

**DANCEMAKING IN UNEXPECTED PLACES: MOLDOVAN MUSIC  
AND VERTICAL DANCE IN WYOMING**

DANSÂND ÎN SPAȚII NEOBIȘNUTE: MUZICĂ MOLDOVENEASCĂ  
ȘI DANS VERTICAL ÎN WYOMING

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*Since 1998, vertical dance at the University of Wyoming has been an active catalyst for interactions among choreographers and dancers, composers and musical performers, audiences, rock climbers, and others. Outdoor performances at an impressive geologic formation have consistently drawn large audiences, and allowed choreographer and performer Margaret Wilson to consider the ways that vertical dancers come to embody widely varying environments through heightened sensitivity, improvisation, and other processes of “tuning in” (Hunter 2015: 181) to the world around them.*

*In 2013, as I stood on a high ledge on the massive Vedauwoo rock formation in Wyoming, I found that the sound of Moldovan nai naturally became a part of our outdoor environment as it echoed off of the rocks and projected out into the forest. Our pianist had begun to embody an effective sense of how to collaborate with dancers and their movement having accompanied their classes for many years. Nai easily became an integral part of her musical compositions.*

*Musicians who are more closely focused on devices such as instruments, sheet music, and microphones have been less able to improvise and interact spontaneously with the sensory world of vertical dance. Listening closely to create their best sound makes them less sensitive to distant aural, visual, and sensory phenomena that would allow them to embody their environment along with other performers and their audiences. In seeking to better adapt to*

*variable vertical dance settings, I found that Moldovan nai is especially well-suited for collaborating with other instruments and dancers in vertical dance environments. Moldovan melodies and rhythms have also become an important element of both outdoor and indoor vertical dance performances in Wyoming.*

*The broader movement, of playing panflute is more like dancing than the smaller movements required for playing transverse flutes. In addition, the social essence of learning and performing by ear, improvising, and telling stories, intrinsic in Moldovan folklore music encourages performers to interact with choreographers, dancers, other musicians, and their settings. "Lifeworlds" of ideas and emotions come into being around them throughout their many hours of working together, and vertical dance performances take on an intersubjective and relational character as environments are being formed and constantly changed through the actions and interactions of individual participants. Moldovan folklore music and the nai have become an integral part of that environment.*

**Keywords:** vertical dance, nai, musical improvisation, singing „by ear”

*Începând cu anul 1998, dansul vertical la Universitatea din Wyoming a devenit un frumos prilej de colaborare activă dintre coregrafi și dansatori, compozitori și interpreți, cățărători pe stânci și public. Interpretarea în aer liber, într-o ambianță geologică impresionantă se bucură de audiență și i-a permis coregrafei și interpretei Margaret Wilson să considere că dansul vertical va constitui, datorită sensibilității deosebite, improvizației și altor procedee de „dezvoltare” a lumii înconjurătoare, un adevărat ornament într-un larg și divers mediu natural (statul Wyoming fiind vestit prin peisajele sale stâncoase și montane monumentale).*

*În 2013, aflându-mă în masivul stâncos Vedauwo în Wyoming, am înțeles că sunetul natural al naiului poate deveni o parte componentă a acestui spațiu, ca un ecou al stâncilor ce se reflectă în pădure. Pianistul ansamblului nostru, fiind acompaniator în clasa de dans pe parcursul mai multor ani, a găsit modalități de colaborare cu dansatorii și mișcarea lor, iar naiul a devenit parte integrală a unor astfel de compoziții muzicale. Prin această muzică ce sună în locații atât de neașteptate, dansatorii și muzicienii nu doar „îmbogățesc” spațiul înconjurător, ci și își adaptează arta lor interpretativă la condițiile acestui peisaj magnific, incluzându-se astfel în timpul real, creând, prin această experiență, lucrări de un artistism deosebit.*

*Este interesant, că fiind muzicieni educați ca instrumentiști-notiști, deprinși cu microfonul, ce nu sunt obișnuiți să improvizeze și să interacționeze în mod spontan cu lumea senzorială a dansului vertical, ei trebuie să asculte cu atenție, în procesul de creare a sunetului, să fie mai sensibili. Melodiile și ritmurile moldovenești au devenit un important element al dansului vertical interpretat atât în încăperi (săli, holuri ș.a.) cât și în aer liber de către dansatorii din Wyoming.*

*Cântarea la nai, — spre deosebire de cea la flautul transversal, — datorită mișcărilor mai largi, creează asociații cu dansul. De asemenea, esența socială a studiului și interpretării „după ureche”, la auz, improvizarea, narațiunea muzicală, care sunt intrinseci folclorului moldovenesc, au încurajat interpreții să interacționeze cu coregrafii, dansatorii, cu alți muzicieni. „Lumea” ideilor și a emoțiilor ia ființă pe parcursul multor ore de muncă petrecute împreună, iar dansul vertical capătă un caracter intersubiectiv și relațional, deoarece spațiile sunt modelate prin acțiunile și interacțiunile fiecărui participant. Folclorul moldovenesc și naiul au devenit parte integrantă a acestui peisaj. (Traducere adaptată Diana Bunea).*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** dans vertical, nai, improvizație muzicală, cântare „după auz”

Since 1998, vertical dance at the University of Wyoming has been an active catalyst for interactions among choreographers and dancers, composers and musical performers, audiences, rock climbers, and others. Outdoor performances at an impressive geologic formation have consistently drawn large audiences, and allowed choreographer and performer Margaret Wilson to consider the ways that vertical dancers come to embody widely varying environments through heightened sensitivity, improvisation, and other processes of “tuning in” (Hunter 2015: 181) to the world around them.

Musicians who are more closely focused on devices such as instruments, sheet music, and microphones have been less able to improvise and interact spontaneously with the sensory world of vertical dance. Listening closely to create their best sound makes them less sensitive to distant aural, visual, and sensory phenomena that would allow them to embody their environment along with other performers and their audiences. In seeking to better adapt to variable vertical dance settings, I found that Moldovan nai is especially well-suited for collaborating with other instruments and dancers in vertical dance environments. Moldovan melodies and rhythms have

also become an important element of both outdoor and indoor vertical dance performances in Wyoming.

Dance happens in all places and in all contexts ranging from community celebration in public venues to improvisation and detailed choreography in performance. Most forms of dance evolve in a gravity-familiar environment — with the dancer's feet on the ground — allowing for movement in all directions, rhythmic accuracy, and synchronization with the music. Whether in large proscenium theatres or smaller, site specific venues, the space and the music are interdependent partners in the development of the choreography, creating an environment in which the idea and intention of the dance develops. Dancemaking is thus an emergent form of movement and artistic communication intrinsic to the dancer, the space, and the context. Dancemaking implies embodying the world through movement, in an ongoing negotiation of who, what, which, when, where, and how within time and space [1, p. 58]. This embodiment is a quality of being which develops through the incorporation and expression of something tangible or ephemeral in a movement form.

The term 'vertical dance' refers to a form in which dancers are suspended in the air from a point overhead, by way of a harness attached to the hips. The vertical dancer can explore 360 degrees of movement while the rope and harness extend her lines creating an illusion of weightlessness and flight. Often vertical dancers are interacting with a wall, which becomes their vertical 'floor' or hang in free space only interacting with the rope or another body. The vertical environment challenges even the most skilled dancer at the start, as their habitually embodied movement patterns are employed in an unfamiliar orientation. The dancer must adjust to a new relationship to gravity in their body – but it is through the medium of familiar movement that this is most effectively accomplished. Once the dancer has embodied this new relation to gravity, she can engage in dancemaking in this environment as well. The movement is the medium for embodiment.

Performers in the vertical dance presentations — musicians and dancers alike — train and rehearse indoors to learn the music and movement. However, the location — either inside or outside, plays a significant role in how the performance comes together. Specifically in an outdoor location, irregular and un-even surfaces, changes in temperature and light, and the effects of sun and wind impact intonation, timbre, sound, rhythm, balance, choreographic timing, and movement quality. The environment shapes the performance in challenging and unpredictable ways.

In vertical dance performances, the music and dance evolve together within the environment. Through performing in this unexpected setting, the dancers and musicians embody the environment and adapt their performance to the present conditions. In this way, the dancers and musicians engage with the environment in real time, creating a deeper level of engagement through shared experience.

In 2013, as I stood on a high ledge on the massive Vedauwoo rock formation in Wyoming, I found that the sound of Moldovan nai naturally became a part of our outdoor environment as it echoed off the rocks and projected out into the forest. Our pianist had begun to embody an effective sense of how to collaborate with dancers and their movement having accompanied their classes for many years. Nai easily became an integral part of her musical compositions.

When I first visited Chișinău in the summer of 2002, Professor Ion Negură told me that the Moldovan nai had a strong and beautiful voice, capable of being part of many kinds of musical settings. More than 50 years ago, Dumitru Blajinu included it in early urban folklore orchestras

and Petre Zaharia, described to me as “the patriarch of nai makers,” developed and made excellent instruments that are still in use today. Master nai performer Vasile Iovu described the 20<sup>th</sup> century as “the century of gold for the panflute” [2, p. 9], and told me in an interview that nai is “a red thread, woven through every range and sound” of the folklore orchestra. On June 22, 2015 Moldovan nai was an integral part of a vertical dance performance in Wyoming. An instrument created by the master Moldovan craftsman Grigore Covaliu was featured in that performance.

The broader movement, *mișcarea*, of playing panflute is more like dancing than the smaller movements required for playing transverse flutes. In addition, the social essence of learning and performing by ear, *dupa ureche*, improvising, *improvizează*, and telling stories, *poveștile*, intrinsic in Moldovan folklore music encourages performers to interact with choreographers, dancers, other musicians, and their settings. “Lifeworlds” of ideas and emotions [3, p. 5] come into being around them throughout their many hours of working together, and vertical dance performances take on an intersubjective and relational character as environments are being formed and constantly changed through the actions and interactions of individual participants [4, p. 20]. Moldovan folklore music and the nai have become an integral part of that environment.

We will now present an indoor performance of vertical dance recorded only hours ago at the University of Wyoming, Berry Biodiversity Conservation Center. Margaret Wilson, Neil Humphrey and Jessie Mays present two short vertical dance pieces with Moldovan melodies performed by clarinetist Blake McGee, pianist Lisa Rickard, and naist Rodney Garnett.

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