

*All raw musical and video material (recorded samples and raw video footage) are available by request! Since most of our process is reflected well in the video, this short version of Women in Exponential Growth is a portfolio in and of itself!*

*Lyrics of the poem are in the description of the Youtube video!*

*If you want to experience the 12 minute part of Women in Exponential Growth without any preconceived notions that we will offer in this, please do so. We are fans of free association and not taking anyone by their hand through our little art worlds, but if you need a hand, by all means, keep reading!*

*This was written from my (Luka's) point of view. So that when you see "me", you know who "me" is!*

Women in Exponential Growth will be a music theatre piece that explores hereditary family trauma between 3 women in my family, our expectations from each other, and the reality of our previous and current relationship, through a series of spoken word vignettes, guitar improvisations, and video-art experiments that are framed by a piece by Steve Reich called Electric Counterpoint.

The three women that we will try to represent to the best of our abilities with vignettes - that consist of guitar improvisations and spoken word pieces - are my grandmother (the root, trauma-starter), my mother (the incubator of trauma), and myself (the witness and the perpetrator of new trauma).

My grandmother is a difficult person with whom both me and my mother have a very complicated relationship. She does not express emotion at all (unless it concerns annoyance, anger, or inconvenience), cannot admit her faults, doesn't show any signs that she can grow from her mistakes. She is rarely interested in anyone but herself. She is helpful, but only from a feeling of duty and commitment, not from love or caring. She is hypocritical, an almost pathological liar, and on top of that - has substance abuse issues that make her violent, destructive, abusive, and emotionally manipulative. All of that was expected to be heavily reflected on my mother, but the reality is she inherited none of these unfortunate traits. She developed some other issues of her own - trust issues, catastrophizing tendencies, low self-esteem, and so on. I did inherit my mother's issues with control and heightened anxiety, but on top of that, I am queer and trans, which has its own set of lovely anxieties and traumas even without the hereditary ones.

The title Women in Exponential Growth comes from the way my mother and I processed and grew from each other after witnessing our "elder" trying to destroy herself and us. "There is this idea that parents try to make a better version of themselves through parenthood." My grandmother did not try, but somehow she made it! My mother, contrary to expectations, became a better person not because of her mother but despite her. She turned out to be a better person by doing the opposite of what her mother did, and I am trying to be as good as my mother by learning from the best bits she offered me through raising me. My mother is exponentially better than her mother, and me... Well, we'll see.

We are writing this because we do not want to be vague when talking about family trauma and this minimal and superficial description was important for understanding this 12-minute video, as well as what the project will be as a whole.

Vignettes, where we try to tackle this web of family connections, are framed by a "fourth" member of the family, which is the House, address: Žuti breg 97, Zagreb and Electric Counterpoint by Steve Reich. This frame/character is made of videos of the rooms of the house (preferably videos that were made in dawn or dusk, and not including people) where a lot of these connections between us were made and tested. All three of us, women of the House, spent big parts of our lives in that house, sometimes even at the same time, which means - a lot of my grandmother's abuse episodes, as well as demonstrations of both me and my mother's insecurities and anxieties, happened in that house.

Electric Counterpoint is the musical representation of the House. It is a composition that, for some reason, I cannot help but associate with my Zagreb home. All three of the movements are urgent, yet serene. They feel like a shelter and a home, are static and slow to change at first glance, but very engaging and moving. Electric Counterpoint has all the musical qualities of a good home, and so does our Zagreb home. That is why we had to make "The House" the frame of Women in Exponential Growth. The House (both Electric Counterpoint and the actual physical house) was a shelter and a battleground but for some reason, the traumas did not stay in the walls. The House is beautiful and it still offers comfort and protection, regardless of how hurtful the people inside of it were.



Žuti breg 97

We have explained in a bit more detail what we discussed in the video pitch for this competition. Now we would like to dive into how we made this particular 12 minute part of Women in Exponential Growth, how it fits into the narrative of the piece, and how both this snippet and the entire piece fit with the theme of Expectations vs. Reality.

The basic idea for a piece under the name Women in Existential Growth existed since I started being more analytical and aware of the depth and issues my grandmother, mother and I carry and how they can be connected into an art piece. It was intended to be an auto-fiction novel that would be my life-long project. Then, an auto-fiction novel that could be adapted for the stage. And, finally, after my extensive stay in the house in Zagreb in 2020 and 2021 and trying to push myself to be artistic and creative again - a music theatre piece. We intend to still do all three at some point in our lives, but for this Goodmesh Concours, we decided to do the music theatre version.

Even though this is the story of the women in my family, Tihomir had a large part in helping me analyze and process the feelings and grudges I have towards my mother and my grandmother in the time of the pandemic, when I spent almost a year (from March 2020 to September 2020, as well as from November 2020 to March 2021) living with and taking care of my grandmother. Tihomir was living with me for extended periods in this time frame and has a very good understanding of our family dynamics. We also, on top of being boyfriend and girlfriend, are musical partners as well, and we knew we could use our experience from our previous performances that included poetry, electric guitar improvisations and live looping to create a piece dealing with family dynamics on Žuti breg

97. I am also a classical saxophonist that enjoys playing classical pieces that are not written for saxophone and "repurposing" classical pieces so they fit in personal or political narratives.

You might think - wow, your family sounds like a lot, why would you go to the place where you saw your grandmother in her worst light and spend the pandemic in that toxic environment? Well, that is where we were faced with how our expectations were only semi-close to reality. Yes, I was worried that my time with my grandmother would be filled with manipulation and toxicity as it was when I last lived with her. I was still expected to behave as nothing happened in the years before, like our relationship and her behavior were perfectly normal. I was expected to take care of her, cook for her, entertain her, while my mother was away for work. And I did all of that with love and while being surprisingly unbothered by the past. While the toxicity and inability to communicate were there, I was able to analyze the situation and write the foundations of *Women in Exponential Growth*. I was able to have deep conversations with my mother (when she visited) that gave me insight into our family dynamics even more. All of our art lives came to a halt professionally, but what I expected to be a nightmare living situation with no fruitful outcomes or lessons - being closed in one's home due to a pandemic makes you think you are being unproductive to a certain extent - turned out to be challenging, but an enlightening experience where we learned, accepted and started to create the basis of future artworks that would not be created in other situations. Expected unfruitful and toxic experience - got a fruitful and somewhat toxic experience.

The clashes of expectations and reality continue to be motives in the 12-minute piece we are presenting for the finale of the Concours. It consists of the third movement of Reich's *Electric Counterpoint* accompanied by videos of the rooms of the house, as well as a vignette about "the root" of the trauma - "The Elder/The Root" that paints a portrait of who my grandmother is. Or who I think she is, rather.

We expect our houses to be shelters. We expect classical music to be pleasant, performed in a specific way that should not be deviated from, and that it has to suffice on its own. We expect our elders to be saints who lead the way, someone who is without questions full of love and who only can get respect in return.

There are a few ways we challenge these expectations through the creation of the finale piece; recontextualization, free association, glitch aesthetics, poetics of clarity, and symmetry.

*Electric Counterpoint* is a piece for a guitar, with pre-recorded two bass guitars and up to ten electric guitars, with the thirteenth guitar being performed live.

The way that most people record and perform *Electric Counterpoint* is by playing it live with Pat Metheny's (a guitarist for whom the piece was written) pre-recorded tapes. We recorded every line ourselves, in our small DIY studio in Treehouse NDSM in Amsterdam. Bass guitars and guitars 5, 6, 7, and part of the solo guitar were played and recorded by Tihomir on bass guitar and electric guitar. I recorded parts of the solo guitar, as well as guitars 1, 2, 3, and 4 on alto saxophone. We also recorded all the guitars and saxophone parts an octave lower than it's written. By that, we tried to add a little somberness to the piece, as well as cater to the fact that the range of alto saxophone is lower than that of the guitar.

Already one expectation differs from reality. Classical saxophone players are expected to stay in their lane and play only arrangements that fit the spirit of the instrument. We are not the first ones to challenge this idea by playing Reich, of course, but the people who

challenge this idea are still not in the majority. Recording and adapting to the very precise nature of Electric Counterpoint was a huge challenge, but it was possible and made me learn how to listen, record, and produce music better.

Classical music, a lot of people suggest, should be enough on its own and is mostly played in "art for the sake of art" settings. It should not dabble in the political or personal that much. We made a classical music piece a character of "The House" by making it coexist with videos. We made it fit our narrative without the piece being intended to be anything other than a beautiful classical music piece. The recontextualization of classical music is not a necessity for enjoying it, but also should not be a cardinal sin when someone does it.

Houses are expected to be sociological units where families spend their happy lives together. You would expect from the first few minutes of this 12-minute work that this beautiful piece of minimal music, combined with the videos of a late 70's Yugoslavian house interior design in the dusk, can invoke only feelings of comfort and protection. However, the break into reality comes from the short interruptions of the video of a mummy made of classical music scores. The mummy can represent a few things. When we first made the mummy pieces, I was being torn between how classical music can be a source of joy and frustration for me. How it can liberate, but also make you so constricted by tradition. The mummy can represent constriction if the tradition of classical music is dogmatically followed. While making Women in Exponential Growth and revisiting the mummy videos (they were made in 2020), the mummy reminded me of a demon - of trauma that happened inside The House. It also reminded me of how my grandmother lurks in parts of the house when she contemplates her martyrdom. The House was a source of great joy and liberation for me, but it was also a place where trauma, not-so-good people, and frustrations came to be. Mummy represents the leftover darkness that lurks in the house.

Our elders should be untouchable saints we have to uncritically worship and respect. Grandmas are sweet, caring, sometimes an escape from parents who are much more strict. Elders are, like houses, shelters, and sources of wisdom and love. Like you could have guessed, my grandma is nothing of the sort.

Written in simple words and with a sense of how it will sound spoken and in combination with music, the situations painted in the poem are enhanced by (partly) improvised music on the electric guitar. In a way, the music is divided into three parts/atmospheres. The connection with Reich was accentuated by several chords from Electric Counterpoint being the basis for improvisation in the first and the third part of our music piece. In the middle, everything intentionally falls apart with plenty of noise being produced through the use of some pre-recorded and improvised loops, which provide the connection with Electric Counterpoint. With live guitar being improvised, this improvisation on top of the pre-recorded noise, serves, in a way, as a counterpoint to Electric Counterpoint.

Glitch aesthetics, as well as symmetry, are elements in art that are a part of our aesthetic and are not necessarily interpretable through the lens of challenging expectations but can be. Very sharp cuts in video editing, as well as unexpected interruptions in the "rooms of the house" parts of the video, are made with the brash and sharp nature of glitch music and visual art.

Our love for more or less central shot composition comes from the aesthetics of the director Wes Anderson, as well as photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher.

The symmetry can also be seen in how the video is composed. The "frame" of the video - which consists of the video-audio character of the House - can be considered as a leitmotif of the piece and a "main page" through which you can access all the vignettes about my family. We accomplished this feeling by placing the vignette right in the middle of the 3rd movement of Electric Counterpoint. Imagine - you always have the main page that is "The House". Whenever we decide to zoom you in on a certain vignette, we accomplish it by making the video clips shorter, placing the zoom in logically in the structure of Electrical Counterpoint, and you arrive at the vignette. The vignette ends, you get zoomed out back to The House in the same way like you were zoomed in - shorter clips become longer, the music fades back in, and you are on the main page again.

Finally, "do it yourself" ethics is what this whole project is coated in. Everything was recorded, produced, and conceived by Tihomir and me. This may be the sign of being control freaks, but it also opens an opportunity to learn as many aspects of creating and producing art as possible. Yes, through this project we have dug deep into my family issues, how different realities can be true at once and how none of them are what we expected them to be. On the other hand, it has been a huge learning opportunity to learn more about sound recording, sound-producing, audio equipment, video editing, and so on. We have become deeper people in both personal and professional ways, and we did it all by not going too far from our own homes.

*Video recording/audio recording/video editing/audio engineering/creative direction: Luka Prelas and Tihomir Babić.*

*Guitar/bass guitar - Tihomir Babić*

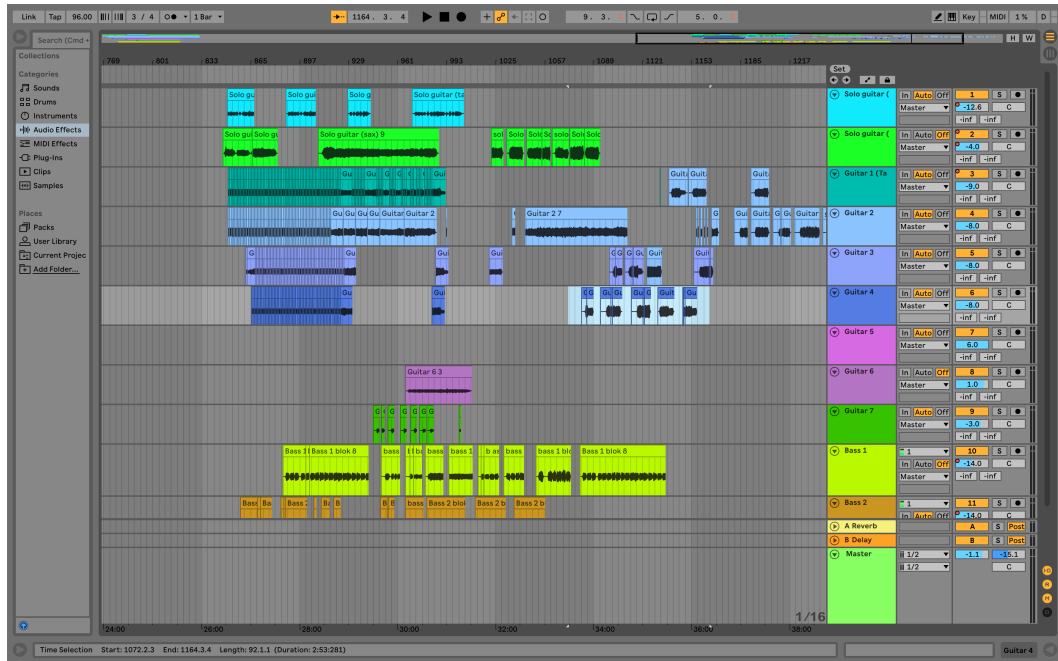
*Saxophone/writing/performing - Luka Prelas*

*Prepared and recorded in September and October 2021, except the "mummy" pieces, June 2020.*

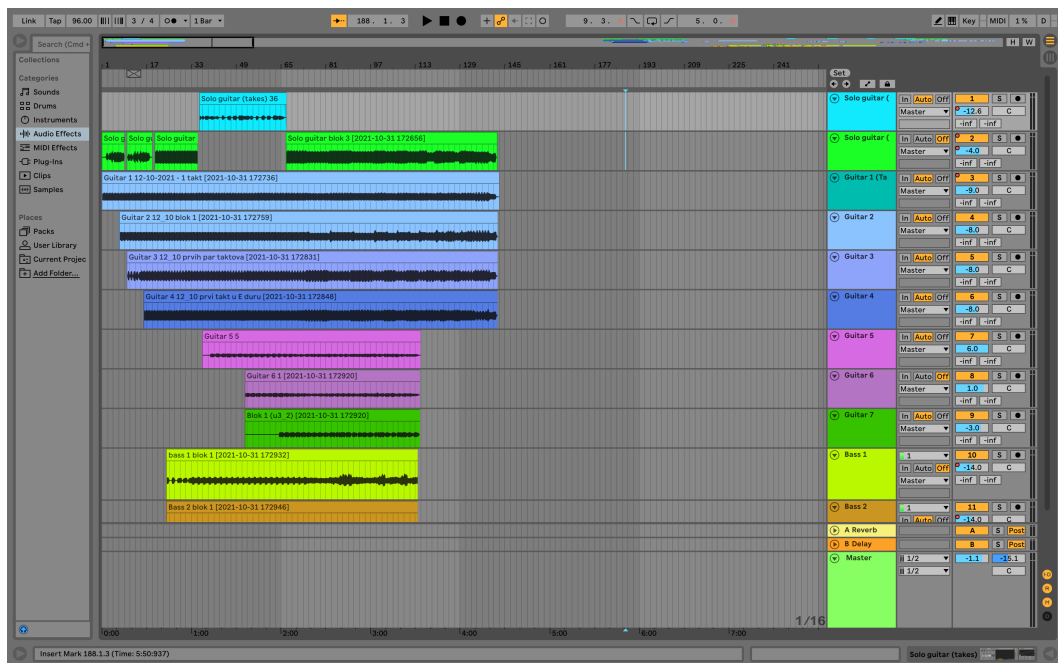
*Recorded in Amsterdam, NDSM Treehouse, as well as Žuti breg 97 (Tihomir conveniently went to Croatia just in time to record the rooms of the house).*

*A big thank you to Mafalda Oliveira who borrowed us the bass guitar, as well as my studio mate, Jethro Cooke, who borrowed us the equipment for the audio recordings.*





Ableton Steve Reich file - before editing, after recording saxophone parts - twice (was not satisfied with the first takes)...



...Ableton Steve Reich file - after editing