first, before moving into his later understanding in the *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*.

### b. *Non Husserlian Phenomenology.*

Even if I use other Husserlian interpreters, mostly French Husserlians but also my professors from Duquesne, Rudolf Bernet remains my main guide to read Husserl. Indeed, he is the Husserlian interpreter who most convinced me to develop my own description, for his clear conceptual distinctions, and moreover for his attempt to think a double consciousness, both perceiving and phantasizing, without falling into the trap of prioritizing either perception or phantasy. Concerning the methodology, even if I differ from her in my approach, I am very inspired Natalie Depraz's attempt to "practice" phenomenology. Jean-Louis Chrétien was also a great source of inspiration to investigate philosophical notions in both a rigorous and creative way, resorting to a more poetic language when necessary. Besides them, I look to other interpreters for specific notions, many of them French-speaking phenomenologists (Merleau-Ponty for the question of the Body; Henry to investigate the problem of auto-affection; Richir to rethink the notion of phantasy). Finally, I refer to Simon Høffding as the contemporary researcher whose work is closest to what I am doing: he is investigating music practice through interviews as I do, even if I interview in a different way, and research a different aspect of music practice.

*c. Other Philosophy.*

Besides phenomenology, I am heavily influenced by Gadamerian hermeneutics. I found myself practicing dialogue to find the truth even before I read him, so, when I read *Truth and Method* as well as his other writings, his work really spoke to me. I also think his vision of art as *Darstellung* could be interesting to develop the understanding of the inner song. Ingarden informs my own approach to the inner song as well, even if I do not choose an ontological approach. Finally, Maldiney's phenomenology of art, understanding art as openness, influences me, even if it is something still minor that I would need to develop further.

*d. Performance and sound studies.*

In addition to the philosophical resources, I rely heavily on performance and sound studies. First of all, I use the large data base that I created through interviews out of necessity because I have not found literature

specifically investigating the inner song. Then, I question other musicians less formally, watching documentaries and masterclasses as well. In addition to these, and in addition to learning through music itself, I read books that musicians mention in interviews, as diverse as Stanislavski or Hoppenot. Finally, I read music theory and aesthetics to address some specific questions, especially what is related to hearing.

## II. The method.

### *a. Philosophizing from my own experience.*

As my research originates in my cello practice, my primary method of investigation is first and foremost to go back to my own experience of the phenomenon when I practice music: I try to focus on how I experience the inner song when I practice the cello, to understand if the inner song sounds like my cello or not, if it is sung as I would sing out loud, if I hear the names of the notes or not, if it is a clear melody or not, if it is continuous or fragmented, how I use it to improve my performance, how it is informed by the performance, how it is clearly distinguishable from the performance, etc. This return “to the things themselves,” central for phenomenology, informs the whole description of the inner song: it enables me to engage in a dialogue on the phenomenon itself with other musicians, as well as to perform the phenomenological description. In the dissertation, it appears at the beginning of each paragraph in an italicized section describing my personal experience of playing the cello.

### *b. Philosophy through dialogue.*

Besides my own experience, the description of the phenomenon is informed by other musicians’ experiences of the inner song, collected through interviews. These interviews are available for all on my website. They appear in the dissertation, either in a separate boxed section at the beginning of each chapter, or in footnotes.

I did not start to do interviews because I thought about my investigation of the inner song as an interview based qualitative research. I started to *do interviews* to answer a first objection that I received at the beginning of my research on the inner song saying that the inner song was maybe not an objective phenomenon but solely

a subjective experience.<sup>1</sup> Asking other musicians if and how they experience the inner song was a way for me to confirm that the experience of the inner song is indeed an experience proper to music practice and not an experience proper to *my* personal training. I then continued with them because of the pleasure I derived from meeting musicians and the new ideas that emerged through these interviews; the present work is a collective achievement.

Only later did I include these interviews in my research, using them as a sort of free interpretation of Husserl's "eidetic variation," varying the perceptions of an object in order to grasp its essential features. When I presented my work, I received a second objection:<sup>2</sup> quoting from musicians and Husserl in the same text was wrongly putting the two references at the same level of discourse, giving to the non-philosophical discourse a philosophical value that it did not have originally, while depreciating the Husserlian discourse by using his philosophical concepts in an inaccurate or trivial way. To answer that objection, I used a format separating the interviews from the Husserlian resources in the present dissertation.

There is an additional reason why I am using interviews: studying *Gadamer's hermeneutics* led me to two philosophical convictions. First, that "dialogue is a source of truth in its own right,"<sup>3</sup> in other words, it is by having a dialogue about the inner song that the truth of the phenomenon comes out. Second, that:

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<sup>1</sup> I heard that first objection back in 2010: the second committee member for my master's dissertation on music interpretation under the supervision of the Pr. Dominique Pradelle argued that the "inner song" that I was describing was potentially solely something of my personal subjective experience. Following the defense, I asked about the inner song in an online cellist forum. Professor Michel Oriano, director of the French review "Le Violoncelle," read my question, invited me to publish a summary of my research in his journal, and suggested that I meet with other cellists in order to investigate the problem further. At the end of our meeting, he kindly put me in touch with Frédéric Borsarello who was one of his friends, as well as with Xavier Gagnepain from whom I had borrowed the notion of "inner song." These two encounters were a success: they answered some of my questions and provoked new ones. Two years after, as I was doing a second master's in Philosophy, I read Dominique Hoppenot's famous book *Le Violon Intérieur*. Seeing a relationship between inner instrument and inner song, I decided to reach out to her disciples in order to discuss the notion of inner song. I met Anne-Marie Morin and Claire Bernard. Here again, a success: more information on the inner song and new problems to solve. Halfway through my program, I decided to create a first elementary website to make these unique interviews available to a larger public, as well as use interviews systematically and create new ones in order to enrich my philosophical research.

<sup>2</sup> This was back in 2013 when I wrote my second master dissertation focusing on the notion of inner song under the supervision of the Pr. Lazlo Tengelyi.

<sup>3</sup> Gadamer, *The Gadamer Reader*, p. 50.

A dialogue has, in theory, no end, but new elements can on the contrary always arise, and something new can always come to our mind, or as we say in German, *es kann einem etwas einfallen*. Each new idea, each unpredictable intuition, is in this sense, an opening.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, I am convinced that the creativity of the investigation into the inner song depends on my capacity to keep discussing the matter through an ongoing dialogue with others.

More recently, these two convictions have only been reinforced by the study of interview-based phenomenological research (Natalie Depraz, or, when it comes to music practice, Simon Høffding). Indeed, these practices confirm that using interviews is perfectly legitimate in phenomenological research.

*c. Performing a description of the phenomenon within a Husserlian framework.*

I perform the description by crossing these first and third person experiences of the inner song with Husserlian descriptions. For the present dissertation, I first went through each interview thematically, I extracted topics and notions that appeared fundamental to me, either because they were often talked about (listening inward, posture, perception of the performance, imagination of how the performance should/could be, etc.), or had a deep phenomenological resonance (*epoché*, inner time consciousness, living Body, perception and phantasy, etc.), and I looked into the Husserlian corpus in order to find analyses close to the topics I needed to investigate. After that, I carefully commented on specific Husserlian texts so that I was sure to understand them well, and I had the description of the inner song coming out of these commentaries.

In my work I use Husserl's notions (for instance his notion of "phantasy") and adjust some of them when the phenomenon requires it (I adjust his notion of phantasy to the musical realm, and more specifically the musical experience of the performing musician, for instance). However, I also create new notions, carefully naming, and defining my concepts when necessary.

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<sup>4</sup> "Un dialogue n'a, en principe, aucune fin, mais de nouveaux éléments peuvent au contraire toujours surgir, et il peut toujours nous venir quelque chose de nouveau à l'esprit, ou, comme on dit encore en allemand, *es kann einem etwas einfallen*. Chaque idée nouvelle, chaque intuition subite est, en ce sens, une ouverture" (Gadamer and Poulain, "Interview de Hans-Georg Gadamer").

Although informed by a careful reading on qualitative research, phenomenological research, or the Husserlian use of examples, this method of researching and writing remains properly personal. It could be objected that it is not scientific because I don't use a stable protocol to identify the main topics of my description, make the interviews, or insert them into my work. My answer to this objection would be that Husserl introduces phenomenology as a science through the *epoché*, it is therefore the *epoché* which makes his discipline scientific. In addition, he himself uses examples without having established a stable protocol. Thus, my practice only goes back to the original Husserlian gesture.

### III. The dissertation.

#### a. *Definition of the inner song.*

The dissertation describes the *inner song* as: a *phenomenon* in the sense that it is given in the phenomenological consciousness; of *phantasy* in the sense that it is not a phenomenon of perception and also not an intuitive positing of past or future as true; *teleologically oriented toward a performance* in the sense that it is given as a part of the act of performing; *constituted through an intention* in the sense that chance plays a very little role in its constitution; and *sonorous but not necessarily linguistic* in the sense that it is composed of sounds but language might or might not be involved (I don't take into consideration vocal music or music with lyrics as it would add linguistic problems that requires a separate dissertation).

Within that phenomenological framework of sonorous phantasy objects, some musical forms of phantasy are excluded from my definition of the inner song. First, any kind of free playing with sounds in phantasy which would not be oriented toward a musical performance. Then, any sonorous object of phantasy which would not be bound by the reality of a doable technical realization. Finally, any type of sonorous phantasy object that is related to a performance giving a large space to casual sound associations or belonging purely to artificial intelligence computation. The inner song, as I am working with it here, is related to the performance and, as a consequence, it presupposes the *trained consciousness* of a practicing musician.

This stricter definition still covers a large variety of possible inner songs. In the dissertation, I focus on one specific type of inner song, thus making the description deeper and more exact, while opening the

possibility of further studies. First of all, within the category of inner songs that are phantasized with the intention, and the possibility of being played, I focus on a type of inner song which is *actually* played. This means that I focus on an inner song which comes to be (the notes are not lost, the phantasy is not forgotten, etc.). Within that category, I focus on a type of inner song which is *immediately played*. The musician is not phantasizing an inner song which will come to be later in the day or even beyond that, but one s/he is currently attempting to play. Within that category, I focus on the inner song in play *during a practice session* and not during a final recital in front of an audience. It means that the attention of the musician is distributed in order to work on the best possible realization of the inner song: the musician may stop playing, listen to the inner song, and go back to playing, but also have a straddling consciousness. In addition, as the musician is not playing in front of an audience, the level of stress is also significantly lower. Then, I specifically address the inner song of a musician practicing a specific melodic musical instrument. It presupposes the formation of a musician's Body as well as the acquisition of a technique. Thus, it excludes the specific cases of the conductor or the composer phantasizing a piece involving several instruments that they don't necessarily play themselves. Finally, I describe the inner song of a practicing musician in a solipsistic situation. It means that the inner song of the musician neither includes other accompanying parts, nor unfolds through an intersubjective process. It excludes the case of a musician rehearsing in the presence of a professor or with other musicians.

*b. The Dissertation.*

The dissertation has five chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. Each chapter starts with a couple of pages with specific excerpts of interviews in a boxed section. Within these chapters, each section starts with a couple of lines of italicized description of my own experience when I play the cello.

The introduction presents the notion, its definition, and the research methodology.

In the first chapter, mostly based on Husserl's *Ideas I*, I distinguish the natural and the phenomenological world and explain how, thanks to a theoretical and a practical *epoché*, the musician enters into the *musician's attitude* which gives a phenomenological access to the inner song (phantasy object representing the possible performance) and the actual song (object of perception of the actual performance). I describe the natural world

in which the musician is practicing his or her instrument, the phenomenological world in which the two phenomena are given, explaining how the natural attitude is the ground of the phenomenological attitude, how the musician switches from one attitude to the other to practice with the inner song, and how that *epoché* needs to be performed again and over again as the musician practices. It could be objected that music practice is not always conditioned by an *epoché*. It is true. I know that because it is the way I practiced for many years: I focused outward on what I was playing instead of converting my attention inward into the phenomenological attitude and practicing from that inner place. I argue that it is, however, the practice of the *epoché* opening to the inner song which allows musicality to flow through the gesture and through the musical instrument.

In the second chapter, mostly based on Husserl's *Logical Investigations, V; Ideas 1; Analysis Concerning Passive and Active Syntheses; Phantasy, Image-Consciousness and Memory; and Experience and Judgement*, I focus on two acts of the musician's ego: phantasizing the inner song and perceiving the actual song. I describe how the two correspondent phenomena can be given, either distinctly, or by a straddling consciousness. Of course, one could question the "sameness," or the "correspondence" between inner song and actual song: if it is the same melody, how is it "the same"? As it cannot be said that they are similar in the sense of an identity like  $A = A$ , it should be understood instead as an identity, like  $A = B$ , between two distinct elements. The identity between actual song and inner song is not given, it is the result of an ongoing process, unfolded as the musician practices. This chapter comments also on Husserl's notions of perception, imagination [*Einbildung*], and phantasy explaining how the inner song is a musical phantasy object. I explain the various modes of givenness of the inner song in consciousness in interpretation, improvisation, and composition. Finally, I elaborate on the phantasy-world in which the inner song is given, distinguishing it from the perceptual world.

In the third chapter, in which I refer also to Husserl's *Ideas 2*, I describe the various layers of the musician's ego. I start with the paradoxical status of the embodied ego after the *epoché*, before going through the various layers constituting this ego, analyzing more closely the mode of the embodiment of the ego of the musician playing music, hearing the performance and phantasizing the inner song. I then analyze the specific mode of consciousness's perceiving in the phantasy. Finally, I introduce the notion of "trained consciousness" as the specific type of consciousness of a practicing musician. In this chapter, I mention a conflict of representation between the activity of the ego perceiving and the ego phantasizing. Here, it could be objected that, when the

musician is absorbed in music, he or she perceives through the phantasy, and phantasizes through the perception, and it is therefore not very clear what is perceived and what is phantasized. I can acknowledge that. However, I argue that the capacity to clearly distinguish the two is beneficial to the practice because it makes a comparison, and therefore an improvement of the performance by the phantasy and the phantasy by the performance possible.

In the fourth chapter, based on the same Husserlian works, but also relying on Husserl's *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, I move from descriptions of the conditions of givenness of the phenomenon to descriptions of the phenomenon itself. I start raising the problem of the temporality of the inner song introducing the notion of *Ur-Phantasie* as a primary phantasy in the temporal unfolding of the inner song. I then distinguish the *quasi*-temporality of the phantasy from the temporality of the perceived, explaining how the two are distinct but intersect in the constitution process of the inner song. Afterward, I introduce the notion of *inner rhythm*, explaining how it is the ground of both the process of temporalization and spatialization of the inner song. Finally, I introduce the notion of the *musician's Body* as a specific type of *Phantasieleib*, distinguishing it from the *Wahrnehmungsleib* while explaining also how the one relates to the other. This chapter articulates temporality and spatiality thanks to the inner rhythm as a common ground from which both the temporality of the impressional consciousness and the *quasi*-temporality of the reproductive consciousness are given, and as a part of the constitution of the *Wahrnehmungsleib* which is also the ground for the constitution of the *Phantasieleib*. This chapter touches upon the largest problem of the perception/phantasy relationship, with an eventual primacy of the reproductive or impressional consciousness. Personally, I don't attribute a primacy to one over the other, I instead postulate a deeper layer common to the two: the inner rhythm. However, being given "against" this inner rhythm does not mean the same when it comes to the impressional or reproductive consciousness: there is a continuity in the first case that cannot be found in the second case in which there is a disconnection, or a toppling into phantasy. At this point, I don't know if I can explain how the toppling into phantasy happens.

The fifth chapter, in which I rely also on Husserl's work on the *Structure of Consciousness*, focuses on the constitution process of the inner song through the perception of its realization in performance, i.e., thanks to a co-implication of the impressional and the reproductive consciousness. I start with the description of the

awakening of the inner song through various types of associations. I then move to the description of the constitution of the musical instrument with the melody as well as its correspondent in the reproductive consciousness, which is the condition of possibility of the phantasy of an *embodied* inner song. I finish, explaining how the acquisition of a *technique* is part of the apprehension of the actual song, and therefore of the constitution of its correspondent in phantasy. I describe how these various parameters participate in the “sketching” of the performance through the inner song, and the inner song through the performance, thanks to associations, various types of orientations of attention, and a selective aesthetic judgement both on the performance and its representation in phantasy. As the musician practices, he or she can engage in a dialogical process with him- or herself, asking questions like: do I like that; is that the way I want to hear it; does what I play correspond to what the music is asking? I don’t address that question because this dialogue is a possibility but not a necessity of the process of constitution. Indeed, the refining of the inner song and the performance can very much happen through an unconscious process of formations of associations.

The conclusion elaborates on some remaining problems, indicating how to enlarge the present description with further research.

*c. The Appendix and the Website.*

In addition to the dissertation, I constituted an **Appendix** composed of all the interviews sorted out chronologically starting from 2010 and running until now. In the Appendix the reader can see how the interviewing had some more intense periods, how it varies according to the geographical situation (with a specific focus on the PSO during the Pittsburgh years, for instance), the linguistic context (more interviews in English in the recent years) and how there is an evolution of the questioning, going from the practical questions of the beginning to the more phenomenological ones of the recent years.

Concerning the **Website**, it is in French<sup>5</sup> and made of two parts: (1) “Musique” where all the interviews are sorted out by category (strings; winds; composition; folk music; etc.); (2) “Philosophie” where the philosophical research is introduced (an excerpt of my dissertation, the appendix, articles, the bibliography; my

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<sup>5</sup> I intend to translate it into other languages, at least English, in coming years.

curriculum vitae; etc.). As opposed to the Appendix, the Website presents the interviews by categories (string instruments, wind, folk music, philosophy, etc.). This allows the reader to observe similarities between the experiences of the inner song in instruments of the same families, but also to discover how the inner song has some specificities when it comes to folk music based on oral traditions, or composition, for instance. As interviews are regularly shared through a correspondent Facebook page and Twitter account, those who are interested in the musical part but not necessarily in the philosophical work can continue to learn about the inner song selecting what interests them.

### Conclusion

To conclude, I argue in my dissertation that the inner song is central for music making because a musician cannot play musically without listening to and working with this embodied phantasy object that I call inner song. This inner song is not an already made mental representation, it is a phenomenon that grows, is enriched, and further developed thanks to the perception of its realization in performance. However, it seems to remain sometimes ignored, other times, underdeveloped. Of course, I would need to investigate that question further. However, my intuition is that, as I learned to listen to my inner song, others could learn to listen to their inner song with appropriate teaching. Thus, there is a pedagogy to develop from this research on the inner song. Musicians who don't suspect its possibility, or somehow practice without it, could learn about it and learn how to practice with it. This would certainly enhance their music practice as it has enhanced mine.

Thank you for your attention, I am looking forward to hearing your critiques!