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The History, Development and Global Dissemination of the *Hang*/Handpan

Ahkok Chun-Kwok Wong

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology

Department of Performing Arts

City University of London

March 2023

I, Ahkok Chun-Kwok Wong confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.



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Abstract

In the year 2000, a flying-saucer-like musical instrument named the *Hang* was invented in Bern, Switzerland, by Swiss steelpan makers Félix Rohner and Sabina Schärer.
The *Hang* was available briefly in several international independent music instrument shops and private resellers when introduced in the early 2000s, before it was withdrawn completely. When there were no resellers or shops stocking the *Hang*, those who wished to acquire one had to write letters directly to the Swiss makers, hoping for their agreement and an invitation to purchase the instrument in Bern. Although the original makers ceased production of the *Hang* entirely in 2013, adaptations of their original design were launched and widely distributed, all of which are generally named the handpan. These continue to flourish around the world, with more than 300 makers identified to date.

Despite the lack of support from major instrument outlets and without the advantages of global branding or advertisements, the *Hang*/handpan has quickly become a global cultural phenomenon, enjoying widespread popularity well beyond Switzerland, particularly in cities across Western Europe, the USA, Israel, Russia, and East Asia, including China. This dissertation examines how this non-electronic musical instrument has achieved this level of global recognition, the musical contexts in which it is most frequently found, and how the popularisation of the instrument has been largely influenced by an online instrument-centric

community. By conducting ethnographic research concerning the production, regulation, and consumption of the *Hang/*handpan, and by investigating matters of identity construction surrounding the instrument, the dissertation illuminates the complications within and between *Hang,* handpan, and Trinidadian steelpan communities in a world increasingly connected by hypermobility and digitalism. Newly-developed non-electronic musical instruments such as the *Hang/*handpan rarely reach its popularity. This dissertation thus not only affords insights into the instrument itself, but it also provides an original contribution to knowledge on the complexity surrounding musical instrument innovation, development, and ideologies, and how these intersect with current social and legal frameworks relating to intellectual property.

Dedicate to my aunt, Moon Yan Fung, who gifted me my first musical instrument

Acknowledgements

The *Hang*/handpan came to me when I needed an escape. As a fatigued music venue organiser, band member, and activist, it was perhaps my lowest period, and I found it very difficult even to pick up my guitar. I had nothing to say, musically or verbally. I lived 'non-musically' for two difficult years. Out of nowhere, the magical *Hang*/handpan appeared, really like a spaceship, and it brought me to an undiscovered horizon full of new discoveries. An ethnomusicological approach to the *Hang*/handpan community revitalised me as a musical and storytelling being. It is my honour to dedicate a fragment of my life to

writing about such a beautiful instrument and the complex community built around it. I am truly grateful for all the help and support I have received, and for those of you who share the same belief that such a magical instrument deserves scholarly investigation. You were in my thoughts when I was on the verge of giving it all up.

Writing the dissertation is perhaps the single most challenging assignment I have voluntarily pursued. It is a years-long marathon with countless obstacles. I would like to say 'well done!' to myself for persisting despite having ADD, depression, a divorce, a massive social movement in Hong Kong, a COVID lockdown, and brain surgery. Thank you, Dad, for financially aiding me in my pursuit of knowledge in humanity despite wanting me to pursue architecture—it is perhaps the closest way in which an Asian man could show love for his son. Thank you Jackie Lou, Hoki Wong, and my wonderful cat Udon for tolerating my terrible temper, and I'm truly sorry for not being the best version of myself under such enormous stress. I often think of my good friend Dayang Magdalena Nirvana Tamanio Yraola, a cancer and PhD survivor—your resilience comforts me in my troubles. As a terrible student who needs a lot of extra care, I suspect there is no better supervision I could ever ask for than what Professor Stephen Cottrell has provided. I'm grateful that you all played a huge part in this project.

I was a mindless musician who learned little but a sense of failure in the Hong Kong education system, but the amazing Lingnan University Cultural Studies department took me in nonetheless. Thank you all the professors and lecturers who have enlightened me, although some of you have now been forcefully removed by the university or left with unbearable disappointments, your love for wisdom and social justice forever impacted me, among many others.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In the year 2000, a flying-saucer-looking musical instrument named the *Hang* (Bernese-German pronunciation: [haŋ], meaning 'hand') was invented in Bern, Switzerland, by Swiss steelpan makers Félix Rohner and Sabina Schärer. The instrument was inspired by Swiss percussionist Reto Weber, a musician who plays the ghatam, an ancient south Indian percussion instrument which was developed from a clay water jug. Weber had an idea of

performing with a steel-made ghatam, provided with different musical notes that can be activated by striking with the bare hands. Schärer answered his call with an experiment comprised of two leftover prototype instruments assembled together. Soon after this development phase, the *Hang* was born. The *Hang* is a hand-struck steel idiophone made with two metallic hemispheres glued together. Although the tuning systems employed for different iterations vary widely, the top half of the *Hang* generally consists of eight to nine note areas tuned to specific pitches. The bottom half of the shell is generally not used to produce a musical note, but has an opening in the center of the hemisphere which amplifies the sound, similar to the bell in brass instruments.

Together with other international adaptations of the original invention, all of which are generally named the handpan, this metallic percussion instrument has enjoyed increasing popularity outside Switzerland, particularly in cities across Western Europe, the US, Israel, Russia, East Asia, and recently, China. The *Hang* was available briefly in several international independent music instrument shops and private resellers when introduced in the early 2000s before it was withdrawn completely. When there were no resellers or shops stocking the *Hang*, those who wished to acquire one had to write letters to the Swiss makers, hoping that the *Hang* would be available for them to purchase. Some enquirers would be invited to visit the makers' workshop in Bern, following which the candidates could select an instrument of their choosing. A few years after the *Hang* had been launched, customers had to sign an agreement not to resell the *Hang* for profit. The *Hang* quickly became highly sought-after, attracting global attention from both professional percussionists and amateur musicians. Although the original makers ceased production of the *Hang* entirely in 2013, the adaptation of their original design, which will henceforth be referred to as 'the handpan', was launched with similar distribution methods, and continues to flourish around the world with more than 300 makers to date. At least during the early phase of the instrument's distribution, despite the lack of support from major instrument outlets and without the advantages of global branding or advertisements, the *Hang*/handpan eventually became a global cultural phenomenon within a short timespan.

The *Hang* is arguably the only non-electronic musical instrument to have achieved global popularity since the invention of the Trinidadian steelpan, with the two instruments having been created nearly seventy years apart. Additionally, the birth and popularisation of the *Hang*/handpan, which took place at the beginning of the 21st century, almost entirely coincided with the rise of the online social media culture. This all culminates in a unique condition, in which the popularisation of a musical instrument has been largely influenced by an online instrument-centric community. Hence, I would argue that the ethnographic

examination of *the Hang*/handpan community is inevitably intertwined with ethnographic work on the internet.

1.2 Research questions

It is important to understand that the *Hang* is not the only acoustic musical instrument to have been invented after the birth of Trinidad steelpan. The invention of new musical instruments happens every single day. Even *PANArt*, the innovative musical instrument company started by Rohner and Schärer, has been experimenting with numerous instrument designs for years (Fig. 1.1), and none of them have achieved the level of popularity of the *Hang*. Bijsterveld and Schulp (2004) suggest innovation-seeking instrument makers have to contend with cultural histories, pedagogical practices, instrument patents, and established ideals related to the visual and sound characteristics of a particular instrument (p669). These 'histories' in some sense stabilised music instrument designs, resulting in few of the many proposed innovation being actualised into production (p649). Hence, musical instrument makers who are able to recast tradition (p670) tend to attract scholarly attention. For example, Herbert (2006) scrutinised the continuity and changes in brass instruments across varies eras; Jones-Bamman (2017) delves into banjo workshops and old-time music communities to investigate how banjo builders hone their craft; Elias (2023) examines naming conventions which have driven the careers of leading Hindustani slide-guitarists, and reveals a complex network of community relationships, intense competition, and legal battles over design patents.



Figure 1.1 Instruments created by *PANArt* with its patented material: *Pang*. Photograph by *PANArt* Hangbau AG.

As a new sound object that has been relatively well received globally, the study of the tonal quality and physics of the *Hang* is perhaps an obvious choice. However, to understand the cultural and symbolic meanings of the instrument, and how these meanings circulate among the community surrounding the instrument, requires a different approach. Combining multi-sited ethnographic and online ethnographic case studies, the dissertation aims to scrutinise the global dissemination of the *Hang*/handpan and the factors behind its popularity. The fascinating social and historical contexts of the instrument have inspired me to ask questions which have become the foundation of the present dissertation: how did this innovative design, made by a small independent musical instrument workshop in Switzerland, become a worldwide phenomenon? What were the circumstances which led to the global adaptation of the *Hang* with the emergence of generic handpans around 2008? Who made initial use of the *Hang/*handpan, and in what musical and social contexts was it used? How did global communities and identities form around this musical instrument, and what are the specific qualities of these individuals and collectives?

1.3 The origins of the *Hang*/handpan as an object of study

The idea of researching the *Hang*/handpan came to me long before this dissertation. I have been playing the guitar for over twenty years, and gradually developed an interest in experimenting with other musical instruments and sound objects for compositions and live performances. In 2013, a musician friend in Hong Kong shared a YouTube video with me on Facebook, [1] featuring a skinny Caucasian man with long dreadlocks playing a bizarre looking musical instrument in the streets of London. In the video, the man sits on a hiking stool in a foot tunnel, playing a cas cas – a West African double shaker – with his right hand. On his lap sits a metallic instrument, which he hits with his left thumb and index finger. Although I had never seen or heard anything quite like it, I was not, at first, particularly intrigued by the instrument. This was largely because it is fairly common to see new musical inventions, especially for musicians such as myself who are heavily involved in the experimental music scene. Although the sound of this inverted-wok-looking instrument was pleasant and somewhat unique, it was not the sound nor the composition demonstrated in the video which struck me, it was the view count - which reached several million viewers - and the generally positive comments generated by this relatively simple, or even dull, performance, which I found captivating. This YouTube video marked the beginning of my research on this instrument. For many days, I spent long hours online looking for the name of the instrument, trying to find out more about its origins, the name of the player featured in this particular viral YouTube video, information regarding the instrument maker, the price of the instrument, and how to acquire one. All of a sudden, I found myself completely engrossed by the narratives, myths, and responses towards this curious musical 'wok'.

The player demonstrating the *Hang* in the YouTube video is Daniel Waples (Fig. 1.2). Waples acquired his first *Hang* only six months after the social media platform - YouTube - had been launched,[2] and he is one of the very first musicians to have performed with the *Hang* on the platform. Several of his videos became viral, and he has since become one of the most recognisable faces of the instrument. After achieving international fame, Waples continues to upload his *Hang*-driven compositions to online music platforms. Generally, these compositions can be downloaded by donation, as a means to maintain Waples' status as a street performer on the internet. Waples claims that when he is not performing on the street, YouTube is busking for him (TEDxCharlottesville, 2016). Waples began travelling the world as a musician, and identifies himself as something equivalent to a troubadour, bard, or

[1] *Solo Hang Drum in a Tunnel | Daniel Waples - Hang in Balance | London - England [HD*, Daniel Waples, YouTube, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDQgU1CPpis

[2] *Handpan - Amplification of Vibration | Daniel Waples | TEDxCharlottesville*, TEDx Talks, YouTube, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuaGV7M1qeI&t=389s

wandering minstrel (hangdrumsandhandpans, 2013). Indeed, the instrument has empowered him to pursue a new global nomadic lifestyle.



Figure 1.2 *Solo Hang Drum in a Tunnel | Daniel Waples - Hang in Balance | London - England [HD].* Screenshot by the author.

Several months after discovering this video, the 'steel rush' reached East-Asia. Waples landed in Hong Kong, stopping over before travelling to China. He brought a handpan with him and was looking for a buyer, and it was swiftly sold. Almost at the very same time, my composer/producer friend Edmund Leung informed me of the arrival of his first handpan. He invited me to listen to the instrument in person, and in his presence, I was moved by the sound of handpan for the first time. I was convinced at that point that the subtle sound of the *Hang*/handpan did not translate well in the recordings I had heard online. As I dug deeper into the *Hang/*handpan online forums and delved into the abundance of social media content, I was dazzled by the community ethos that they exhibited, with makers and players constantly placing great emphasis upon sharing and mutual aid while always presenting a 'positive' vibe. Leung shared the contact of his handpan maker with me, and I followed Leung in trusting this new handpan maker in California, picking a scale that 'sings to my soul' (Char 2014, p.c.). I paid USD 2000 up front, without knowing the exact delivery time. When my handpan arrived after eleven months of anticipation, I had a sense of becoming part of the global *Hang*/handpan community. I changed my profile picture on Facebook to one of me posing with a handpan, and immediately enthusiastic *Hang/*handpan netizens started to send me 'friend requests'. Like Waples, I began to perform on the street as a

busker. I also began to participate in *Hang*/handpan-centric gatherings and festivals internationally, something I had never thought of doing in my twenty years of musicianship. By the time I had decided to write a dissertation about the *Hang*/handpan, Leung became one of my obvious choices as an informant. By December 2016, Leung and I, together with the founder of *Handpan Union HK*, Chris Ng, were interviewed by an online news platform, *The Initium*, which was writing a survey on the instrument.[3] Before the interview, I told Leung that I was in the process of researching the *Hang*/handpan for my upcoming dissertation. Leung's reply was telling: in a sense, we are all researchers of this new instrument (2016, p.c.).

1.4 How to examine the *Hang*/handpan: A brief history of organology

Studying the design of musical instruments and the use of these instruments in traditional and rather narrow settings in order to classify them has been the main focus of classical organology (Roda 2007). Organologist Margaret Kartomi (2001) describes musical instruments as 'fixed, static objects that cannot grow or adapt in themselves' (p305). However, there is much more to learn from musical instruments besides classificatory knowledge, especially for those bearing unorthodox social and historical backgrounds. In the case of the *Hang*/handpan, examining the design development of the instrument and the evolution of its tonal characters could be a fruitful avenue for research in itself, but questions regarding the social life of the instrument go beyond the materiality of the research object. In this light, and particularly given the ways in which I have positioned the research object, the classical organological approach exhibits certain methodological limitations, since it is an approach which often neglects the complex interrelationship between human beings and musical instruments. I would argue that the study of the dissemination of the *Hang*/handpan challenges Kartomi's claim, precisely because the richness of this research subject lies in the fact that the instrument is highly mobile, and the meaning, use and identity of the instrument is always changing through complex social interactions. For lack of better words, this research focuses on the 'unfixed', 'non-static' lives that 'grow' and 'adapt' around the *Hang*/handpan.

It is not uncommon for scholars to call for an expansion of focus in organology, and Ki Mantel Hood (1971) has been one of the earliest ethnomusicologists to address such a concern. Hood not only helped in establishing a framework for the field now known as

[3] *對談樂器 handpan：社群捍衛的音符與反資本精神,* The Initium, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://theinitium.com/article/20161222-culture-music-handpan-communityofsound/

ethnomusicology, he has also suggested a more accurate terminology for organology, which is 'organography'. What Hood suggests with such a term is a science of musical instruments which focusses not only on the descriptive and historical elements of instruments, but also includes the equally important aspects of 'the science' of musical instruments, such as 'particular techniques of performance, musical function, decoration (as distinct from construction), and a variety of socio-cultural considerations' (1971 p124). After Hood, the thriving interest in ethnomusicological studies embracing a multiplicity of cultural contexts indicates a new trend of organological development. Sue DeVale (1990) has proposed the addition of applied analytic inquiries to help explain society and culture (p22). Kevin Dawe (2001) has also critiqued classical organology, which he views as a methodology which primarily focuses on grand classification schemes while being heavily dependent upon private and museum collection culture. He argues that these musical instrument collections are wonderful resources for education and important information archives for research, but for our understanding of the meaning and significance of musical instruments embedded in cultures and societies, which are 'not dead and inactive but are replete with meaning even when still, untouched, or unsounded' (p266), researchers need to look into fields outside collection displays. Similar to Hood's call for organography, Jeremy Montagu (2003) calls for the proper study of musical instruments, a worldwide 'ethno-organology' method of research, which is crucial for the understanding of how instruments originated from different parts of the world influence each other. Allen Roda (2007) invites a new type of investigation which does not only place the musical instrument in a static time and space detached from social relationships, further expanding upon the idea by studying human interaction during the fine-tuning process of tabla, an instance of fieldwork he has termed 'materialist musical ethnography' (2014). In short, the boundaries of classical organology have been challenged and expanded upon by scholars in ways in which considerations of the symbolic and cultural agency of musical instruments have become essential.

Musical instruments can provide information which is vital to the work of the ethnomusicologist (Hood 1971). Many scholars have, to some extent, made such a claim in their body of work around the Trinidadian steelpan, which I consider as a 'relative' of the *Hang* (the historical relationship between these two instruments is examined in Chapter Two). The Trinidadian steelpan has been featured as a research subject for interrogating its social function (Grant 1999); the circumstances behind its nationalisation (Dudley 2007); and in examinations of the relationship between music and diaspora (Ramnarine 2007). This information can be the foundation for the understanding of the context in which the *Hang* was invented, and the complex relations between these two cultures will be further explored in this dissertation. In contradiction with the heavy legal protections regarding the design of

the *Hang*, the collective of makers responsible for adapting its design and producing handpans share manufacturing knowledge with one another. Referencing Rainer Polak's study (2006) of the local, national, and international uses of the Jembe (also known as Djembe, Jenbe - the African drum), this thesis identifies and unpacks the complex relationships between multiple contexts of the construction methods of handpans under the effects of globalisation.

Equally, the study of a musical instrument can go beyond the study of the symbolic meanings and cultural contexts which surround it. Musical instruments do not only reflect and respond to the social life of humans per se. In Eliot Bates' (2012) words, instruments have their own social lives. Bates' organological work not only observes the musicians and the music they produce, but also attempts to explore the material world of the musical instrument. He borrows theoretical frameworks from Science & Technology Studies (STS) and material culture in political science in order to examine "the performative and integrative capacity of 'things' to help make what we call society" (Pels, Hetherington & Vandenerghe 2002, p2, cited by Bates 2012). To demonstrate that musical instruments are constitutive and not incidental to social interaction (p372), Bates examines the Anatolian saz by putting the instrument itself in question (p386), hoping to unpack the power, mystique, and enticement of the instrument, which he argues are inseparable from situations where the musical instruments are entangled in webs of human-object relationships (p364). Some of the proposed questions, he claims, such as 'does the performer perform the instrument or the other way round?' (p387), would even seem to most to be irrational. However, Bates finds these questions necessary, precisely because they challenge the "human-centered conceptualizations of 'performance' and 'agency'" (p387). He applies Actor-Network Theory (Latour et al. 1996) in the organology of saz, and argues that musical instruments themselves have the power to promote change. Considering that several of my dissertation informants have mentioned that the *Hang*/handpan has played a crucial role in impelling them to pursue life-changing decisions, the idea of using a similar approach seems to be of great use for my work. Although the objective of the dissertation is not to prove whether *Hang/*handpan consists of such a 'thing-power', I find it inspiring to be reminded of the ways in which instruments could initiate actions, rather than being a passive inanimate object which only reflects human activities.

By contrast with the Anatolian saz's clearly-defined national identity, I would argue that the *Hang*/handpan lacks any history of nationalisation. In a certain sense, *Hang/*handpan has always been a non-national and multicultural project. Although the *Hang* was created in Bern, Switzerland by two Swiss instrument makers, and while it has, for a long time, been a

product that can only be picked up in Switzerland, the demographic of the community surrounding the instrument has never been 'Swiss-centric'. This global dimension developed further when handpans began to be manufactured all over the world. For framing my work within the context of globalisation trends and developments, Arjun Appadurai's (1990) conceptualisations of global cultural flows seems to be essential. In Appadurai's eyes, globalisation is nothing new, since modern capitalism has always been global. He is, however, specifically interested in the ways in which regions, nations, and societies interact with each other in the last three decades of the nineteenth century and onwards, especially in conjunction with the emergence of new media. The new global cultural economy is now more complex than ever, a fact which cannot be understood with the use of old theories. Appadurai imagines globalisation in terms of the ways in which people, things, and ideas traverse the borders of the nation state, a process which has been sped up by new technologies and media. He calls these processes of global dissemination 'flows', and divides these flows into ethnoscapes (the movement of people), technoscapes (the ways technologies help speed up cross-border movements), ideoscapes (global movement of ideas and symbols), financescapes (movement of capital across borders), and mediascapes (international media spreading news information). With these tools, Appadurai demonstrates how new global flows construct a global public sphere and new types of social imagination, separated from a mentality and imagination oriented around the nation-state. Appadurai has since posited that these imaginary landscapes are the building blocks of that which he calls imagined worlds: 'Multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the group' (1990 p7). The idea of imagined worlds was built upon Benedict Anderson's (1983) theory of how the convergence of print-capitalism and the popular imagination creates imagined national communities, but Appadurai extends this theory to cover globally imagined worlds, rather than simply remaining within the context of locally imagined communities.

One of the best examples of how a global ethnomusicological research benefits from Appadurai's theorisations of global cultural flows, is perhaps Kevin Dawe's (2016) research on the guitar. Dawe's work sets out to survey numerous cases of the guitar, attempting to establish an overview of the multiple dimensions of human-object connection which the guitar generates. This provides him with the possibility of documenting a wider scope of the social appearances of the worldwide guitar phenomenon, and stretches the academic terms of reference on how musical instruments can be examined. When facing challenges in framing the global dimension of the guitar, Dawe invents a new framework which he has and coined as the 'new guitarscape'. Indeed, the term 'guitarscape' draws analogies from other

disciplines: ‘New soundscape’ (Schafer 1969), ‘toolscapes’ (Tallis 2003), ‘sensescape’ (Howes 2005), and of course, ‘-scapes’ from Appadurai’s global cultural flow theory (1990).

However, while Appadurai’s work provides a grand theoretical framework by which we can make sense of the proliferation of global flows, such a grand theory also comes with its problems. In tracing the journey of the flip-flop, sociologist Caroline Knowles (2014) navigates the ‘backroads’ of globalisation, which are essentially trails of a global commodity across global, national, sub-national, and hyper-local scales that expose tensions between lived experiences and social textures (p6). She argues that such a movement is not exempt from real life difficulties, and is seemingly made without the presence of a scape or force field, but with embedded inevitabilities of motion (p7). Instead of ‘flow’, she witnesses a ‘fragile shifting set of trails which bend this way and then another way with the exigencies of circumstances and human effort’ (ibid.). Knowles’ interrogation of the material biography of the flip-flop - from the state of raw material to disposal - reveals the ‘backroad’ that it takes through its material globalisation (2014). With the use of this framework, Knowles explores how the operation of producing an ordinary global commodity traverses people’s lives and the territories and spaces in which they live. These globalised ‘trails’, riddled with all of the uncertainties, fragilities and contingencies of life – trails upon which people and things shuffle and dance along - are less neat, finished, predictable and settled than familiar theories suggest (2014). Hence, Knowles claims that these ‘backroads’ of globalisation, off the beaten tracks of the major highways, provide the connective tissue of globalisation.

My initial interest in the *Hang*/handpan, and my main focus upon examining the circumstances which have led to the *Hang*/handpan becoming a global sensation, is intrinsically tied to theorisations of the global imagination. The current concern of this dissertation is inspired by Appadurai’s (1990) vision of a global cultural economy in which post-modernity and time-space compression have changed our ways of disseminating things and ideas. Knowles' (2014) methodology and critique of grand globalisation theory, meanwhile, addresses the importance of ethnographic work, raising concerns about the sorts of critical questions which could be asked about the provenance and use of an object in revealing how social worlds work. Furthermore, one might suppose that the identity and symbolic meaning of the *Hang*/handpan could be just as, or even more, complicated than a relatively mundane object like the flip-flop. An imagined *Hang*/handpan community has been built through bonds of trust that have formed between producers and consumers who have perhaps never met; through the practising and playing of the instrument; through interacting on online forums and social media; through participation in international instrument-centric festivals; through busking and taking busking videos of *Hang*/handpan or letting fellow

travelling musicians ‘couch-surf’ in your home; through the written pact to not profit through reselling the instrument.

This is not the first intellectual examination of the *Hang*/handpan. There are useful publications on the modes of vibration and sound radiation of *Hang* (Morrison & Rossing 2009; 2008; Rohner & Schärer 2007; Rossing, Morrison, Hansen, Rohner & Schärer 2007; Morrison 2005; Rossing, Hansen, Rohner & Schärer 2001). There is also a growing interest in the examination of *Hang*/handpan among undergraduate and graduate students. Baron (2021; 2017) examines how the *Hang* and other instruments created by *PANArt* could be implemented in a ‘sound therapy’ workshop; O’Donnell (2017) studies the geometry and characteristics of handpan from an engineering perspective; Alon (2015) designed an experimental procedure to record, analyse and synthesise the handpan sound. Building on these fundamental understandings of *Hang*/handpan construction, and some of the ways in which the instrument has been employed, this dissertation complements and extends this knowledge by taking a broader social and cultural view of the instrument. It is thus the first multi-sited ethnographic study of the global *Hang*/handpan phenomenon and the various *Hang*/handpan-centric communities that sustain it.

1.5 Musical instruments and globalisation

What are the different ways by which we can examine an instrument-centric culture, particularly in an era where our worlds are connected by global flows or/and global backroads? Is it even possible to conduct any kind of examination of an instrument outside the scope of globalisation? Scholars have been examining musical instruments within the global context from various different research frameworks, some of which have been briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, and these serve as wonderful examples of how the study of musical instruments can be framed: Dawe (2010) positions guitar playing as a transnational instrument activity, and coins the new theoretical apparatus of the ‘guitarscape’ as a collection of sites that construct meanings which influence economic, political, cultural, and social domains. The guitar, in this sense, is more than a sound making instrument, it is to a certain degree an agent that alters global ideoscapes. For a musical instrument which has been globalised so widely and successfully, Dawe’s methodology in conceptualizing this global phenomenon as a research field provides ways in which extensive global networks such as these could be examined. Meanwhile, notwithstanding its comparatively short history, the saxophone can be similarly situated in a broad range of musical genres and global socio-cultural spheres. Stephen Cottrell (2013) examines multiple angles of the

musical instrument's history, implementations of the instrument, and has scrutinised how the instrument, sometimes with conflicting identities represented in different musical genres, has been successfully and effectively globalised.

Responding to Dawe's call for a re-imagination of the musical instrument's role in society, I inquire into how different aspects of the *Hang/*handpan- its monetary value and trading system, the representation of the instrument, the myth and purported therapeutic power of the instrument, changes in the social status of the instrument makers and players and other specific social-cultural elements have contributed to its global success. The study of the guitar and saxophone, in a global context, demonstrate the challenges of framing and contextualising such popular musical instruments. However, as Deirdre Morgan (2017) carefully points out in her dissertation on the jew's harp, some globalised musical instruments do not have global networks which are as far-reaching and pervasive. The global network of jew's harpists consists of a series of rather small communities, with smaller numbers of participants and organizers producing more niche events. It consists of a loose assemblage of participants, events, and places which are not necessarily tied to urban spaces (p18). In an attempt to position and contextualize the revival of the jew's harp in the late twentieth-century, Morgan examines jew's harp communities within local and international frameworks, with the support of ethnographic data collected from instrument-centric festivals and online forums. Professional shakuhachi performer and scholar Kiku Day (2009) examines the revival of the earlier incarnation of the instrument, the jinashi, by collaborating with contemporary composers to produce new compositions as a form of action research. Day extends her research by examining how alternative identities are shaped and defined by online shakuhachi communities. She employs the idea of an imagined community by Anderson (1983), examining the ways in which identities are constructed without community members meeting in reality, and finally analyses how a sort of online-based citizenship is experienced and claimed with reference to Bryan S. Turner's (1990) idea of active citizenship.

One of the most challenging questions the *Hang*/handpan community has had to face is that of the complex relationship between the *Hang* and the Trinidadian steelpan (a subject I deal with at more length in Chapter two). A few informants have argued that the *Hang* is just the steelpan reinventing itself: the convex shape, the diatonic design and the playing of the instrument with one's bare hands appeared in instruments long before the invention of *Hang*. Could the popularisation of the *Hang*/handpan be considered as a 'revival' of the Trinidadian steelpan? How far must a musical instrument differ from its predecessors in order to avoid being considered as a facsimile or a revival of a prior form? These challenging questions can

perhaps never be responded to with a simple straight answer. However, I would consider these questions to be necessary and necessarily complex parts of an evaluation of the invention, reinvention and revival of forms in the history of musical instruments.

Besides this question of the 'revival' of forms, research concerning music instruments and the diasporas that accompany them are not uncommon in the study of the transnational practice of specific musical instruments. By scrutinizing the dombra, a plucked lute played among Kazakhs in western Mongolia, Jennifer Post (2004) illustrates how socialist ideology and a ‘new’ narrative of Mongolian nationalism have shaped the lives and performances of some Kazakhs. Elsewhere, Deborah Wong (2004) has traced the route of a Japanese taiko drum ensemble in California, revealing the entanglements of authenticity and ownership in the taiko repertoire. This musical performance, rooted in Japanese Buddhist ritual and transformed into virtuoso stage performances, is now perceived as a pan-Asian American diasporic instrument, an instrument that Wong refers to as being ‘explicitly multi-ethnic’ (p75). Interestingly, the formation of the *Hang*/handpan community identity cannot be properly described as a conventionally diasporic music community. While a diasporic population is conscious of separation from a real or imaginary source, the *Hang*/handpan community consciously decentres and deterritorialises identities, unhinging cultural signifiers from their moorings, as we shall see.

1.6 New Age and musical instruments

It appears that the evolution of global market trends in musical instruments is inextricably intertwined with the global commodification, reproduction, and distribution, of sound. In this sense, Timothy Taylor’s (1997) long-standing observation on the commodification of sound can be an important reference assisting us in our examination of musical instruments as a transnational commodity. The success of the marketing of world music, world fusion, and world beats in the 1980s, for instance, contributes to a global interest in musical instruments which create unfamiliar, or ‘exotic’ sounds. It is difficult to challenge the globalisation of ‘world’ music instruments mentioned earlier in this chapter: the dissemination of the jenbe, jew’s harp, shakuhachi, etc., are in part influenced by the commodification of world music, which simultaneously fuels the marketplace for new sounds and aesthetics. While Taylor also treats new age music as a subgenre of the world music phenomenon (1997), I would like to briefly describe the idea of the New Age sound/music in order to situate my treatment of the *Hang*/handpan, which I argue often sits perfectly with the description of the category. The components which translate seamlessly from New Age music to the identity of the

Hang/handpan community are the correlations between sound, wellness and the ambiguity of cultural identities.

In 1989, Patti Jean Birosik published *The New Age Music Guide*, describing New Age music as music which 'encourages personal empowerment, earth connectedness, space consciousness, and interpersonal awareness' (1989, p9). New Age music refers to sound productions by artists made with the intention of designing sound to affect the listener's mind, inducing mental and emotional responses as an 'ultimate blend of art and science' (1989, p10). The jazz composer Steve Halpern, arguably the founder of New Age healing music in the 60s, has defined New Age music as music returning to the roots of sound and believing in its primordial power (Birosik 1989, p19). According to Halpern, the composition of New Age music separates itself from traditional Western aesthetics in harmony, melody, and rhythm. By engaging with 'true' New Age music, listeners should be able to experience a lighter body, having been 'taken out' of one's-self by sound, and a positive impact on one's mood. Musicologist Robert C. Ehle (1983) defines New Age music as the opposite of composing music with a cause-and-effect relationship in mind. It generally focuses on creating 'pure sounds', consonant, and clear 'textures'. In Ehle's description, the closest thing to the New Age music aesthetic are a few examples of Japanese and Indian music. Although *Hang*/handpan music is inevitably rhythmic, the narrative of pursuing 'pure sounds' or 'relaxing sounds' among *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts is common, and quite often, the musical composition itself becomes secondary. YouTube videos, such as 'HANG DRUM + WATER DRUM Yoga Music (432Hz) Positive Energy Music',[4] or 'Hang Drum + Tabla Yoga Music || Positive Energy Music for Meditation || Healing Music',[5] are popular examples of this tendency, with millions of views to date. The myths, practices, and testimonies correlating the *Hang*/handpan and New Age sound healing properties will be further examined in the later part of the dissertation.

Studies of the ambiguous cultural roots of identities in New Age narratives are also helpful in framing my research on the *Hang*/handpan. According to Kimberly J. Lau (2000), New Age movement participants believe in personal transformation through non-Western and alternative paradigms of health and wellness. The concept of the alternative, turning eastward for its inspiration and relying on sentimentalism and nostalgia for a lost past, are all central elements and themes in New Age thought, with discourses on the capacity of sound

[4] *HANG DRUM + WATER DRUM Yoga Music (432Hz) ¦Positive Energy Music,* Meditative Mind, YouTube, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCFfjp0bPuM
[5] *Hang Drum + Tabla Yoga Music || Positive Energy Music for Meditation || Healing Music,* Meditative Mind, YouTube, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2jXxO9YO4Ig

to heal being prevalent in certain Western practices which make use of Eastern musical instruments. Meanwhile, evidence of the 'borrowing' of non-Western inspiration is clearly presented in the description attached to the invention of the *Hang,* which includes the study of the function of the dome of the gong, exchanging tuning knowledge with gamelan and tabla makers, and the idea of building an Indian ghatam with melodic notes (Rohner & Schärer 2000) to name but a few. The common posture of performing with the *Hang*/handpan, also suggests a similar non-Western influence: the inverted 'wok-shaped' design sits comfortably on the performer's lap, and many enjoy playing the instrument while sitting on the floor cross-legged, reminding one of a familiar meditation position found in Hinduism (Fig. 1.3). While learning the tabla, gamelan, or ghatam may require years of dedication, the appeal and aura of these 'exotic' associations are perhaps difficult to resist when integrated in a fairly approachable musical instrument. This is an essential quality for New Age music and sound-healing practitioners who have received limited to no musical training previously. Paradoxically, while the *Hang* was born in Western Europe, players and seekers seldom associate the musical instrument with its Swiss or Western background. It is, in a certain sense, a cultural agent wrapped up in mock Eastern garb, assuming the form of a melodic 'fool-proof' music-making device created in the West.

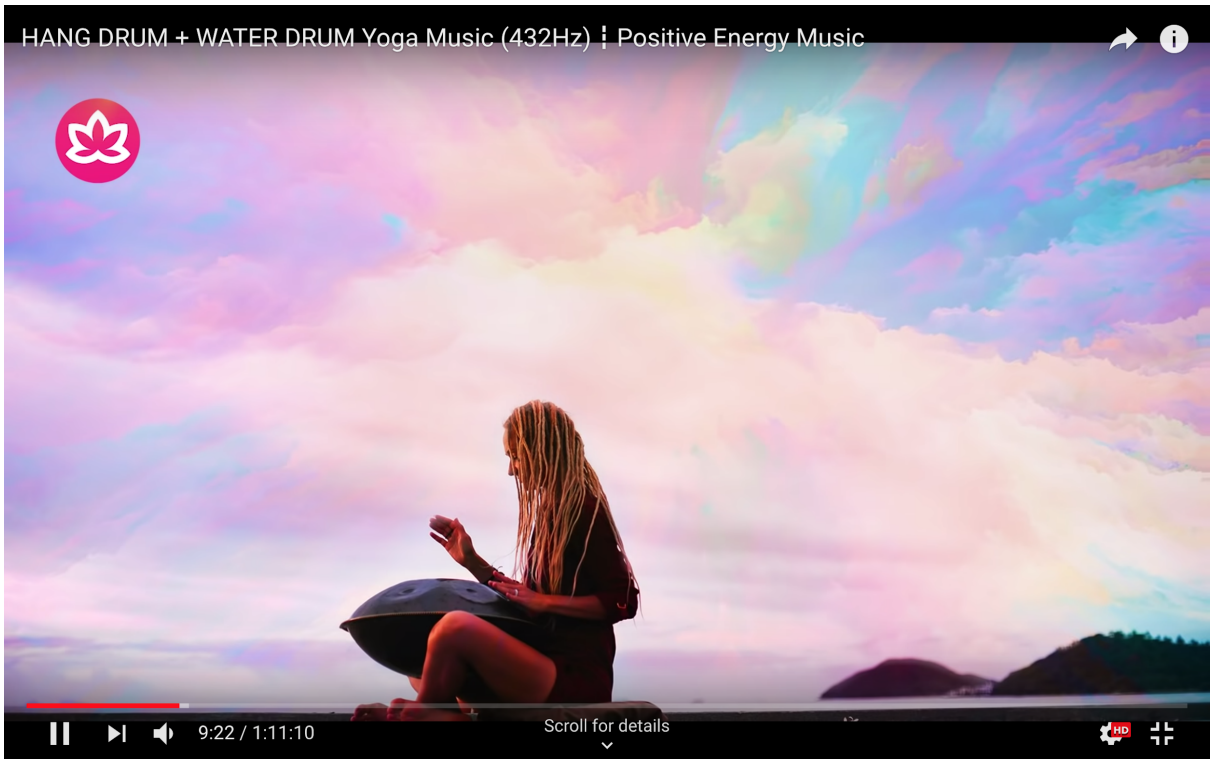


Figure 1.3: *HANG DRUM + WATER DRUM Yoga Music (432Hz) ¦Positive Energy Music.* Screenshot by the author.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *Hang* personality Waples describes himself as tapping into an ancient lineage of ‘troubadours, bards, and wandering minstrels’ (2013). Such a description encapsulates the lifestyle, mobility, and the economic strategies of some *Hang*/handpan community members. Modern hypermobility largely constitutes the social engagements of the *Hang/*handpan community, and this is perhaps best highlighted by *Hang/*handpan festivals. From *HangOut UK*, arguably the very first music festival dedicated to the *Hang*/handpan, to the blooming of *Hang/*handpan-centric festivals within the last decade, predominantly in Western Europe, US, Israel, Japan, India, Thailand, and China, these events attract participants who are able to transverse national borders with relative ease. Participants are made up of instrument enthusiasts who often ‘gather’ on the same online platform. For some of the new participants, music festivals provide an opportunity to acquire their first instrument. Handpan makers often provide instrument retuning services, displaying their own brand of instrument, or exchange instrument-making knowledge in these *Hang/*handpan festivals. Some experienced festival-goers may participate in swapping, buying, or selling *Hang/*handpan. These festivals are essential, interconnected nodes in the global *Hang/*handpan network, and are crucial for community identity construction, information exchange and, at times, the opening of economic opportunities. While the community is still relatively niche, familiar faces appear frequently in these global gatherings. The hypermobility of *Hang*/handpan community members can be framed through a concept developed by anthropologist Anthony D’Andrea (2006), that of 'neo-nomadism'. D’Andrea portrays and examines the social forms and subjectivities associated with this tendency based on his ethnographic work which navigates through Techno and New Age music events in Ibiza, Goa, and Pune. His fieldwork captures the countercultural lifestyles among these tribes of neo-nomads, or ‘expressive expatriates’, groups largely made up of a ‘variety of self-marginalized groups, such as bohemians, expatriates, hippies, ravers, freaks and New Agers’ (p97). The notion of expressive expatriates was developed to connote entrepreneurs who integrate mobility and geographical displacement into the elaboration of economic strategies and expressive lifestyles (2006). The concept acts as a counterpoint in migration studies, departing from the theory which generally focuses upon ‘predominantly utilitarian’ subjects, essentializing the understanding of global subject mobility (2007, p7). Often, these expressive expatriates constitute what D’Andrea argues is ‘a negative diaspora’ (2006, p102), in which subjects identify themselves as people who ‘despise homeland-centered identities’ among the trans-ethnic dispersed (ibid). The neo-nomadism of Techno and New Age countercultures entails postidentitarian subjectivity, alternative and fluid forms of self-formation (2006).

In this light, one can make better sense of the importance and functionalities of global *Hang*/handpan festivals, and perhaps even more so of *Hang*/handpan players turning into travelling street performers. Geographical displacement, in this context, is essential for potential economic opportunities and the ways in which subjectivity and identity can be constructed. With the help of easy-access design, the 'exotic' sound and look of the instrument (and sometimes the carefully-cultivated look of the player too), amateur players often draw attention to themselves, and gain monetary rewards from, street performances, with some even finding ways to support their border-crossing journeys by busking. I have hosted buskers from Japan, Taiwan, Israel and Sweden who have couch-surfed their way through London, sustaining the costs of their international travel largely through tips from playing *Hang*/handpan. It would be fair to say, then, that in the *Hang*/handpan resides the power to transform individuals, even musical amateurs, into mobile entrepreneurs monetizing their expressive lifestyles.

1.7 Methodology

Learning to perform the *Hang*/handpan is a prerequisite to developing an understanding of the community, since it is the price of admission to gaining an 'insider' ethnological and phenomenological perspective on the phenomenon. As a fellow handpan player, I was invited frequently to festivals, workshops, performances, and some private gatherings involving the *Hang*/handpan. During my field trips, I was often taken care of and sheltered when visiting instrument makers abroad. As an identified community member, I was able to engage in deeper conversations with informants where some discussions regarding *Hang*/handpan were otherwise not accessible, as relatively critical opinions were often absent from the public domain. Although I developed a sense of community through my digital and physical interactions with fellow *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts, the idea of a 'community' remains elusive and ambiguous, and thus the community this dissertation is dealing with needs specification.

The meaning of community in this research is multi-faceted. The *Hang*/handpan community is indeed a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) in which participants share a common interest in the instrument, and through the exchange of knowledge, skills, experiences, and information regarding *Hang*/handpan, collective identity is constructed and maintained. While the *Hang*/handpan is relatively niche, it is largely an online music community of practice in which members exchange musical and instrument-related knowledge in cyberspace (Waldron 2009). However, the *Hang*/handpan community is also an imagined community (Anderson 1983), particularly for global New Age subjects

and neo-nomads to actively disperse and dissolve their inherited, nation-state-oriented identities (D'Andrea 2007). Thus, the term 'community' in this dissertation covers the virtual and physical network of participants in activities surrounding the *Hang*/handpan. The term also describes global *Hang*/handpan practitioners who share a common imagination and a pursuit of a new identity and means of shaping their subjectivity, but who perhaps have never met virtually or in reality.

To a certain degree, gaining an 'insider' perspective of the community requires participation in *Hang*/handpan gatherings and festivals. During the research period, the two most recognised *Hang*/handpan festivals were *HangOut UK* (abbreviation: HOUK), and *HangOut USA* (abbreviation: HOUSA). Started in 2007, HOUK is arguably the world's first annual music festival dedicated to the instrument. The first HOUK was attended by a small crowd of 32 festival-goers, with participants from Scotland, Germany, and New Zealand. It steadily grew to become the annual pinnacle event of the community. Notwithstanding the growing interest in the event, HOUK organisers set a limit of 220 participants as the maximum capacity for the event, with tickets selling for relatively moderate prices (in 2007, a four-day long-weekend ticket cost GBP 55), and the festival location has remained unchanged through the years, with the festival taking place in Mellow Farm, Farnham. While residing in London, I was able to participate in the four-day immersive experience that is HOUK from 2016 onwards. In some senses I was highly fortunate, since HOUK 2016 was essentially the 10th anniversary of the event, a significant milestone for the *Hang*/handpan community.

In 2017, I participated in an artist residency programme located in New York City which was funded by the Asia Cultural Council. During my residency, I travelled to North Carolina for HOUSA (Fig 1.4) where I witnessed a relatively costlier music festival, where New Age practices were more visible. The festival cost USD 465 for 4 nights lodging in a private room, and vegan catering was provided by a fellow handpan maker. The festival performance line-up was intriguing, with performers being predominantly female music amateurs. As a musician from a rock, jazz and experimental background, this was perhaps the first music festival I attended with largely non-male performers. The demographic of the UK/US *Hang*/handpan festivals is largely white, with a fair proportion of middle-class and middle-aged participants, and a strong presence of female *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts. Intriguingly, I was told by several handpan makers that their clients are often female. Women have always played a significant role in the community, from the *Hang* inventor Schärer to the rather high proportion of female community participants and festival performers.



Figure 1.4: Group picture in HOUSA 2017. Photograph by Slightly Removed Photography.

Besides attending music festivals in the UK and US, I had the experience of co-organising the first *Hang*/handpan festival in Hong Kong. After the HOUK organisers relinquished any claims to the name of the event, we named our festival in 2016 *HangOut Hong Kong* (abbreviation: HOHK). It was a compact, one day gathering in a vegan restaurant situated in a rural area, 大江埔 (Tai Kong Po). Again, female participants played a significant part of the gathering. Although a highly local and under-promoted event, Ukrainian handpan players Valeriy and Sasha Frolov were among the performers, as they were temporarily based in Hong Kong. Their participation seemingly contributed to a sense of 'international outlook' of the festival. Interestingly, while I am accustomed to hugging fellow *Hang*/handpan community participants when attending festivals and gatherings in the West, I find it awkward to do so in Hong Kong. In some sense, my attempt to duplicate the experience gained from HOUK was not possible, and it became a rather different and unique experience. Participants in Hong Kong are generally less keen on social interactions, and instead HOHK became somewhat like a one-day long *Hang*/handpan workshop, emphasising development in music technique. Surprisingly, as a Hong Kong Chinese, I did not feel like a community 'insider' in HOHK, but rather my experience was more akin to that of a music event organiser and performer. The 'failed' attempt in setting up an 'authentic' HangOut experience in Hong Kong proved to be a reflexive auto-ethnographic experience

which further complicated the ‘insider/outsider’ status in both local and global *Hang*/handpan communities as well as the emic/etic perspective of a researcher.

Being a practitioner of the instrument and participating in community events are the central ethnographic aspects of my methodology. Participation in *Hang*/handpan festivals, shows, workshops, private gatherings, busking, digital social interactions, and generating online materials regarding the instrument, provide essential means of identity construction as a handpan player and a community participant. It was crucial for me to be accepted by the community as a *Hang*/handpan enthusiast, with the ‘researcher’ and ‘informant’ relationship only being emphasised outside of community activities, usually during formal interviews. Several times, the revelation of this ‘unusual’ role created subtle tensions between me and my informants. Hence, it was necessary for me to downplay this dynamic so as not to have my informants perceive themselves as constantly being observed. Soon, I reflected on my own methods and tailored them to the specific contexts: my field notes were usually written out of sight of community members during festivals and gatherings, and formal interviews were mostly scheduled and conducted elsewhere, often taking place in cafes, pubs, at the informant’s residence, or workshop of the handpan maker.

Since 2016, I have been constantly communicating with community members physically and virtually. Informants for the dissertation have been selected mindfully for a comprehensive understanding of the instrument and the community built upon it. Interviews and personal communications were conducted frequently, and the dissertation has solicited the input of amateur *Hang*/handpan players, participants who have successfully made use of the *Hang*/handpan for the development of economic strategies, festivals and *Hang*/handpan training course organisers as well as *Hang* and handpan makers. Perhaps the last component of my method lies in the (as-yet-unattempted) empirical experience of building the instrument myself. It is certainly tempting. There is, seemingly, a trend in which *Hang*/handpan players transform into instrument makers, or at least, players attempting to tune their own instruments. Furthermore, handpan makers have their own affinity groups, and the only way to gain an ‘insider’ status in such a community is to become a maker myself. While I agree, to a certain extent, that learning how to build an instrument can be valuable from a participation standpoint (Nettl 1983 p377), it is not feasible within the time that is allotted to me for the completion of my research. However, the voice of instrument makers and the social interactions between them must not be neglected. As Richard Jones-Bamman (2017) states in his observations of US banjo makers, instrument makers are often not restricted to crafting musical objects to fulfill an individual requirement; makers also contribute to the maintenance and formation of musical communities surrounding their

creation. Perhaps this observation is of even greater significance in the case of the *Hang*/handpan: such delicate instruments require regular maintenance, and often instrument producers are actively engaged in the online surveillance of consumers and offer an active challenge to secondary market speculation and resale markets.

Aside from interacting with makers in *Hang*/handpan festivals, I visited four different handpan workshops/studios in Europe, where I heard all manner of stories and observed handpan tuning process in person. These manufacturers are Panstream (Cornwall, UK), Echo Sound Sculpture (Lenzburg, Switzerland), Soulshine Sound (Nuremberg, Germany), and Karumi Steel (Warsaw, Poland). Besides Panstream – a previously well-established Trinidadian steelpan maker in the UK – the rest are essentially DIY handpan makers who became professional instrument producers, with this transformation being facilitated with the assistance of their peers, at least to a certain degree. Personal communications within festivals and workshops were not generally designed in a rigid fashion. At times, informants would like to be notified about the questions in advance, but actual communications were always conducted spontaneously. The experience and sentiments generously shared by these handpan makers have had a considerable influence upon the ways in which the dissertation is positioned.

While the dissertation is primary a participation-based observation of the *Hang*/handpan community, I conducted an additional online questionnaire in both English and Chinese with Google Forms. The questionnaire was introduced on *Handpan.org* and its *Hang*/handpan related Facebook page in 2017, and was designed to be answered anonymously and voluntarily. There are two main justifications for the addition of this method: the questionnaire, to a certain degree, assisted me in cross-referencing the demographic of the *Hang*/handpan community (age, gender, ethnicity) with other means of observation. Also, by asking questions which intentionally invite open interpretations (e.g. the feelings towards the instrument; choosing five words subjectively in association with the instrument), the questionnaire captures the multifarious imaginations and sentiments of individual subjects. The anonymity of the questionnaire in some ways liberates the individual from the anxiety of deviating from collective expectations. The community responded generously. So far, 59 English questionnaires have been completed, and 47 in Chinese. These responses were often inspiring, revealing a certain degree of tension between individual subjectivity and the community. As supplementary data, this questionnaire remains largely a secondary reference. While the questionnaire remains available online, it has remained inactive after the initial invitations were sent out.

1.8 Participation-observation in an online *Hang*/handpan community

My sense of being an ‘insider’ of the *Hang*/handpan community was established before my first participation in HOUK. Interestingly, my way of identifying my position within the community was in truth largely constituted from learning and understanding the ‘codes’ of the community, an understanding gained primarily through online interactions with global *Hang/*handpan enthusiasts. I learnt that, to be part of the community, one has to, first and foremost, avoid calling the instrument a 'Hang Drum'. This is expressly proscribed within the community, a word which instantaneously exposes one’s shallow understanding of the history of the instrument. There are countless jokes and memes online regarding community ‘outsiders’ employing the term 'Hang Drum' (Fig. 1.5), and this mockery is behind the most popular *Hang*-related memes to this day. I learnt over time that the ability to perform is of relatively less significance in constructing the *Hang*/handpan communal bond. Instead, respect for and consolidation of the community's collective ethos is of far greater importance than technical virtuosity. The consensus that lies behind this ethos involves protocols of behaviour such as learning and circulating the right terminology, avoiding purchasing the instrument from online auction platforms (e.g. EBay), not profiting from reselling the instrument, buying instruments from makers who are considered to be a part of the community, looking after the delicate instrument with care and generally maintaining the ‘love and sharing’ orientation of the community,



Figure 1.5 Facebook meme on the taboo term 'Hang Drum', Danny Sorensen 2018. Screenshot by the author.[6]

Being a relatively niche global community, identification of the research fields for this dissertation can be a challenging task. Although the author participated in *Hang*/handpan gatherings and festivals in the UK, the US, and Hong Kong, similar annual festivals of the instrument have begun to appear in various continents. Invariably, affinity groups have begun to surface within the global scope, with the classic dichotomies of 'insider/outsider' and 'emic/etic' dualities being largely geographically determined. It is vital, then, for an ethnomusicologist to engage in participatory-observations. But with Morgan (2017) having cast the criteria of participation in question (p30), I have also interrogated the meaning of participation in this project. What and how should I get involved to better position myself for the observation and comprehensive understanding of the *Hang*/handpan community? How

[6] Danny Sorensen 2018, Facebook, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10216265239445948&set=gm.2123303264569829&type=3&theater&ifg=1

much participation is enough? How can a *Hang*/handpan practitioner gain recognition and lay claim to an 'insider' perspective within the community amidst the expeditiously growing and highly transformative global *Hang*/handpan community? The case of my informant, Chris Ng, sheds light upon methodological challenges such as these. Ng, the founder of *Handpan Union HK,* co-organiser of the HOHK festival with the author, only attended his first HOUK in 2017. However, Ng has been highly active in online forums and social media by interacting with the community, and often publishes *Hang*/handpan-related illustrations (Fig. 1.6). As a consequence of these activities, he was widely recognised and welcomed the very moment he introduced himself, without having touched any instruments in sight. I would endorse Timothy Rice's (2008) notion that 'the field is the metaphorical creation of the researcher' (p48), and it would seem that from this vantage point my frequent interactions on digital sites somewhat compensates for the physical limitations of the research. While it is obviously impossible to physically appear in all of the community gatherings that take place, I have found this to be the most constructive way of establishing and maintaining a community insider status, and this includes continuous generation of online materials and interactions with the community virtually. Through the course of my research, I have discovered that digital sites are some of the main research fields which I must return to frequently.

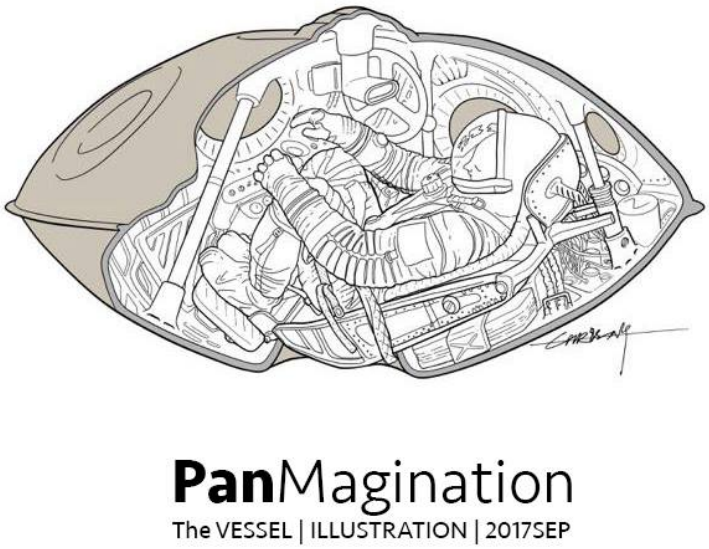


Figure 1.6 *The VESSEL*. Illustration by Chris Ng 2017.

Since the global *Hang*/handpan community depends largely upon virtual content and interactions, I therefore tried to gain recognition by participating in online worlds, particularly in periods when I was physically detached from the community. From my first encounter with the *Hang*/handpan in 2013, I have devoted myself to 'catching up' with narratives and discourses which had been produced and circulated within the online community prior to my engagement. The main digital site at the time was the popular forum dedicated to the *Hang/*handpan, named *HandPan.org*. The online forum not only accurately displays the community ethos of the global *Hang/*handpan community, the evolution of the community has been partially documented in the archives of the forum. For instance, on the forum we can find the activity of a certain Colin Foulke, a *Hang/*handpan enthusiast who joined the forum since 2009. With assistance provided from forum members, Foulke gradually gained access to essential knowledge regarding the *Hang/*handpan's development, participated in *Hang/*handpan festivals, became a handpan performer before releasing his own composition and tutorial materials, and successfully transformed himself into a handpan prosumer[7] with his own brand of handpans launching in 2014. His story in some sense demonstrates the diverse social functions of online *Hang/*handpan sites, and the ways in which sites such as these influence community development.

My role in Handpan.org was rather the role of an active-reader, as I felt myself too 'green' to start a conversation or respond. The already-constituted community appeared to me to be difficult to penetrate for newcomers. It was when the online community gradually 'migrated' to Facebook around 2014 that it became more approachable for newbies like myself, and I took the opportunity to establish my online identity within the handpan community. Like many other community members, I deliberately selected handpan images for my Facebook profile picture. This simple action of posing with *Hang/*handpan on social media proved to be the magical ticket to gaining access to participation in this global collective. Facebook users who pose with a *Hang*/handpan often actively seek connections with fellow enthusiasts whom they have never met physically. This proved to be true to a point where these 'friend-requests' became too overwhelming for me to manage, prompting me to create another Facebook account with another picture showing myself playing the handpan, and to hide traces of the *Hang*/handpan on my private account.

However, the convenience of including a handpan in my profile picture ultimately proved to be rather counter-productive to my research. I was at first invited to a field trip to *PANArt* in

[7] The role of producers and consumers blur and merge. Prosumer is a term coined by Alvin Toffler (1980)

order to interview Rohner and Schärer, but this invitation was rescinded before the trip. This was perhaps the consequence of their discovery of a picture displaying my participation in a handpan workshop in London which took place in the spring of 2017. Since then, I learned of the growing tension between *PANArt* and the international handpan makers who had adapted their invention, and that *PANArt* had been engaging in protracted legal disputes with many of them. Seemingly, the ways in which I had chosen to establish myself as a handpan player had come into contradiction with my prospects of gaining 'insider' perspective as a *PANArt* supporter. I was deeply disappointed, and have often reflected with regret upon how I could have handled these conflicts with more tact. Although Rohner has been exchanging emails with me, the dissertation has, in my eyes, failed to capture the inner lives of these seminal figures of the *Hang/*handpan culture.

For a relatively comprehensive examination of *Hang/*handpan and the ways in which the *Hang/*handpan contributes to identity construction, I found that it was necessary to conduct participant-observation sessions outside of instrument-centric gatherings. The global popularity of the *Hang/*handpan is heavily entwined with the instrument's appearance in street performances, and media representations of these performances. Since 2016, I have been busking frequently with handpans in the streets of London. Additionally, during my artist residency programme in New York City in 2017, I spent three months in New York City underground stations as a busker (Fig 1.7), and I composed short but duplicative rhythm patterns specifically for this occasion. I also busked in the underground stations in Montreal, but for a relatively short amount of time. Expanding upon Brentlinger's (2019) concept of digital busking, the complex interrelations between street performance and social media content will be scrutinised further in the course of the dissertation.



Figure 1.7 *Handpan Remedy presents: 8 rhythms for New York subway.* Screenshot by the author.[8]

Generally, I have made use of the handpan in two ways in my own musical career. In 2016, I formed an experimental duo in Hong Kong named 問米(Ask Rice).[9] In this duo project, I would connect the handpan to piezo microphones routed through multiple guitar effect processors and then amplified by a sound system. My performance partner, a vocalist with the artist name 年華(Linwah), would improvise vocally on top of the processed handpan sound. While the duo project has been successful within the experimental music scene, this processed or electrified handpan sound has failed to draw attention from the *Hang*/handpan community. The performance invitations we received as 問米 came exclusively from experimental music organisers. With this in mind, I deliberately placed a pronounced emphasis upon my alternative identity as a street performer who plays simple catchy acoustic handpan music. Street performances in New York City were well planned, as I discovered that social media documentation of *Hang*/handpan street performances is generally valued by the community. In some sense, the generation of online representations such as these correspond to the online activity expected of members of the community. Until now, I have uploaded 17 videos with me performing with handpans on social media, 10 of which I consider to be experimental, these being the videos which received the lowest hit rates.

[8] *Handpan Remedy presents: 8 rhythms for New York subway*, Today's Remedy, YouTube, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGH8275Iwgk&t=168s
[9] 問米 is an ancient way of Chinese communication with ancestors.

The history and global dissemination of the *Hang*/handpan has never escaped the digitalism from which it was born. The *Hang* came out in the year 2000, which means that it can be said that the instrument 'grew up' with the internet age. Although there are only a handful of academic writings regarding the *Hang*/handpan, the internet has been extremely resourceful for the purposes of this dissertation. Much of the discussion around the instrument's trade, construction, the required musical technique as well as the mystique and stories surrounding it are traceable in online forums and social media. Besides Waples' wonderful description of how the internet is 'busking for him', the *Hang*/handpan community also learns, teaches, socialises, debates, and constructs identity and subjectivity online. As a community participant, I am often intrigued by the ways in which fellow *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts are constantly connected virtually, relying much less upon physical exchanges.

However, the inner lives of *Hang*/handpan community participants are more challenging to capture digitally. Between *Hang*/handpan festivals and gatherings, I often meet up with *Hang*/handpan players and makers who are aware of the fact that I am conducting research on the community. In the course of these private meetings, participants have often expressed relatively critical opinions which they keep to themselves in public. These expressions often contrast with the appearance of harmony and accord within the *Hang*/handpan community, and the informants generally do not feel comfortable in making these statements in public, either physically or digitally. These valuable individual opinions demonstrate the complex interplay between individual subjectivity and collective identity. With this in mind, the dissertation has dedicated two separate chapters to examining identity construction and maintenance of this identity on an individual basis, and another chapter being dedicated to the collective identity of the *Hang*/handpan community.

In this light, online and offline research of the *Hang*/handpan global dissemination are indeed part of the same whole, rather than being separable fields. However, as scholars who have reflected on their own cyber-ethnographic (or digital ethnography/online ethnography) work have reminded us, ethnography in cyber-space raises new ethical challenges (see e.g. Ward 1999; Hodkinson 2002; Reiley 2003; Gajjala 2006; Morgan 2017). As a researcher, it is not feasible to make an announcement or ask for permission from everyone I have encountered on social media and online forums, as members frequently come and go. In this sense, the online *Hang*/handpan community is unstable in nature, and my relationships with these members could be transitory (Ward 1999). It is also necessary to consider that what has been said and posted online could disclose more information than an informant would be prepared to consider as research data, thus contributing to an ongoing ethical debate about

the balance between the use of informant internet data and informant protection. Interestingly, while Gajjala's (2006) own experience of asking for permission to conduct an ethnographic study upon an online group created a backlash in which some members saw the group as a closed community that should not be subject to outside scrutiny, the online *Hang/*handpan community has on the contrary generally expressed tremendous support for *Hang/*handpan-related research. Apart from the unfortunate course of events with *PANArt,* not once have I been turned down for an interview or personal conversation. Moreover, informants often remind me that my work is important, and that they would love to read my dissertation upon completion. Informants generally regard the global *Hang/*handpan phenomenon, and the community constructed with the instrument, as worthwhile subjects of study and research. These *Hang/*handpan community participants often consider themselves as contributors to a historical and unique event. While there is no 'one size fits all' guideline for online ethnomusicology research, the questions which surround the pursuit of an ethically and methodologically appropriate framework generate the tensions which have given form to my research and to this field of study more generally.

1.9 Thesis Structure

My dissertation begins by providing an overview of the *Hang/*handpan background and development, including corporate histories of *PANArt* and a significant handpan maker. The overview provides essential information on the similarities and differences between the *Hang* and the handpan. Chapter one is the introduction of the dissertation. Chapter two considers the technical development of the *Hang* and handpan, which begins with a brief but crucial history of the Trinidadian steelpan. The steelpan's history, the development of its construction as well as the social contexts of its colonial history are presented as the premises of a historical and cultural understanding of the *Hang* invention. Then, the dissertation summarises the technical development of the *Hang* stretching over 13 years. This is followed by an examination of the handpan, which continues to grow in various directions in terms of scales and tuning systems, material choice, geometrical design and so on. The chapter ends with the emergence of the electro-acoustic handpan, the electronic handpan and the digital handpan.

Chapter three examines the roles of the *Hang/*handpan makers. This begins with the corporate history of *PANArt,* formed by Rohner and Schärer. *PANArt* not only invented the *Hang,* the instrument company continues to invent and develop assorted musical instruments with the patented material *Pang*. However, apart from the highly successful *Hang,* the rest has, to date, attracted a far less enthusiastic public response. The chapter

argues that the corporate philosophy of *PANArt* has progressed with the development of the *Hang.* Such a philosophical progression, in some sense, corresponds to and is consistent with the consequent termination of *Hang* production, and has influenced how *PANArt* envisions the instruments which have followed since, all of which generally emphasise implementation in a music ensemble setting. Then the chapter moves on to the comparatively more collaboratively-driven handpan, starting by interrogating the circumstances which led to the emergence of the *Hang* adaptations in and around 2007. Field work and personal conversations with Ezahn Bueraheng and his handpan workshop in Lenzburg, Switzerland, are referenced extensively here. Finally, the chapter investigates how potential patent and copyright infringements have sparked legal conflicts between *PANArt* and international handpan makers.

Then, the dissertation focuses upon the use of the *Hang*/handpan. Chapter four examines how the relatively simple construction of the *Hang*/handpan appeals to music amateurs. With musical notes which are generally diatonic, musical amateurs can reach basic competency in the instrument almost instantaneously. Even if these *Hang*/handpan amateurs have often had unsatisfactory experiences previously in learning musical instruments, the highly approachable *Hang*/handpan in some sense 'revives' the unexplored musical lives within such amateurs. The dissertation then takes up the discussion of *Hang*/handpan players who have begun performing the instrument with a wide range of vocal techniques. The next section scrutinises how folk singing, yodelling, beat-boxing, *Khoomei* and *Konnakol* are incorporated into *Hang*/handpan performances. Interestingly, despite the *Hang* being a Western creation, it has been seamlessly assimilated within the 'world music' market. By referencing the case of the global dissemination of the didjeridu, the dissertation examines how the *Hang*/handpan follows a similar trajectory in the 'world music' category. The relatively new and intriguing instrument attracts attention with great ease, and seemingly invites its users to explore creative new ways of finding audiences across music genres. Currently, the sound of *Hang*/handpan has been employed by international music icons, independent bands and techno musicians, with each of these harnessing the handpan as a tool to advance the development of their careers.

The rest of Chapter four scrutinises how the *Hang*/handpan is implemented in unique settings outside conventional forms of musical composition and performance. The *Hang*/handpan holds great appeal to New Age sound healing practitioners who make extensive use of the instrument in new age music composition and in increasingly trendy sound healing sessions. The brief history and theoretical discourse of New Age music is covered first in this chapter, which then paves way to an understanding of how the

Hang/handpan is implemented in similar discourses. Lastly, the chapter examines an arguably new approach in music performance, which is specific to *PANArt Hang* and Pang Instruments, a method known as 'harking'. The dissertation suggests that the development of harking is largely parallel to the history of the *Hang*, with *PANArt* having discovered a highly subjective improvisation method blended with concepts borrowed from Eastern-meditation. Harking, in some sense, is a concept developed to direct practices of musicking with *PANArt* instruments, distilled from the corporate philosophy of the company.

In Chapter five and six, the dissertation deals with how the *Hang*/handpan contributes to identity construction and maintenance. Chapter five largely focuses upon the collective identity of the *Hang*/handpan community. Here, I argue that the *Hang*/handpan community can at the very least be identified in three distinct ways, as a producer-consumer network community, a community of affect, and a cosmopolitical community. The chapter begins with further examination of the intriguing connections between producer and consumer within the *Hang*/handpan community, and argues that the ways in which small-scale instrument makers have advocated and insisted upon direct customer interactions has had a pronounced influence upon the values which circulate in the *Hang*/handpan community. The established identity of the instrument and the community ethos which has crystallized around it are largely associated with ‘positive’ sentiments and affects. The dissertation identifies how the instruments are often infused with gift-like properties and positive affects such as hopefulness and gratitude, affects which largely determine the tonality of the collective. The rest of Chapter five examines musical cosmopolitanism in the *Hang*/handpan community. Although the *Hang* was invented by Swiss instrument makers, the instrument is not associated with a fixed nationality or place of birth. I argue that the nebulousness of the instrument's identity invites a particular type of cosmopolitical imagination: non-national cosmopolitanism. The dissertation then explores the ways in which this imagination of ‘non-nationality’ plays a prominent role in collective identity construction.

Chapter six deals with the *Hang*/handpan and the forms of identity construction that it precipitates on an individual basis. However, the dissertation attempts to demonstrate the complex interplay between individual and communal identity. Hence, the chapter begins with a deeper examination of New Ageism in the *Hang*/handpan community. New Ageism has been identified in scholarly accounts as a highly individualistic endeavour which emphasises the self generally. However, ethnographic research of the *Hang*/handpan community suggests that New Age subjects often display social behaviours which contribute to communal solidarity. The messiness of the *Hang*/handpan identity also invites a specific way of constructing subjectivity which is referred to as 'neo-nomadism'. The neo-nomad generally

combines physical displacement with the elaboration of economic strategies, and displays a certain sense of refusal towards national-centric identities. This section examines how a certain proportion of *Hang/*handpan performers correspond to such a description, practising a neo-nomadic lifestyle which traverses and transcends borders. Finally, the dissertation explains how the visual identity and signature of the *Hang/*handpan at least partially resides in cultural symbols drawn from ufology and Oriental fantasies. The conflation of these widely-ranging subcultural symbols arguably assist *Hang/*handpan enthusiasts in constructing their identities, particularly in the age of social media. This section demonstrates how the peculiar appearance of the *Hang/*handpan, empowers individuals in constructing their subcultural identities in successfully drawing attention to themselves for the purposes of and economic opportunity.

Finally, Chapter seven provides the conclusions to the thesis overall.

Chapter 2: The Invention and Development of the *Hang*/handpan

2.1 Introduction

By integrating discussions of the cultural context of the birth of the Trinidadian steelpan, treated as the pre-history of the *Hang,* the development of the *Hang* in Switzerland, the extended history of *Hang*'s global adaptation, the handpan and the evolution of its development, this chapter recounts the story of the *Hang* and its various afterlives. Although the materiality and structural development of the instrument is significant, such a development is intrinsically tied to the specific history and cultural context of its formation. I argue that to fully understand the complexity of the *Hang*'s history and development, a thorough historical investigation is required, beginning with the colonial history of Trinidad, the nation in which the steelpan was born. Hence, this chapter will begin with the history of the birth of the Trinidadian steelpan.

After a brief introduction to the Trinidadian steelpan's history, the chapter scrutinises how the *Hang* was conceived, taking up different stages of the *Hang's* development, and how the Trinidadian steelpan community and the general public have offered different responds to the instrument's intriguing design.

The global demand of the highly niche *Hang* led to a demand for its adaptation into a surrogate instrument, generally known as the handpan. Handpan makers have appeared gradually internationally, and have displayed a seemingly liberal approach in instrument development. The rest of the chapter examines the various significant approaches towards handpan development, as well as the ways in which the *Hang* adaptations have eventually established new audiences with the introduction of innovative alterations, or arguably improvements, which set the handpan apart from the original *Hang.*

2.2 Early history of the Trinidadian steelpan

The history of the Trinidadian steelpan has been covered by many authors,[10] who point out that a comprehensive understanding of the steelpan movement should encompass the history of colonialism and decolonization, class hegemony and resistance, as well as

[10] For a deeper understanding for the history of Trinidad steelpan, readers are suggested to read publications from three Trinidad scholars: Lloyd Braithwaite (1954), J.D. Elder (1964), and Errol Hill (1972), and scholars which were influenced by these analytical studies, such as Percival Borde (1973), Stephen Stuempfle (1995), Felix F. I. R. Blake (1995), Shannon Dudley (2008), and Angela Smith (2012).

touching upon questions of ethnic diversity and creolization (Stuempfle 1995). Although this is not a research project dedicated to the steelpan, Stuempfle's approach to studying the Trinidadian steelpan can be taken as a useful model for considering the history and development of the *Hang*.

Today, it is widely believed that on his third voyage in 1498, Christopher Columbus reached an island close to the north-eastern coast of Venezuela, located on the continental shelf of South America. Originally named *lëre* (or Land of the Hummingbird) by the Arawakan-speaking inhabitants, Columbus named it *La Isla de la Trinidad,* 'The Island of the Trinity' and eventually shortened the name to simply 'Trinidad'. The crenelated Spanish colony was raided by the Dutch, French, and Britons through the 17th century and became a British colony in the year 1797. This brought 300 years of Spanish rule to an end, and Trinidad continued to be part of the British Empire until 1962. To develop a sugar plantation economy, African slaves were imported in large numbers until the slave trade was prohibited in 1807.

A new musical form with strong West African influences called 'calypso' developed in Trinidad in the 17th century, with the form representing a way of documenting current events and personal feelings in a song. The then-colonial government banned the use of African skin membrane drums in 1884, out of 'fear of their power to call together and organize large groups of people in protest' (Henke 2001) after several unsuccessful slave revolts. Notwithstanding official restrictions, Trinidadians continued to improvise with new musical instruments developed out of everyday objects. Bamboo poles were cut into different lengths, which the player could pound on the ground to produce different sounds. Different 'bands' could be identified through different distinctive rhythms, hence the birth of the bamboo tamboo band. The term 'tamboo', comes from 'tambour', the French word for drum, hence 'bamboo tamboo' means literally 'bamboo drum'. For similar reasons as those which inspired the drum ban, bamboo tamboo bands were outlawed in the late 1930s.
The ban of the bamboo tamboo band led Trinidadians to explore the production of rhythmic sounds with any objects they could find: garbage cans lids, old car parts, empty oil barrels, biscuit cans, butter tins, and so on. After a great deal of musical activity and experimentation took place among the youths of Port-of-Spain, bamboo drums were gradually replaced, with bamboo tamboo bands evolving to become 'iron bands' that performed on the street, especially during times of festive carnivals. Trinidad was not only a British colony but also acted as an important source of crude oil. For instance, in 1930, Trinidad alone was responsible for producing over 40% of the British Empire's oil (Mulchansingh 1971).

Besides the British Empire, the United States military also set foot on Trinidad. World War Two broke out in 1939. For the exchange of United States warships, Britain entered a 99-year lease agreement with her American allies for land designated for the construction of military bases in the strategically-located island colony of Trinidad. The presence of the American bases in Trinidad meant that there were great demands for petroleum. This natural resource of the Trinidadian land was drilled and exported by these two Western powers. Unlike today, where 'barrels' are mostly metaphorical units of oil trade, the Western standardized 55-gallon steel oil barrels were actually used as containers in the 1940s by the British and Americans to facilitate the transport of oil and petroleum. For creative Trinidadians who were searching for the perfect material to build musical instruments, these 55-gallon oil drums were constructed of a better calibre steel than the biscuit can drum, with larger surfaces on the top and bottom. Thus, the tone produced from these oil drums was more satisfactory. For these reasons, it became the standard material for the production of steelpans.

However, just as Bates (2012) attempts to investigate the agentive power exerted by the material of the saz in its crafting (p383-384), the symbolic meaning of the steel oil barrel should also be examined if we are to develop an understanding of the Trinidad steelpan. The invention of the container steel drum is credited to Elizabeth Cochrane (pen name Nellie Bly), with her first cylindrical steel oil drum patented in 1905 (Gay 2000). Although in the patent Cochrane specified that her invention was to be known as the 'barrel', the word 'drum' was later taken up to distinguish it from the wooden and early steel barrels which had a curved geometry. During World War Two, a thinner 18-gauge drum was widely adopted for weight efficiency. According to Gay (2000 p5), this created an opportunity for steelpan players to craft instruments out of the drums and allowed players to carry them around.

Could the cultural context, symbolic meaning, and agentive power of the barrel have transmitted themselves to the object which would be crafted from it afterwards? It is certainly convincing in the case of the steelpan's invention. During the development of the steelpan in the 1930s, social unrest due to high inflation, low wages, and unemployment could be seen in Trinidad. Black and East Indian sugar estate and oil field workers were particularly active in strikes and demonstrations (Aho 1987). Labour riots broke out in 1937, caused by hiring and pay discrimination. Consciousness of racial exploitation in Trinidad's oil, sugar and other enterprises had been awakened (p32). Perhaps these steel oil drums were the best representations of the social and political unrest in which the steelpan was invented: the steel drums symbolised the exploitation of the Trinidadians. Similar to the fictional Red Violin in François Girard's movie, in which the violin maker mixes his wife's blood into the varnish,

the container which symbolized the draining of Trinidadian blood and vitality had been appropriated and transformed by the people into something beautiful. This transformation symbolised how the Trinidadians transcended their colonial past and empowered themselves. To a certain degree, the very existence of the steelpan was made possible by colonial suppression and exploitation, the second world war, global trade, and Trinidadian rebellion and emancipation.

The foundation and the procedure of steelpan tuning were developed in the 1940s, and continued to develop through the exchange of ideas among different tuners as well as rivalries which developed among tuners would competing among each other to build instruments with as many notes as possible (ibid.). Panmen could usually be found competing over how many notes a tuner could temper in a pan, and also on the complexity of the performed music. Besides the *ping pong*[11], other steelpan sizes and designs were also introduced to the steelband—a larger version of the kittle[12] called the *balay* or *grumbler*, a large single noted *cuff boom*, so on and so forth. It is important to note as well that a convex version of the *ping pong* was also available in the 1940s, and the significance of this convex *ping pong* will be explained in the later part of this chapter.

1951 marked a significant milestone for the global dissemination of the steelpan: Trinidad's new steel bands put forward their best players - including panman Sterling Betancourt, a major figure in pioneering the steelpan in the UK and Europe - to join the *Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra for the Festival of Britain*. Steelpan players would play songs that were familiar to the Europeans, but re-interpreted through instruments that they had never heard before: 'It's familiar, they play songs that we know, but it's also very exotic, and we like that.' (Wall). Betancourt (made MBE in 2002) stayed on in England, forming the first steelband combo in the UK with pianist Russell Henderson and doo-doop (a bass with only two notes) player Ralph Cherrie and later Mervyn Constantine. Betancourt was also the key figure in the establishment of the *Notting Hill Panorama* competition in London (Olsen 2016), which can now be found in the English-speaking Caribbean, as well as some European, US, and Asian cities. The globalisation of the Trinidad Carnival is directly linked to the expansion of the North Atlantic Caribbean diaspora after the Second World War, in response to demand for low-cost immigrant labour (Nurse 1999). These steelpan competitions and carnivals play

[11] In the '*History and Development of Steeland'* video tape (1987), lecturer Lennox Pierre mentioned Mannette's achievement in tuning a small hand-held pan named the *ping pong* with two diatonic scales in 1947 (Stuempfle 1995)

[12] The name 'kittle' comes from military kettle drum, a three-note melody pan made from a zinc or paint can

a significant role in the cultural restoration and formation of identity politics among West Indian diasporas (Nurse 1999; Ramnarine 2004; 2007; Olsen 2016). This culture exists at varying rates of intensity in different parts of the world, and all are related to the instrument, its distinctive tone, its history and ability to bring people together (Olsen 2016).

The once-unique sound of the Trinidadian steelpan has been disseminated globally with the help of carnivals and diasporic communities. Its global popularity has been further developed by music education programmes mainly across Europe and the U.S., and with good reason. Having culturally relevant practices in education systems generates subjective positions and encourages learning among people with Caribbean heritage (Walrond 2007; Williams 2008). For everyone else, it is a great tool to precipitate the blending of multiple cultures, races and ethnicities (Bishop 2019). Additionally, it is one of the most approachable instruments for beginners at all levels, since the technique required to produce a good sound out of it is relatively simple (Williams 2008). However, it is the history and symbolic meaning of the Trinidadian steelpan which has made the musical instrument tremendously valuable in education. The steelpan's history is of great benefit to those who study the pans to learn the plight of the oppressed Africans under slavery and colonialism, and how their freedom has been won. These struggles and forms of resistance could be taught from economic, cultural, and social perspectives, telling the story of a struggle of a people to preserve its own music, as well as the ways in which this music was transformed when it was restricted. Among the diasporas, the steelpan is symbolised as an instrument of resistance (Walrond 2007; Bishop 2019). All of this provides the background to the later global dissemination of the *Hang*/handpan.

2.3 The birth of the *Hang*

According to Swiss tuner Werner Egger (2008), between 1976 to 77, Betancourt would often perform in Zurich hotels, and knowledge of the steelpan began to spread across Switzerland. Egger wrote an online article, '*History of the steelpan in Switzerland*',[13] summarising his account of the history and development of the Swiss steelpan. The concert of the Trinidadian Steelband at the *Bernfest* of 1976 attracted some local attention. Young Bernese Felix Rohner attempted to build a steelpan after experiencing the Trinidadians' sound. Rohner studied the tuning method of Elliot 'Ellie' Manette and shortly after exchanged his experiences with fellow European tuners. In 1985, he founded the *Steel Panmanufaktur*

[13] *History of the steelpan in Switzerland,* last accessed 12 September 2020. https://www.pan-jumbie.com/history-of-the-steelpan-in-switzerland/

Bern and started his own professional steelpan tuning career. From 1985 to 1993, Rohner supplied dozens of steelbands with his instruments, largely produced in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The '*PanArt Steel Panfactory Inc*.' (*PanArt* is currently written as *PANArt*) was founded in 1993. Together with steelpan tuner Sabina Schärer, who joined *PanArt* in 1995, the two were among the few steelpan tuners who dedicated their time to material development, to 'improve the pitch retention of this relatively young instrument' (Hangbauhaus newsletter 2008). By the mid 1990s, *PanArt* developed a gas nitrided sheet steel, which they later named *Pang*.

Nitriding is a treatment process which increases hardness and corrosion resistance. Nitriding steel to make machine and car parts is not uncommon. The medium for nitriding could exist in plasma, salt bath or in powdered form. Gas-nitriding on sheet metal, on the other hand, is less common, and applying such technology on musical instruments is even rarer. Using gas-nitrided steel sheets to replace 'raw' steel oil drums in the building of steelpans could improve durability, metal fatigue strength, and to a certain extent provide corrosion protection. One of the main problems in building steelpans from nitride steel lies in the fact that the stiffness makes it difficult for the metal to stretch. Therefore, *PanArt* has divided the process into two parts: shaping by deep drawing the metal sheet with their own machinery, and then, when the 'sinking' is complete, they gas-nitride the metal before the tuning process (Rohner & Schärer 2000). Rather than hardening and strengthening the bottom of a steel oil drum by stretching it with hammers, they endowed this deep-drawn hemisphere with a more consistent thickness (Rohner & Schärer 2007). *PanArt* not only started building steelpans with this newly developed material, they also attempted to create new musical instruments out of it. This material gradually became the foundation of the sonic exploration for the future of PanArt, and remains the fundamental material for the entirety of *PanArt's* musical instrumentarium to date.

One of the most important roles of the steelpan tuner in general is to be able to service an out-of-tune steelpan. It is quite common among steelpan players to have their instruments serviced once or even twice a year. One of *PANArt*'s customers in the late 1990s was Reto Weber, a Swiss jazz and world music percussionist who is also the leader of a trio and percussion orchestra under his own name. He plays a wide range of percussion instruments, including the steelpan, gongs, bells, balaphones, and ghatam among others. It was during Weber's visit to *PANArt* for the maintenance of his steelpan in November 1999 that the seed for the idea of the *Hang* was sown. Having handed over the steelpan for retuning, Weber demonstrated his technique on the ghatam – an ancient south Indian percussion instrument which was developed from clay water jugs (Fig. 2.1) – to Rohner and Schärer. After the

demonstration, Weber expressed his desire for ‘a sounding pot in steel with some notes to play with the hands’ (Handpansmagazine 2011). He shared a vignette with the *PANArt* tuners regarding an incident in India, in which he attempted to play three ghatams in different sizes. He discovered three tonally different sounds were produced. An Indian master musician asked him, ‘what are you doing? We never play three ghatams.’ Thereafter, he took some time to rethink what he was actually trying to achieve as a European musician, and the idea of a ghatam with different musical notes was born (Castan & Pagnon 2006). Not long after, Schärer glued two already-tuned prototype instrument shells together, top to top, and cut a hole into one of them. This bulky metallic globe 60cm in diameter was later named the ‘Baby Hang’ (Paschko 2015). This was effectively the first prototype of the *Hang*. The development of a more playable design evolved, and in the end *PANArt* settled with:

> *the technology of deep drawing, the gas nitrided steel, the dome geometry of the notes, the octave-fifth tuning. The prototype had to be reduced in diameter from 60 cm to 50 cm to make it possible to be played on the lap. The challenge was to bring the Helmholtz resonator, the central gong-like sound, and the tone circle, into a unified musical conception. Fewer notes could be tuned in, which meant that we would have to leave the chromatic scale behind and explore the large world of tonal systems. After one year the Hang was ready to be presented at the Frankfurt Music Fair. To play harmonically tuned steel with the hands was a new dimension. That is the reason we called it the Hang, which means ‘hand’ in the Bernese dialect* (Rohner & Schärer 2007, p2).



Figure 2.1 *Front line: Prototype Hang from November 1999 (left), Ghatam (right); second line: Three Hanghang built in 2007, 2006 and 2005 respectively (from the left to the right).* Photograph by Michael Paschko 2007, CC BY-SA 3.0.

A new musical instrument prototype was being tested in 1999. By the year 2000, it was finalised and introduced to the world. It was no longer played by mallets, but by bare hands. Rohner and Schärer named their new creation the *Hang*, (German pronunciation: [haŋ]; *Hanghang* for plural), meaning 'hand' in Bernese German. The finalised *Hang* was made, as throughout the rest of the instrument production period, with two shells which are deep-drawn with a metal stamping machine. On the top shell, a convex tone field in the middle is formed, which can produce the lowest possible note, with 7 to 9 higher pitched notes formed around it (Fig. 2.2). This lowest convex note in the centre is called the 'ding', *PANArt* named the rest of the tone fields surrounding the ding 'chorus', these tone fields consist of a concave 'dimple' in the centre. Considering *PANArt* has been continuously experimenting with the production of the *Hang,* and both construction and cosmetic differences can be observed in different development stages, the shaping and tuning method revealed in 2007 International Symposium on Musical Acoustics (abbreviation: ISMA), provides a valuable guide to how *Hanghang* were made in general: Two raw steel shells, bottom and top, are deep drawn with machinery from a common metal sheet. These shells are gas-nitrided in an oven with an atmosphere of ammonia at a temperature of 600° C for several hours. Seven to eight oval domes are stamped around the ding by a hammer. A plastic ball between 3-5 cm

in diameter is selected, to produce different sizes of a circular recess in the center to produce each dome. The plastic ball is pushed inward by a wooden block that takes a direct blow of the heavy hammer. Then the shell goes through a heat treatment, annealing, in the 400°C heated kiln for 15 minutes (Rohner & Schärer 2007). *PANArt* claims that the annealing helps raise the tensile strength, increases the hardness of the core, and also relaxes the stresses introduced within the meta. The process also diffuses the brass coating into the surface of the shell when brass coating was introduced in the later stage of instrument development (Rohner & Schärer 2007).

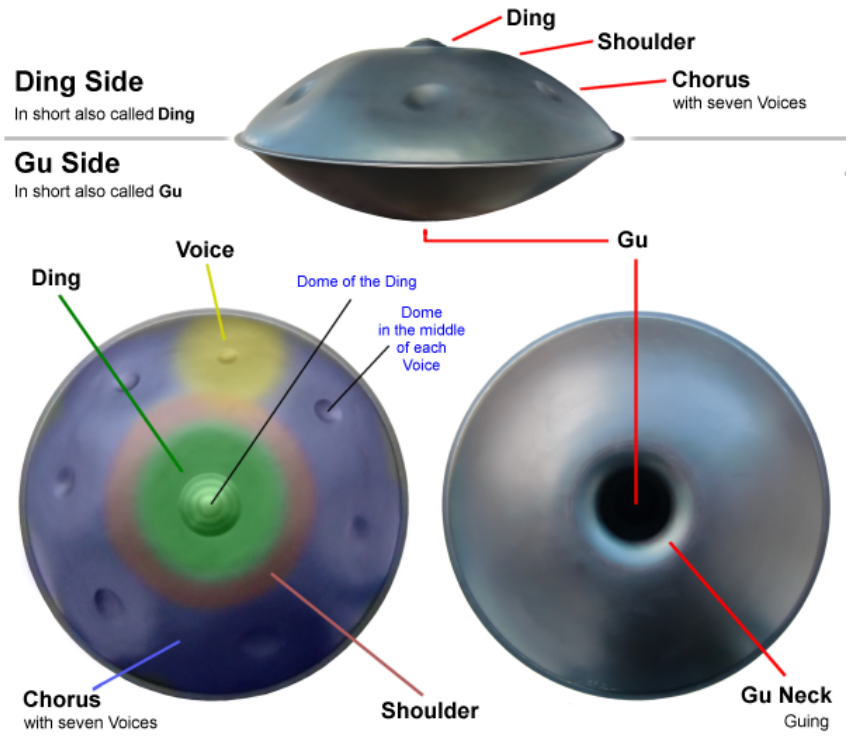


Figure 2.2 Naming different parts of the *Hang.* Illustration by Michael Paschko.[14]

Above is a general and brief understanding of the 'shaping' stage. A more refined 'tuning' stage usually comes after, but, as explained by the *Hang* makers, shaping and tuning is a complex nonlinear system in which each determines the other (Rohner & Schärer 2007). The tuning stage requires hammering the dome areas, forming a curvature around the note which produces the desired musical pitch. This tuned shell is heated and re-tuned several times for temperament. The bottom half of the shell has no musical note but an opening, named 'gu'. This opening gives the *Hang* vessel-like properties. Similar to a vase's neck, the

[14] *Hang,* Michael Paschko, last accessed 17 February 2023. https://www.hangblog.org/wp-content/uploads/zonen-des-hang_2_en-.png

‘gu’ is curved and extends inwardly. The entire chamber should resound when the *Hang* is struck anywhere. This resounding mechanism is inspired by the concept of a Helmholtz resonator (Rohner & Schärer 2013). A Helmholtz resonator is a hollow sphere with a short, small-diameter neck and a single orifice providing communication between the interior of the vessel and the outside air, and which resonates with one single discrete frequency. Although the ‘gu’ has no musical note, however, it requires tuning with a steel hammer which stretches the area around the ‘gu’s’ neck, then smoothing with a wooden hammer afterward. These prepared shells are generally glued with sealant, and left to stabilise for a couple of days. The *Hang* will then be fine-tuned again with a small steel hammer, and each one receives a unique serial number with the tuner’s signature before it leaves the workshop. Even when it is perfectly tuned, the *Hang* often requires regular retuning. Accidental dropping of in the instrument, frequent playing, striking too hard, or temperature change can result in an out-of-tune *Hang*. Thus, it is generally advised to play the *Hang* in a relatively gentle way, only striking the instrument with one's bare hands.

The most common way to play the *Hang* is by placing the instrument on the lap or on stands, striking the center ‘ding’ with one's thumbs, fingers or other parts of the hand to produce the lowest musical notes. Opening or closing the players lap while striking the ‘ding’ gives a different timbre, as the player’s thighs can open or mute the air coming out from the ‘gu’, similar to the function of a mute in brass instruments. Other tone fields around the center ‘ding’ are tuned in a specific tonal structure, and each instrument comprising of alternative note choices is presented as a different ‘sound model’. A relatively popular way to locate the notes coordinates is to spin around the *Hang* until the lowest tone fields are facing the player’s abdomen. When playing the *Hang* starting from the lowest tone fields, players often alternate right and left-hand movements, using the thumbs to strike notes closest to the abdomen, and the index finger for the rest of the tone fields across the shell. Alternative ways of playing *Hang* include positioning the instrument with the ‘gu’ side facing up and the tone fields facing down. Players can activate the ‘gu’ by striking the opening with the palm of their hands, which gives a deep, breathy sound. From this position, players can strike the area around the opening of the ‘gu’ in a percussive way, similar to the ghatam or udu. Placing the instrument upright between the thighs allows players to access both the ‘ding’ side and ‘gu’ side at the same time. However, in such a performing position, the *Hang* is often partially muted, and the technique generally requires relatively advanced skills in hand independency.

As noted above, the official name of the *PANArt* instrument ‘*Hang*’ means ‘hand’ in Bernese dialect. However, perhaps due to the percussive properties of the instrument, many would

call it the ‘Hang Drum’. Rohner and Schärer published a public letter in November 2009, arguing that if the *Hang* were to be treated as a drum and promoted with the 'name Hang Drum', it would create a ‘ripple effect of misinformation that leads to damaged instruments, physical injury, and mental and emotional turbulence’. Interestingly, *HangoutUK* co-founder Kelly Hutchison recalls how Rohner has described the *Hang* as a ‘drum’ in the early days of the instrument, at least periodically (2018, p.c.). But now, with over a decade of development, the term ‘Hang Drum’ has become a name which only circulates outside the *Hang/*handpan community, for applying such term to the instrument within the community would genuinely upset some participants, unless it was used for satirical or parodic purposes. Ethnomusicologists and organologists using the Hornbostel-Sachs system of musical instrument classification would perhaps express a more ‘forgiving’ opinion. According to the system, the *Hang* belongs to the category of ‘direct struck percussion idiophones’ with percussion vessels, being a musical instrument which creates sound primarily through the instrument as a whole vibrating, without the use of strings or membranes. Meanwhile, drums which produce sound primarily by way of a vibrating stretched membrane belong to the category of ‘struck membranophones’ (Hornbostel & Sachs 1961); however, the word ‘drum’ does not always imply the existence of a membrane.

The terminology and classification of the *Hang* is complex. The *Hang* makers have emphasised that tuning is an art-form and an intuitive task which requires daily practice. Ultimately, the maker can internalise ‘the behaviour of the forces in the steel in relation to both resonance and pitch’ (Rohner & Schärer 2007, p4). *PANArt*’s rich legacy of experience in incorporating sheet metals in musical instrument development has led them to conclude that such a process is parallel to art-making as both are ‘complex non-linear systems’ which cannot be ‘summarized in one formula’ (Rohner & Schärer 2013, p12). Hence, instead of calling the *Hang* a musical instrument, Rohner and Schärer often display a preference for the term ‘sculpture’ (Fig. 2.3), or ‘sound sculpture’. In 2013, *PANArt* published a forty-four pages book summarising the developmental journey of the instrument, titled *Hang – Sound Sculpture* (Rohner & Schärer 2013). Such a use of terminology upon closer examination is quite revealing. For instance, the name ‘sound sculpture’ to a certain degree captures the ideal implementation of the *Hang* from the perspective of the company that crafted it, reflecting *PANArt's* reluctance to situate the *Hang* in the canon of Western musical history (Rohner & Schärer, 2013 p13), as well as revealing *PANArt’s* ambition in exploring and expanding the concept of musicking. The official recommended application of the instrument as well as the corporate philosophy behind it are further examined in Chapter four.



Fig. 2.3 *Hang® Sculpture*. Screenshot by the author.[15]

More importantly, as a form of 'sound sculpture' or a work of 'art' the *Hang* gains legal protection against counterfeits which potentially exploit the object's visual appearance. As Vadim Keylin (2015) suggests, the totality of aesthetic experience in sound sculptures often translates into the interplay between the visual appearance of the instrument and its acoustic shape, two aspects which mutually define one another (p188). The visual aesthetic of *Hang* has been the basis of complex litigious arguments which will be examined in Chapter three. Whilst this dissertation has no intention to conclude whether the *Hang* should be classified as a music instrument or a sound sculpture, it is perhaps more constructive and less messy to consider the *Hang* and sound objects inspired by it as being primarily musical instruments.

2.4 The development of the *Hang*

In total, there have been four different stages of the *Hang's* development, and these four phases are generally regarded as the four generations of *Hang* production. While the fundamental architecture of the instrument has remained almost identical throughout this

[15] *Hang® Sculpture*, *PANArt,* last accessed 20 November 2020, https://panart.ch/en/instruments/sound-sculpture-hang

process (approximately 21inches wide, 9 ½ inches high and weighing just over 8 pounds, or 3.6 kilogram), the most visually distinguishable characteristics among the various *Hang* generations lie in the colour, polishing and brass annealing of the respective iterations. The colour of the instrument is usually determined by the temperature choice during the process of steel temperament, which the makers have been experimenting with throughout the years.

However, one of the most significant alterations applied to the various versions across separate generations lies in the choice of notes provided by the *Hang*. Applying the Trinidadian steelpan tuning method to a *Hang* geometry requires a relatively minimalistic approach. While an average steelpan can provide from three to approximately thirty notes, a construction of an 8 or 9 note *Hang* means that a chromatic construction is no longer feasible. Furthermore, note choices were limited to three factors related to the resonant chamber: my informant Tong Pi Si recalls his encounter with a rare first-generation chromatic *Hang* in Hong Kong, presumably owned by a percussionist in the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra (2018, p.c.). Tong suspects that this incarnation of the instrument was perhaps a unique custom-made order, since it was the only chromatic *Hang* he had ever heard of. However, Tong has described the sound of the chromatic *Hang* as being 'unpleasant to hear' (難聽) (ibid.). He assumes that this was the case because the available notes within the instrument body were activating each other. In other words, if a player strikes one note, other notes could be vibrating simultaneously. If the existing notes on a *Hang* were chosen within a certain diatonic scale, such a property could provide a rich harmonious ambient resonance which enhances the overall sound. However, if the available notes were not chosen from a particular diatonic scale, the overall resonance can sound somewhat chaotic.

The same limitation applies to the Helmholtz resonator sound, which acts similar to an ambient bass note, with various notes vibrating simultaneously. Another problem with having a resonant chamber is a difficulty that many handpan makers have referred to as being an 'impedance' issue. More precisely, this involves the problem of phase cancellation[16] happening within the resonance chamber.[17] Differences in chamber height, port depth and chamber diameter can lead to different phases cancelling each other. Therefore, the maker has to learn which frequencies are phase cancelled within a given geometry to avoid certain

[16] Phase cancellation meaning two signals of the same frequency but out of phase with each other cancelling one another, leading to the overall level of the combined signal being reduced.
[17] *Handpan, Hang, Pantam resonance and wave interference,* 28 November 2016, last accessed 17 February 2023. https://www.sarazhandpans.com/handpan-construction/handpan-resonance-and-wave-interference/

‘bad notes’. *PANArt* briefly mentioned the concern of these tuning issues, as some notes ‘resonated better than others’ (Rohner & Schärer 2007, p7), and ‘fewer notes could be tuned in, hence they had to sacrifice the chromatic scale and explored tonal systems’ (p4). It is reasonable to assume that these new challenges in sound resonance, which do not exist in steelpans generally, were one of the driving forces behind *PANArt* ‘s decision to explore note choices and scales in a diatonic fashion.

Similar to the options available across steelpans, two types of *Hanghang* with different tonal ranges were built within the first and second-generation. A bass version generally consists of 7 elliptical domes stamped around the ‘ding’, while the treble version could have delivered one extra tone field, since higher notes generally took up less space on the shell (Fig. 2.4). The first series of *Hang* prototypes were built in the first two months of 2001 and presented at the *Musikmesse Frankfurt* (Frankfurt Music Fair) in March. The *Hang* makers then retired from steelpan building and tuning services for steelbands to completely immerse themselves in their new creation. The ‘first-generation *Hang’* is generally used to describe *Hanghang* produced following the prototype phase up to those made in 2005. This generation can be commonly identified by the light shade of metallic grey, produced by the specific temperature range at the stage of steel temperament. The ‘ding’ and ‘gu’ are polished to a mirror-like condition, with the tone fields being marked in keeping with steelpan convention, with the makers being careful to ‘follow the custom of steelpan invention’ (Rohner & Schärer 2008). Within the dome in the tone fields, a tiny metallic ‘nipple’ can be found due to ‘technical reasons’ (ibid.). As tools for stamping tone fields advanced, the metallic ‘nipples’ eventually disappeared.



Figure 2.4 The first-generation (2001-2005) treble version *Hang.* Photograph by *PANArt Hangbau AG.*

In this generation, 45 scale options were available and customised scales were accepted (ibid.). In 2005, the *Low Hang* was introduced for a brief period of time. It achieved a deeper sound as 'requested by clients' (Rohner & Schärer 2008). Non-Western music cultures were often referenced in the conception of note choices and scale names, such as the Japanese *ake bono* (G3, C4, D4, Eb4, G4, Ab4, C5, D5, Eb5), or *Yue Diao* (F3, C4, Eb4, F4, Ab4, Bb4, C5, Eb5, F5), which *PANArt* claimed to be Chinese-influenced. *PANArt* calls this an 'ethnomusicological approach' which requires the makers to study and tune different scales with reference to the rich 'musical heritage among the world's musical cultures' (Rohner & Schärer 2007, p7). Long-time *Hang* devotee Michael Paschko had been researching these available scale choices, which are generally known as the 'sound models'. In his online publication (2008) *Hang Sound Models*, Paschko provides the most comprehensive data regarding options which were available at least periodically (see appendices 1-5). Between 2001 and 2005, *PANArt* produced an average of 850 *Hanghang* yearly, but in the following year, the production rate was reduced by half without a clear explanation. Labels with serial numbers between 1 to 4300 can be found inside these early *Hanghang*, which provides evidence of the actual quantity of *Hang* produced within this period (Hangbauhaus 2008).

The term 'second-generation *Hang'* generally describes *Hanghang* produced between 2006 and 2007 (Fig. 2.5). *PANArt* claims that the sound quality was improved by brushing brass

on the surface of the instrument's top hemisphere. However, this brass coating gradually fades away with intensive playing. The rim is reinforced with a brass ring for protection, and the 'ding' is no longer polished. Almost all *Hanghang* built in this generation had a default 'ding' pitched at D3 (A=440Hz), with A3 being the lowest note from tone fields. The rest of the tone fields consist of the octaves of these two notes generally. Second-generation *Hanghang* were predominantly built with this basic structure. The other notes are chosen according to the maker's artistic choice, and this generation of the *Hang* was built mainly in a 7-note-configuration excluding the ding. Although *PANArt* did not explain why it preferred a 7-note *Hang*, it was generally believed that building too many notes on the shell surface could sacrifice the overall timbre of the instrument, since musical notes could be 'choked'. Also, it is fair to presume that a 7-note *Hang* requires less construction time than an 8-note option. After 2006, the model names no longer sought to connote ethnic influences. The makers claim that the ethnomusicological approach to musical conception ended in 2006, as 'the response from HANG players world-wide showed a marked preference for universal modes such as various pentatonic, and especially minor pentatonic modes' (Rohner & Schärer 2007, p7). From 2007 onwards, the neck of the 'gu' was tuned to D5 in harmony to the 'ding', and the 'tone fields' (or chorus) were shifted to a 45° angle relative to the radius of the *Hang* (Paschko 2008).



Figure 2.5 The second-generation (2006-2007) *Hang.* Photograph by *PANArt Hangbau AG.*

In general, this is the most sought-after generation among *Hang* collectors for the following reason: the second-generation *Hang* was only produced within the narrow window of 2006 and 2007, usually engraved with a serial number between 001 to 0826, which led to this generation being much rarer than the first-generation *Hang* (Hangbauhaus 2008). *PANArt* claims that the scales available in this generation have more 'wholeness', the vessel is 'richer', and the new angled tone fields improved the 'presence' of the *Hang* (2008). Community members who acquired the second-generation *Hang o*ften concur with these claims, agreeing that this is the best sounding *Hang* across four generations. This was also the last generation *Hang* which allowed customers to choose between approximately 20 different sound models.

In February 2008, the *Hang* makers announced that the *Hang* had reached the next development stage, naming the next generation *Hang* the *Integral Hang*. The *Integral Hang* is generally built in slightly darker grey, with the brass coating only covering the 'ding', and inside the dome of tone fields. The construction of the 'ding' has changed to a layered design (Fig. 2.6), with the 'gu' opening modified to a slightly oval shape which fits on the lap

more comfortably. Sound model choices had been further reduced for this generation of the instrument, reducing the wide array of choices to just one. The *Integral Hang* comes in only one sound model: the 'ding' in D3, with seven tone fields of A3, Bb3, C4, D4, E4, F4, and A4.



Figure 2.6 The third generation (2008-2009), as known as the *Integral Hang.* Photograph by *PANArt Hangbau AG.*

The fourth and final generation of the *Hang* is the *Free Integral Hang*. The 'ding' construction adds another layer, giving it a ripple-like look (Fig. 2.7). There is no brass coating nor brass ring rim protection. In the *Hang Guide,* a publication *PANArt* released in 2010 along with the presentation of the *Free Integral Hang*, the company describes the most significant change of the latest *Hang: PANArt* abandoned previous systems and tools of reference in tuning the *Free Integral Hang* (Rohner & Schärer 2010). The makers no longer depended upon electronic devices and any scale systems, tuning the latest *Hang* with their 'inner ears' and sense of intuition exclusively. Tuning the instrument subjectively, the makers state, is liberating (2010). The resulting *Hang* marks a pronounced departure from the Western concept of an equal temperament, which provides 'the possibility of integrating non-harmonic

elements and thus to additionally enrich the dynamic' (2010). In December 2013, the makers terminated the production and retuning services of *Hang* entirely, and focused on the development of other music instruments built from the patented nitrided steel sheet, *Pang. PANArt* named the new series of sound objects *Pang Instruments*. This marked the end of a short-lived, but fascinating *Hang* journey. After the termination of the *Hang, PANArt* continued to be highly creative and courageous in music instrument development. The reason behind the termination of the highly enchanting *Hang* will be examined in Chapter three.



Figure 2.7 Fourth-generation (2010-2013) *Hang*, The *Free Integral Hang.* Screenshot by the author.[18]

2.5 Global reception of the *Hang*

A year after experimenting with a 'metallic ghatam with musical notes' for percussionist Reto Weber, *PANArt's Hang* was ready to meet the world. In 2000, *PANArt* was invited to the first International Conference on Science and Technology Of the Steelpan (ICSTS 2000) in Port-

[18] *Tuned former "Free Integral" Hang in C#,* Pancycle, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnaFCqPg20s

of-Spain, Trinidad. Rohner & Schärer seized the opportunity to present their instruments and research to the steelpan community. However, the first presentation of the *Hang* failed to garner critical attention:

> *'It sounds like in the old days,' was the reaction of the Trinidad scholars. This statement was a confirmation of our work because it really was the sound of the old steel bands that have inspired us. The appearance of the Hang in the capital of the steel band escaped the attention of the participants at the conference as well as the media. Playing this metal instrument with bare hands was foreign to the people of Trinidad and their reaction was: 'This is not our culture'* (Rohner & Schärer 2009).

The reactions provoked complicated feelings tinged with a sense of disappointment. The sound of the *Hang* appeared to have drawn from the cultural lineage of the Trinidadian steelpan. The distinctive differences in appearance and ways to perform the instrument, however, marked a distance from the instrument's origins, generating a sense of alienation on the part of those associated with Trinidadian sound culture. In truth, the early design of the steelpan went through a convex phase, and it was smaller than the current 'standard' 23 inches geometry. According to London percussionist Madhav Bhatt, the convex steelpan idea had been raised before but was discarded; this was at least partially attributed to Lieutenant N Joseph Griffiths' ambition (music director and conductor of The Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra - TASPO) to have TASPO perform as a fully chromatic orchestra across several octaves at the Festival of Britain in June 1951 (2018, p.c.). Perhaps the sound of the 21-inch convex *Hang* presented in ICSTS raised a certain nostalgic feeling among steelpan historian and organologists, but the idea of playing the flying-saucer-like instrument with hands rather than sticks or mallets was not enthusiastically received by some of the modern steelpan players.

Trinidadian physicist Anthony Achong (2016), one of the organizers of the ICSTS 2000 who invited *PANArt* to the conference, later argued that performing the steelpan with one's bare hands was not, in truth, uncommon in Trinidad. In an online open letter, Achong wrote:

> *Pan players in Trinidad, in the early days, first played Pans with their bare hands or wrapped their hands with cloth. I have seen it in the early days, as a boy, so I bare* [sic] *record! ...The Hang is a steel pan (Pan) having limited musical range (low registers only) because of the chosen method of direct Hand Playing (…) The physical properties of the hand (fingers and thumb) gives the Hang note*

> *impacts similar characteristics to that obtained when playing the Pan Cello with soft standard size sticks. The hand is a natural, personal item; therefore, the tonal character of the Hang is player dependent* (Achong, 2016)

According to Achong, neither the *Hang*'s convex structure nor the way it should be played are new, and the air resonators on steelpan had been done before (2016). He opined, therefore, that the *Hang* should be considered another form of the Trinidadian steelpan. To some Trinidadians, even the 'fool-proof' design of the *Hang* was not new. Trinidadian Mark Wilson, the founder of *Panstream*, is one of the very few handpan makers in the UK with a Trinidadian background. During a conversation that we had in HOUK 2017, Wilson noted that there are steelpans built for special-needs children which are tuned diatonically. So, one can randomly strike these special steelpans without making a 'wrong' note (2017, p.c.). However, one thing Achong praised *PANArt* for contributing to the steelpan evolution was the development of nitrided steel, *Pang*. Achong claims that Rohner must be commended for his contribution to the Pan, particularly for his introduction of nitrided steel which was not a new material in itself, but new to steelpans (Achong, 2016).

As steelpan makers, *PANArt* understandably made an initial gesture of offering the steelpan-influenced *Hang* to the steelpan community. Not only did the *Hang* appear in the scientific conference in Trinidad, early research papers regarding the *Hang* were often collaborations with steelpan scholars (see e.g., Hansen, Rossing, Morrison). This suggests that *PANArt* initially considered the *Hang* to be a sibling or offspring of the Trinidadian steelpan, or at least an offshoot highly relevant to the steelpan culture. However, the *Hang* was caught in the crosshairs of a complicated situation, generating divided responses towards its relationship with the history of the steelpan. The *Hang* was simultaneously considered by different people as a steelpan with limited musical range (Achong, 2016), not part of the Trinidadian culture (Rohner & Schärer 2007), or even profiting from the national instrument of Trinidad (Bhatt 2016, p.c.). While Rohner and Schärer, as European steelpan makers, seemingly comprehend and respect the symbolic and cultural meaning of the steelpan, the somewhat libertarian approach in steelpan experimentation in materiality and forms 'without cultural constraints' (Rohner & Schärer 2006) positions the *Hang* in a complicated and contentious place.

Outside of the steelpan community, the *Hang* has been incredibly popular. *PANArt* gradually developed an international retailer network after the *Hang* was presented in the *Musikmesse Frankfurt* in 2001. Distributors could be found in Austria, Australia, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the U.S.A., as well as

several music stores within Switzerland (Paschko 2012). However, in 2006, after taking several months break from production, *PANArt* announced that it would no longer supply the *Hang* to distributors. *PANArt* also reduced the quantity of production to approximately half in order to decrease the workloads of the makers. Without international distribution, the only method to acquire an instrument for oneself was to write handwritten letters to *PANArt* with an explanation for the purchase. Generally, the chosen prospective owners were invited to *PANArt's* workshop at their own expense, where visitors could try the instrument before buying it in person. Upon arrival, buyers generally would learn the history of the *Hang*, the basic approach to perform the *Hang,* and the necessary knowledge for instrument maintenance. This highly selective method of commerce unexpectedly attracted global demand. Some of those who wished to purchase a *Hang* but had been turned down by *PANArt* still travelled to Bern and camped outside the workshop for a second chance (Hutchison 2017, p.c.). The secondary market for the *Hang* sky-rocketed with some even reaching an astronomic price of EUR 8000 or more (Bueraheng 2017, p.c.). Later, *PANArt* requested buyers to sign an agreement to prevent commercialisation by reselling the *Hang* (see appendix 6). The global demand for the *Hang* was staggering, and could not be satisfied by the small-scale instrument production method espoused by *PANArt.* Since 2007, instrument makers in Europe and the United States began making their own adaptation of the *Hang*, which became popularised generally. The next section examines the international handpan, a general term for the adaptation of the original *Hang*, as well as various instruments which are likely inspired by the globally successful *Hang.*

2.6 Handpan and *Hang*-inspired percussion

Since *PANArt* registered the trademark of the name '*Hang*', other makers have attempted to build similar instruments and have as a legal consequence needed to create a different name for their adaptations. In c.2007, American steelpan tuner Kyle Cox, also known as the co-founder of *Pantheon Steel,* coined the name 'handpan' in describing the 'type of steelpan that is played with hands' (Sarazhandpans.com 2018).[19] The global circulation of the term handpan was also partially driven by an online dispute in early 2000s. According to Saraz (2018) - also an American handpan company - a leading forum at the time for exchanging *Hang* related information, *Hangblog.org*, expressed concerns towards non-*Hang* related discussions. *PANArt* communicated to the forum moderators that the forum should only be used for discussions regarding the *Hang*. Not long after, *handpan.org* was

[19] *Hang Drum vs Hand Pan,* 6 December 2018, last accessed 17 Feburary 2023, https://www.sarazhandpans.com/handpan-construction/hang-drum-or-handpan/

created, and 'handpan' became the common term shared by thousands of builders and players, particularly among Anglophonic participants.

Besides the handpan, alternative names can be found outside Europe and the US. Russian maker Victor Levinson of the company *SPB* introduced a different name to the scene, calling his variation on the instrument the pantam'. Pantam is a term consisting of two parts: ‘pan’, taken from the Trinidadian steelpan and ‘tam’, from the Indian ghatam. Pantam is more commonly used among Russian and Israeli players and makers, but people would generally consider handpan and pantam to be practically the same type of musical instrument. It is worth mentioning here that Finnish composer and sound artist Lauri Wuolio has argued on his online blog that the prefix ‘pan’ could be problematic:

> *The name sparked fierce debate amongst the players and the builders. Others agreed that handpan was a practical and descriptive common name for the instrument, while others argued that the name put too much stress on its steelpan roots and that it could even be considered offensive towards the Trinidadians* (…) *It appears that handpan best suits instruments and builders that emphasize the instrument’s background in the steelpan* (Wuolio 2013)

Wuolio began to call the instrument a 'cupola', a name which originated etymologically from the Greek word cup (kupellon), and the Latin word for cymbal and bell (cymbalum). The word cupola is also used for the dome of a church or other architecture. However, as explained by Wuolio, the reason for using the term cupola does not only derive from the shape of the instrument, but to emphasise its European origins. Although the name cupola is not commonly used, Wuolio’s concern for potential problems of cultural appropriation in the use of terms such as 'handpan' and 'pantam' as well as his general approach towards tackling this problem are highly inspiring. The complexity of cultural ownership between the *Hang,* handpan and the Trinidadian steelpan is further examined in Chapter three. All this being said, the prevalent tendency among members of the community is to use the term 'handpan' in describing the adaptation of the *Hang.* While ‘pantam’ remains favourable to some, this dissertation generally employs the relatively popular term ‘handpan’ in describing non-*PANArt* instrument designs influenced by the *Hang.*

PANArt's decision to adopt the umbrella term ‘sound sculpture’ for its creation has also proven to be influential. It is not uncommon among handpan makers and players to make use of the term ‘sound sculpture’ in addressing *Hang*/handpan. This conception of the instrument has also inspired global handpan makers such as *Echo Sound Sculpture*

(Switzerland),[20] *Oasis Sound Sculpture* (US),[21] *Satya Sound Sculpture* (Brazil)[22] to name a few to use the notion of 'sound sculpture' for company branding. The online handpan shop *Sound-Sculpture.de* also categorizes handpans and steel tongue drums as musical instruments under the umbrella term 'sound sculpture'. Handpan makers often find that the term 'sound sculpture' precisely captures the process in creating the instrument, which is, in a sense, 'sculpting from metal sheets' (Bueraheng 2017, p.c.). The term also suggests that the desire impelling the creation of the object rejects and subverts conventional musical-historical expectations associated with instrument making and performing. According to informant Lenny Guo, he is not playing music on the handpan, he is 'sculpting sound' (2017, p.c.). In truth, the fact that *Hang*/handpan community largely welcomes DIY instrument makers and music amateurs with little to no previous related training to produce or perform on a 'sound sculpture' instead of a 'musical instrument' has done much to reduce some of the anxiety embedded in music instrument production and performance. Besides this, the branding of the *Hang* as a 'sculpture' or a work of 'art' has been a crucial component in obtaining copyright protection in 2020, as I will explore in Chapter three. This incident has had a discernible effect upon handpan supporters, who are now generally more reluctant in using the term 'sound sculpture' to describe the handpan.

The emergence of the handpan can be dated back to 2007. According to a personal communication with Thai handpan maker Ezahn Bueraheng – founder of *Echo Sound Sculpture* in Switzerland - Germany-based Bill Brown of *Kaisos Steel Drums* was the first person to make his own adaptation of the *Hang,* the *Caisa,* and successfully commoditise it. Along with Brown, Bueraheng, with his handpan *Asachan*, American makers Kyle Cox and Jim Dusin of *Pantheon Steel*, with their creation named *Halo*, Spanish maker Luis Martin Eguiguren Garrido of *BELLArts* and their *Bells* as well as the Russian maker of *SPB*, Victor Levinson, were the first five makers in the world to have successfully reproduced and marketed instruments similar to *PANArt's Hang*. While the *Bells* from *BELLArts* look almost identical to the original *PANArt Hang,* usually handpan makers develop unique ornamental designs, construction methods, material development choices, and sound models in order to avoid copyright infringements. For example, the *Caisa* generally combines a steel top with a wooden base, with unique holes pierced around the tone fields (Fig. 2.8). Early versions of

[20] Official website of *Echo Sound Sculptures,* last accessed 17 February 2023, https://echosoundsculptures.com/
[21] Official website of *Oasis Sound Sculpture,* last accessed 17 February 2023, https://oasissoundsculpture.com/
[22] Official website of *Satya Sound Sculptures,* last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.satyasoundsculptures.co/

the *Asachan* had two distinctive yellow circles around the oval shaped 'ding' (Fig. 2.9). In truth, since the adaptations of the *Hang* began appearing, *PANArt* has been extremely active in contesting their production and legitimacy, with litigious challenges against international handpan makers becoming more commonplace. For instance, handpan makers were requested to submit production materials for legal examination to clear them of suspected patent violation. This dissertation will return to these legal disputes in Chapter three, which deals with the corporate history of *PANArt* and handpan corporations.



Figure 2.8 The *Caisa* by *Kaisos Steel Drums.* Screenshot by the author.[23]

[23] *Sound Travels*, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.soundtravels.co.uk/p-Caisa_Hand_Steel_Drum-3343.aspx



Figure 2.9 Early version of the *Asachan* by *Echo Sound Sculptures*. Screenshot by the author.[24]

Another musical instrument phenomenon worth mentioning is the emergence of the steel tongue drum after the birth of *Hang*. Although the wooden tongue drum or slit drum is generally considered to be one of the oldest musical instruments in existence, one which can be found in various ancient civilisations, tongue drums constructed with steel are perhaps relatively recent. According to Taiwanese sound sculpture company *Tzun's Pan* (村),[25] it is generally believed that American inventor Dennis Havlena came up with the first modern steel tongue drum design in 2007. Havlena drew inspiration from *PANArt's Hang*, wooden tongue drums and Dominican percussionist Fellé Vega's invention of *Támbiro,* a percussion instrument made by cutting 'U' shaped tongues on the body of a metal Freon cylinder (Fig. 2.10). These tongues in different sizes act as tone membranes when struck by the performer. Naturally, a larger tongue size produces a lower tone. Havlena made his own steel tongue drum by cutting out eight tongues on the bottom of a propane tank. Inspired by the *Hang*, Havlena arranged the tank's tongues in a circular configuration and called it a *Hank drum*. Havlena shared the template of his invention online, encouraging people to build their own *Hank* (Fig. 2.11). After the *Hank* was created, similar products started to appear internationally. Besides the Taiwanese *Tzun's Pan*, a variety of steel tongue drums (sometimes made with metal alloy) have been available for purchase on Amazon. Some

[24] *EchoSoundSculpture - AsaChan "AnnaZiska" 2014,* EchoSoundSculpture Studio, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4l675l4vRa0
[25] *What is 天鼓 ?* last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.sinestudio.co/pages/what-is-%E5%A4%A9%E9%BC%93-%EF%BC%9F

steel tongue drum manufacturers marketed their instrument as being easy to play, suitable for meditation and religious practice, corrosion-free, portable, and as not requiring constant retuning.[26] The most established and notable among these is perhaps the *RAV Vast*, was invented by Russian engineer Andrey Remyannikov in 2013. (Fig. 2.12). Since cutting out musical tongues from a propane tank or similar vessels requires relatively less technical skill than building a handpan, steel tongue drums are usually sold at a relatively moderate price. Generally, steel tongue drums are not considered by the *Hang*/handpan community to be within the same family tree as the handpan, but they are nonetheless 'sound sculptures' inspired by the *Hang,* and have gained a certain degree of global popularity from the *Hang*/handpan explosion.



Figure 2.10 A *Támbiro*. Screenshot by the author.[27]

[26] *FOUR UNCLES Steel Tongue Drum, Handpan Drum Percussion Instrument Panda Drum C Key with Bag Music Book and Mallets for Meditation Entertainment Musical Education Concert Yoga (6 inch, Green),* Amazon, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.amazon.com/FOUR-UNCLES-Percussion-Instrument-Entertainment/dp/B08R17ZKCB/ref=sr_1_1?crid=29D98K40N6MN6&keywords=tongue%2Bdrum&qid=1660298906&sprefix=tongue%2Bdrum%2Caps%2C320&sr=8-1&th=1

[27] *Tambiro by Felle Vega,* fellevega, YouTube, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pv1FQCeCTIA

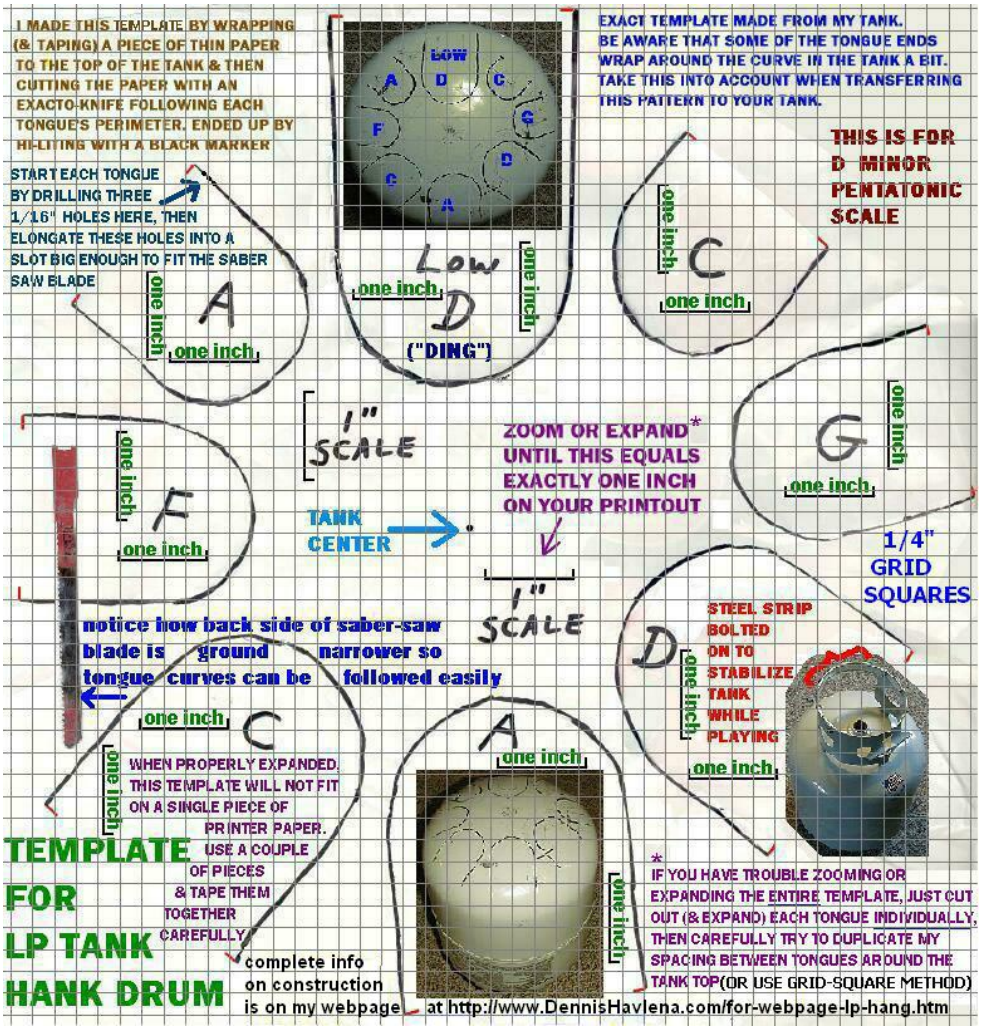


Figure 2.11 *Hank Drum* template by Dennis Havlena. Screenshot by the author.[28]

[28] *Web-page of Dennis Havlena,* last accessed 17 February 2023, http://www.dennishavlena.com/for-webpage-lp-hang.htm

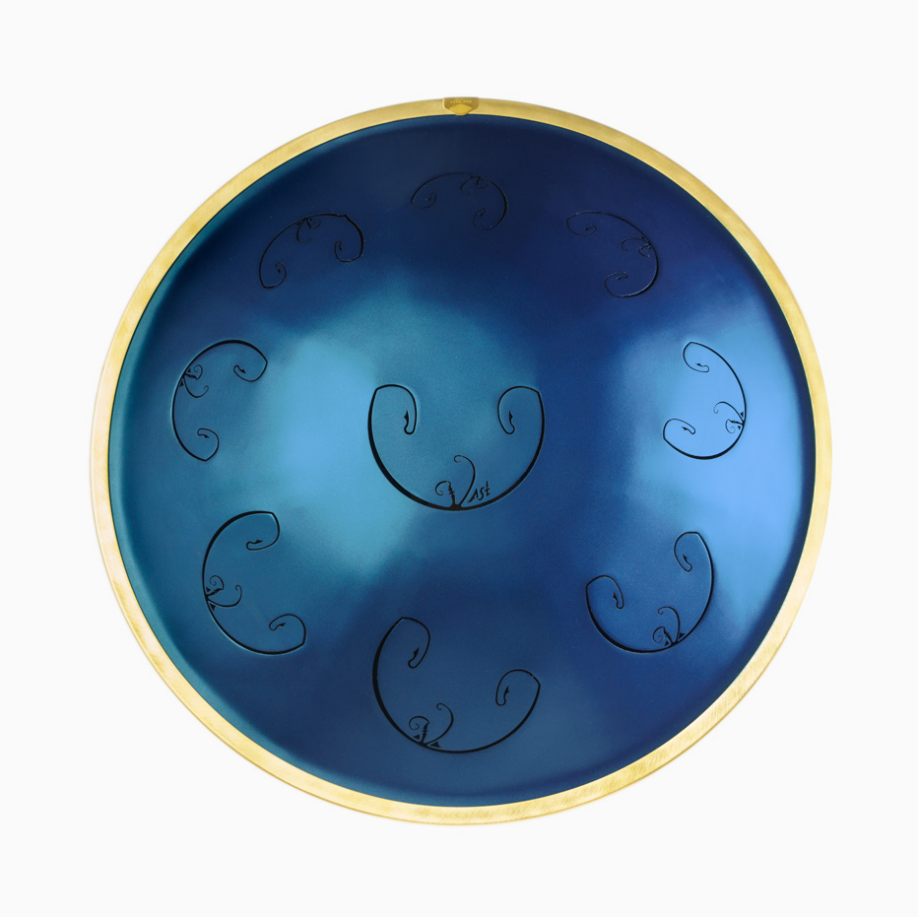


Figure 2.12 Russian steel tongue drum *Rav Vast*. Screenshot by the author.[29]

Since many handpan makers have considered their instruments to be an answer for the relentlessly growing demand of the *Hang*, and the direct influence of *Hang* can be easily discerned in all available handpans, it is essential to examine how handpan makers have been elaborating upon the discovery of the *Hang* in their own adaptations. This is especially true since the production of *Hang* was entirely discontinued after having been available for a brief 13 years, leaving much to be explored. However, currently there are more than 300 handpan makers around the world (James 2018, p.c.) and every maker has contributed to the development of the handpan in unique and singular ways. As such, it is impossible to cover all the different approaches and directions that have been taken thus far. Additionally, at times these supposedly unique differences are merely cosmetic rather than functional. Therefore, this dissertation divides the significant progression of the handpan's development into five parts, supplying an overview highlighting some intriguing new concepts in handpan structure and functionality. These five areas are: material, size, shaping, tuning, and new

[29] *Official store,* last accessed 18 February 2023, https://ravvast.com/catalog/drums/ravvast/rav-vast-a-marmara/

technology. In the section on materials, I examine how different metals have been implemented to build handpans which have been relatively well received. In the section on handpan size, I explain what new and popular handpan sizes are currently available, and the reasons behind these options. Having done this, I consider some shaping processes of the handpan shell which have been popularised. New approaches in tuning and tone fields design are explained next, and finally I explore how new technological ideas have been employed to bring the handpan away from the realm of acoustic instruments. These examples illustrate some of the ways in which the handpan has progressed beyond being merely an adaptation or facsimile of *PANArt*'s seminal creation.

2.7 Handpan material and size

Inspired by the *PANArt Hang*, handpans available in the marketplace are commonly built with gas-nitrided carbon steel shells, adopting this choice mainly because of the material's stability, timbre and because it offers a certain level of rust resistance. However, the result of gas-nitriding steel has many variables, with the biggest variables involved in the nitriding of steel being temperature and how long the raw steel is exposed to this controlled temperature. Through multiple stages of nitriding, combined with periods of increasing temperature, peak temperature, and decreasing temperature, a process involving such dramatic oscillations in temperature could produce various effects on the material (Sarazhandpan 2017). Besides temperature and time, other variables include different alloy composition from the selected raw steel, gas selection, and the manner of gas flow. Hence, although nitrided steel is a relatively popular choice among handpan makers, different nitriding processes contribute to an instrument's uniqueness in terms of timbre, colour, touch, among other characteristics.

Another effect of nitrided steel, apart from providing metal rigidity and stabilisation, is to stiffen the vibration of metal membranes which can reduce some higher frequency sound waves, an effect which in turn has an influence upon the sustainability of the musical notes. Thus, some handpan makers prefer the sound properties of non-nitrided steel, while some prefer non-nitrided steel, simply for cutting production time and costs. Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that it is harder to maintain, there are handpan makers who construct handpans out of heat-treated steel without nitriding. Handpans built from heat-treated steel are generally considered to project a relatively open sound, as high frequencies are not muffled by nitriding. Some players, however, consider these rich frequencies overwhelming or relatively challenging to control. Notes having long sound tails bleed into each other, making each note less distinctive. While the preference for certain sounds over

others is largely subjective, the downside of heat-treated handpans lie largely in the area of maintenance. In general, although nitrided-steel is rust-resistant to a certain degree, without proper care, both nitrided-steel and heat-treated steel can still rust. Generally, a handpan, nitrided or not, requires regular cleaning and protection with a thin layer of oil. In comparison, a non-nitrided steel handpan requires more frequent retuning and maintenance procedures, since it is softer and less rust-resistant.

From around 2017, a trend towards employing stainless-steel in handpan construction gradually developed. Before the appearance of such a trend, the German handpan company *Sunpan* was arguably the only maker using stainless steel for the production of its instrument. Stainless steel has appeared to attract more attention in recent years, with some handpan makers including stainless-steel options along with nitrided/non-nitrided steel in their catalogue. Producers such as the Brazilian handpan company *Tacta* have replaced their entire production line with stainless-steel (Fig. 2.13) instruments. Stainless steel in general produces a substantial amount of high frequencies and longer sustain than the previously mentioned materials, hence it is relatively appealing to players who seek a brighter and more ‘elevating’ sound. Stainless-steel also excels in rust resistance and generally does not depend upon the protective coating implied by nitriding or heat treatment. As such, rust protection is not affected even if the surface is scratched. However, although it provides the maximum rust protection among all handpan materials generally, it is not completely immune to rusting. Instrument maintenance is still required, despite the fact that it does not need to be tended to as frequently as instruments crafted from other material choices.



Figure 2.13 Demonstrating a *Tacta* stainless steel handpan. Screenshot by the author.[30]

To a certain degree, new materials incorporated in handpan manufacturing provide new marketing strategies. *Ayasa Instrument* in Netherland is one of the handpan makers to have replaced their entire production line with stainless-steel instruments. In 2020, *Ayasa Instrument* made the claim that they had discovered a particular type of stainless-steel which provides 'warm sound' and 'does not rust at all'.[31] The unique colour of this type of stainless-steel inspired the instrument company to name the material 'Ember Steel'. Amidst the growing international supply and arguable saturation of the market for handpans, handpans made with 'Ember Steel' generated their own niche and demand. *Ayasa Instrument* claims that due to 'high demand' there are no instruments available for immediate purchase, and the company cannot accept further requests (November 2022).[32] Besides these instruments crafted with ember steel, a relatively new Spanish handpan maker named *Mercury Handpan* has launched a new line of products made with 'Titan Steel' in 2022 (Fig. 2.14). Pre-ordering a 'Titan Steel' handpan with 12 notes costs EUR 1850. While both 'Ember Steel' and 'Titan Steel' are marketed as types of stainless steel, however, I cannot find further information regarding the material in use.

[30] *Tacta #100 - E Kurd,* Tacta Handpans, YouTube, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGmUMCl6wTA&feature=emb_logo
[31] *Everything you need to know about Ember Steel Handpans,* last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.masterthehandpan.com/blog/ember-steel-handpan
[32] *Available now,* last accessed 17 February 2023, https://ayasainstruments.com/available-now



Mercury Handpans tagged a product from their **shop** — in **Basque Country**.
19 July at 14:13 ·

🌞 Good morning people! Let's start the day working on this Titan Steel F Low Pygmy 12 🐙

#mercuryhandpans #handpan #pantam #soundsculpture #handpanmaker #handpanbuilding #handpantuning #handpanlover #handpanplayer #handpanmusic #handpanworld #music #meditation #meditative #percussion #yoga #yogamusic #soundhealing #mindfulness #worldmusic #hangdrum #хэндпан #手碟 #ハンドパン #핸드팬 #هنگدرام #titansteel

Figure 2.14 *Mercury Handpans* releasing handpan made with 'Titan Steel'. Screenshot by the author.[33]

[33] *Mercury Handpans,* Facebook, 19 July 2022, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/MercuryHandpans/photos/pb.100037192137163.-2207520000./2255235931281339/?type=3

Apart from new approaches in material experimentation, international handpan makers have taken the liberty to produce instruments in various sizes. Although a handpan featuring a 21-inch shell in diameter, a size which is similar to that of a *Hang*, is the most common choice among handpan makers generally, variations in handpan size have indeed been present from the very beginning of the handpan manufacturing history. Handpan diameter and height is largely determined by the cutting of the raw metal sheet and the various ways in which the shell is sunk. Perhaps the most comprehensive data regarding handpan sizes has been collected by arguably the most popular handpan case manufacturer in the business, *Hardcase Technologies*. The online shop of *Hardcase Technologies* provides a 'Handpan/Pantam Brand Name Selector'[34] through which the customer can select from over a hundred different instrument brands. Such a system suggests that the largest handpan currently available measures over 24-inches in diameter.

Almost parallel to the stainless-steel trend, a few handpan makers had been launching what the community generally regard as the mini handpan. In general, the mini handpan measures approximately 17 to 18-inches in diameter. Perhaps one of the most convincing reasons behind such an alteration is its portability: carrying a 21-inch full metal 'sound sculpture' is not an easy task. Several informants who are full-time handpan buskers (at least periodically) developed some sort of back pain caused by carrying the *Hang*/handpan. Not only is the instrument heavy, it can be extremely challenging to squeeze the *Hang* into an airplane's overhead compartment. Additionally, players with comparatively shorter arm lengths and thigh lengths can also experience a certain degree of discomfort in performing on a *Hang*/handpan which has a diameter of 21-inches or above. Performers might find it challenging to reach the outermost tone fields and the instrument might frequently slip off their laps. With the advantages of increased portability and playability, the mini handpan established its own audience in the community. Interestingly, handpans of different sizes have a different frequency impedance. While a 21-inch *Hang*/handpan can introduce sound interference on Bb4 (Sarazhandpans.com 2016), theoretically, the same musical note should pose no problems on an 18-inch shell. Indeed, there are players who seek a specific note which only works on a mini handpan, notes which *Hang*/handpan makers who build a conventionally-sized, 21-inch instrument would generally avoid. The downside of a mini handpan however, is the fact that the smaller shell area further limits the number of tone

[34] *Home / Hardcase bags / EVATEK 2.0 (Large)*, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.hardcasetechnologies.com/product/evatek-2-0-large/

fields which can be accommodated, as well as the risk of choking the instrument's sustain due to reduction in instrument size.

2.8 Shaping a handpan

PANArt invested in a deep-drawing machine which presses the hemisphere of the Hang from steel sheets, accelerates the sinking and shaping procedure, and results in a shell with uniform thickness (Rohner & Schärer 2000). However, for many handpan makers, especially in the early stages of their career, a deep-drawing machine is a costly investment which many are not able to afford. Consequently, many handpan makers began building the instrument in the most economical way: by sinking the shell with a hand hammer (Fig. 2.15). Sinking metal shells by hand is tremendously time-consuming and exhausting, but also generally considered to be highly valuable, since makers can learn a great deal about how steel responds to hammer blows. However, handpan makers often agree that sinking a metal shell manually is simply not a sustainable method in the long term (Handschuch 2017 p.c.; Garner 2017 p.c.; Weglinski 2017 p.c.). Long-term injuries from absorbing impacts from hammer-blows are not uncommon. Commonly, handpan makers replace the hand hammer with a pneumatic hammer later on in their careers. Interestingly, to some ears, the timbre of the hand-sunk handpan is considered to be the pinnacle of sound quality (Ng 2016 p.c.; Mak 2016 p.c.; Lai 2022 p.c.). It could be due to the fact that the unevenness of the hand-hammered shell generates a more ‘organic’ tone. Therefore, in general, quality hand-sunk handpans are considered to be more valuable and highly sought-after.



Figure. 2.15 Zbyszek Weglinski demonstrates how to sink a shell with a wooden hammer. Screenshot by the author.[35]

In responding to the challenges in sinking metallic shells, international handpan makers came up with at least three different methods. Kyle Cox and Jim Dusin from *Pantheon Steel* designed a specific rolling machine for handpan manufacturing which rotates a steel sheet. This machine features a roller bearing with a computer-controlled hydraulic arm which applies stress to the steel sheet as it turns. Cox and Dusin named it the Rolling Method, and patented it in 2013. Handpan shells produced by this method have distinctive circular 'tracks' evenly covering the entire surface (Fig. 2.16). However, in 2017, *Pantheon Steel* announced that they would dedicate the patented design to the public (Cox 2017), meaning that whoever wants to explore or apply this patented Rolling Method can do so with no legal concern. Despite the fact that this method is now free from patent protections, setting up the rolling machine is extremely costly. Hence, the Rolling Method remains one of the rarest and least-used technologies for sinking a handpan shell.

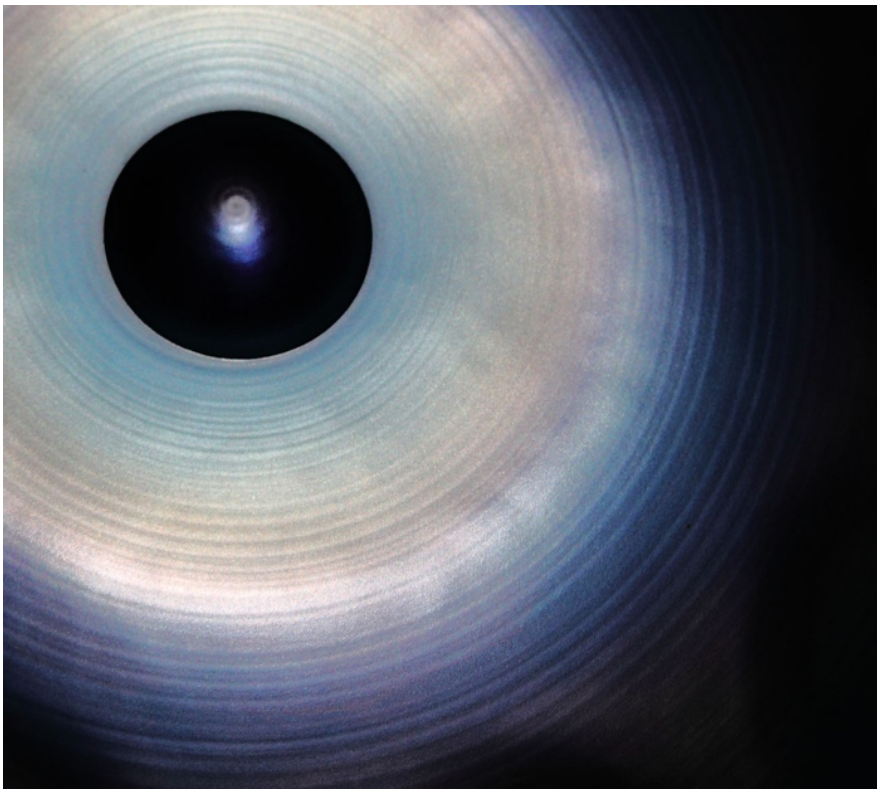


Figure 2.16 Rolled tracks on a *Pantheon Steel* handpan – *Halo*. Screenshot by the author.[36]

[35] *Karumi Steel handpan building project,* Karumi Steel, YouTube, last accessed 17 February 2023 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uhzXKgmSQ4
[36] *Halo*, last accessed 20 November 2020, https://davidyoungs.net/halo/

Another way to tackle the huge costs of investing in a deep-drawing machine is to share the cost among handpan makers. While several handpan makers would sell their deep-drawn handpan shells to others, a more cooperative approach has been developed in France, with a group of 5 European makers forming for a joint project to design and build their own pressing tool. They agreed on the choice of steel and the shell's dimension, and have been producing deep-drawn shells since 2014. This cooperative is called *Shellopan,*[37] and they have maintained a collective spirit in sharing handpan building knowledge and supporting young handpan makers in the manner of a 'fablab' (fabrication laboratory). In this laboratory, individual handpan makers are welcome to ask for technical as well as material support. *Shellopan* shells have been used by many, and has become are relatively popular practice among European handpan makers.

In a publication released in 2000, *PANArt* briefly mentioned a new technology that could be used to shape the entire steelpan, but eventually dropped the idea because it was too costly (Rohner & Schärer 2000). This technology was hydro-forming, which uses extreme water pressure to 'push' a shell out of a mounted sheet of metal. It is considered a quick and easily replicable method for shell formation. American handpan maker Colin Foulke successfully designed and built his own hydro-forming machine in his workshop, and publically shared the design in 2016 (Fig. 2.17). Now, handpan makers can build their own hydro-forming machine for approximately 2500 to 4000 Euros (somasoundsculptures.com 2018). This has contributed to a significant change in the international handpan making community, by dramatically lowering the cost for handpan makers to set up their own production line. It is debatable whether the publicly-shared hydro-forming setup has contributed towards the growth of handpan makers globally. One possible downside of hydro-forming lies in the possibility of the metal sheet stretching in an uneven manner. Generally, the material will gradually thin out as it stretches from the rim to top of the shell. However, an experienced maker is able to control the thinning during the forming process (somasoundsculptures.com 2018). Interestingly enough, *Pantheon Steel*, the inventor behind the Rolling Method for sinking handpan shells, has now partially incorporated the hydro-forming technique for sinking handpan shells into their production process: shells are generally hydro-formed initially, with the Rolling Method applied to the material in the final stage of the process.

[37] Official website of *Shellopan,* last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.shellopan.fr/index.php?lang=en

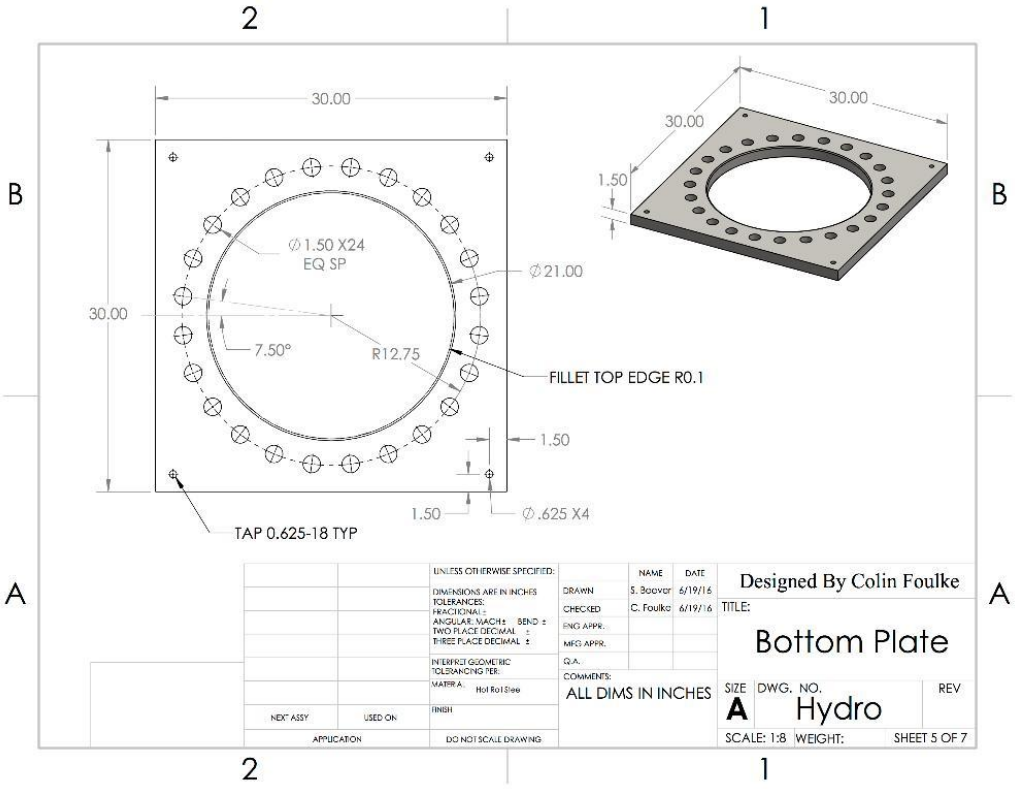


Figure 2.17 Hydro-forming machine template, designed by Colin Foulke. Screenshot by the author.[38]

2.9 Tuning and tone-field design of a handpan

The tuning of *Hang/handpans* has been largely influenced by the tuning principles developed by steelpan tuners. Besides *PANArt,* some of the pioneering handpan makers were once experienced steelpan tuners. Those without steelpan tuning experience were often encouraged to learn how to tune a steelpan first before making a handpan. The seminal work '*Secrets of the Steel Pan*' by Trinidadian professor Anthony Achong (2013) is highly praised by *PANArt* and the handpan maker community more broadly as being essential reading. Tone fields constructed on *Hang*/handpans are actually hammered into an anticlastic[39] shape consisting of the fundamental note and upper harmonics, with a similar tuning process to the steelpan (Fig. 2.18). The biggest difference between a *Hang* tone field from the equivalent on steelpan generally is the central dome-shaped dimple which *PANArt*

[38] Official website of *Cfoulke,* last accessed 15 November 2019, https://www.cfoulke.com/files/Hydro_Final_Drawings.PDF

[39] Also known as the 'pringle' shape by the handpan community. An anticlastic surface has two curves at right angles to each other.

claims reinforces the fundamental note and stabilises the overtones (Rohner & Schärer 2000).

On a properly tuned *Hang*/handpan, these 'pringle'-like tone fields usually oscillate in a 1:2:3 frequency relationship. For example, on an A4 fundamental note (440Hz), the first partial is tuned to a A5 (880Hz, an octave from the fundamental), with a second partial to E5 (1320Hz, a compound fifth above the fundamental) (somasoundsculptures.com 2018). However, this is not always the case. While 1:2 is considered to be an 'industry standard', some *Hanghang*/handpans have a compound third tuned in as the second fundamental (Daniel Bernasconi 2020, p.c.). Some handpan makers have tried a fourth, augmented fourth, sixth, so on and so forth, on the second fundamental, but this tuning sounds unpleasant to some ears (Vitor Luz 2020, p.c.).

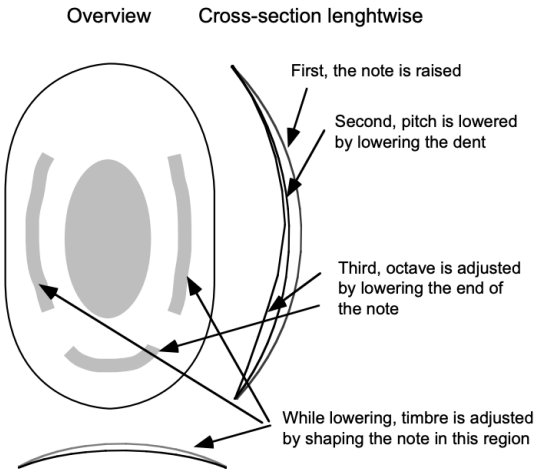


Figure 2.18 Picture taken from '*Steel Pan Tuning'* (Kronman, 91) showing The tone field of a steelpan. Screenshot by the author.[40]

There are two new developments around the 'ding' which are worth mentioning. On the longest axis of the 'ding' - the central tone field - a higher mode of vibration can be tuned as an audible tone, which has a distinctive bell-like sound. It can be activated by hitting the

[40] Kronman, U. 1991, *Steel pan tuning: a handbook for steel pan making and tuning* (Vol. 20). Musikmuseet

‘corner’ area of the lowest tone field. These notes are often called ‘shoulder tones’ by the handpan community, since they are usually available on the edge of the flattened surface next to the ‘ding’. It is generally believed that these ‘shoulder tones’ were first introduced and popularised by Russian handpan maker Victor Levinson, the founder of *SPB*. Another construction method of the ding which is relatively less popular than the shoulder tone is the ‘inpex’ design of the ‘ding’ (Fig. 2.19). The term 'inpex' simply refers to a concave ding instead of the typical apex (convex) structure. Whether an apex ‘ding’ contributes to any substantive improvement in sound quality is controversial. However, there are techniques which have been specifically developed from playing the apex ‘ding’, and vice versa. Although the choice is largely a subjective one, the apex construction is generally more common.



Figure 2.19 Inpex ding construction on a *Halo*, produced by *Pantheon Steel.* Photograph by Pantheon Steel.[41]

Another essential leap in construction from the *Hang* to handpan lies in the change in the number of tone fields successfully tuned on an instrument. If one counts the ‘ding’ as one of the tone fields, *PANArt*’s *Hang* usually comes with 8 or 9 notes in total. Achong has also claimed that since the *Hang* is an instrument which is played by hand, this results in a limit to the number of notes which can be integrated into the construction of a *Hang* (2016). Achong

[41] *The New Era Halo,* last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.pantheonsteel.com/new-era-halo/

claims the *Hang* is limited to no more than 9 notes (ibid.). Some handpan makers, however, have attempted to push through such a limitation while retaining a similar instrument geometry and size to the original *Hang*. Around 2014, a few handpan makers had been experimenting with bottom notes or 'booty taps' (a phrase believed to have been coined by Kari Foulke). These are additional notes hammered onto the bottom half of the handpan. Although it provides extra note choices to a rather limited space on the top-shell, having notes on the bottom shell means players have to adjust their posture in order to allow the bottom notes to be struck and for the notes to vibrate freely. In 2016, I attended my first handpan gathering, *HangOut UK*, and was fortunate to get my hands on the very first handpan with 15 notes: 3 of them were notes on the lower half shell. The instrument was tuned to G# harmonic minor with (C#/D#) G# C# D# E F# G# A C C# D# E F# (G#) (notes in brackets are bottom notes). This instrument, named the *Golden Mutant*, is the result of a collaboration between Portuguese musician Kabeção and Dutch handpan maker Jan Borren (Fig. 2.20). *The Golden Mutant* has arguably inspired a new generation of 'mutant' handpans, sparking an 'arms race' of cramming as many workable notes into a handpan as possible. The notion of the 'mutant' handpan design generally refers to the incorporation of a pair of additional 'eye-like' notes (hangdrumsandhandpans.com 2017). In 2018, Israel handpan maker Yonatan Bar successfully built a 26-note instrument for German percussionist David Kuckhermann. Interestingly, the more notes appear on a handpan, the more it looks like a Trinidad steelpan, only in a converse shape.



Figure 2.20 Kabeção demonstration video with the *Golden Mutant.* Screenshot by the author.[42]

2.10 The handpan and new technology

Since the mid-2010s, handpan technology has also undergone significant changes. From its initial incarnation as an acoustic instrument to electric amplification of the instrument to the appearance of virtual iterations of the instrument. The central aspect of the *Hang*/handpan's tonal characteristic largely depends upon its rich overtones and sustain. However, these are often challenging to capture in stage settings or in the street with the use of dynamic microphones, due to the rather low volume of the delicate sound that its generates. Some *Hang/*handpan players, attempting to address this difficulty, started to amplify the sound of the instrument with piezo microphones directly attached to the bottom half of the instrument shell with positive results. This has also been my approach as a performer when performing handpan on stage, or in busking situations. Handpan maker Duncan Arnot from Bristol started to experiment with electro-acoustic handpans from 2018 and produced a handpan with a built-in pickup around the end of that year, arguably the first one in the world. The patent-pending design, which incorporates pickups and jacks inside the handpan vessel (Fig. 2.21), is now an option available from Arnot's handpan company, *Meridian*.

[42] *Kabeção - "Golden Mutant" - Jan Borren Handpan*, Kabeção, YouTube, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XeClvCqRFpw&t=32s



Figure 2.21 *Meridian* electro-acoustic handpan. Photograph by *Meridian Handpans*.

While *Meridian*'s concept of an electro-acoustic handpan still consists of an acoustic structure as the foundation of the amplified sound, some companies took a more radical step by removing the acoustic steel vessel entirely. The first attempt was made by the Spanish start-up company *Oval Sound*. In 2015, *Oval Sound* launched a Kickstarter crowd-funding campaign to finance the development costs of its product, a digital handpan named *Oval* (Fig. 2.22). The campaign ended having successfully raised EUR 348,018 for the project. *Oval Sound* claims its instrument to be both an electronic handpan and an open-hardware music controller which can link to smart phone applications. With a minimum pledge of EUR 499, supporters could own an *Oval* and the application software of the instrument. The application allows users to set up the instrument and changes how it sounds. The *Oval* received mixed responses from the community: while some of the members were supportive of the birth of an electronic handpan, there are those who have dismissed the *Oval* as being simply a USB controller that resembles a *Hang*/handpan. However, notwithstanding its success in reaching its fund-raising target and launching the product, the *Oval* was terminated in 2018 due to financial problems, and there will be no more hardware nor software updates in the future.[43]

[43] *Kickstarter* campaign of *Oval Sound*, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/2101519704/oval-the-first-digital-handpan/posts/2081842



Figure 2.22 The *Oval.* Photograph by *Oval Sound.*

In 2016, another crowd-funding campaign initiated by the company *Lumen* claimed to be a music instrument project developing an electro-acoustic percussion instrument in the form of a traditional handpan[44]. The company envisioned a metallic electronic handpan with a built-in speaker and sensor pads replacing the acoustic tone fields (Fig. 2.23). The sound and scale, similar to the *Oval*, could be programmed from a smart phone. Without having released a working demo for such a product, *Lumen* claimed that they had successfully reached its funding target in just seven days[45]. By the end of 2019, a small batch of instruments had been dispatched to the supporters. However, further development and the release of the final product has been slowed down because of the global pandemic. Interestingly, while several handpan smart phone applications and studio grade virtual *Hang*/handpans (Fig. 2.24) are available, many crowd-funding supporters are seemingly willing to invest in a physical music 'controller' resembling the shape of a *Hang*/handpan. Perhaps the revealing examples of the *Oval* and *Lumen* highlight to a certain degree the importance of both the appearance of the instrument and the ways in which the instrument interact with the performer, with both of these crucial factors playing a significant role in the musicking experience afforded by the *Hang*/handpan.

[44] *Indiegogo* campaign of *Lumen the Electro-Acoustic Handpan,* last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/lumen-the-electro-acoustic-handpan#/
[45] Product story of *Lumen*, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://www.lumenhandpan.com/pages/product-story



Figure 2.23 *Lumen.* Photograph by *Lumen*.



Figure 2.24 Handpan VST panel by *Soniccouture*. Screenshot by *Soniccouture.*[46]

2.11 Conclusion

This chapter provides an overview of the history of the *Hang* and its adaptation - the handpan - and the contexts in which they have been developed. This highlights some of the significant details in the history of the *Hang*/handpan, its technological development, and the ways in which the *Hang*/handpan community has responded to these.

I have argued here that it is crucial to begin with a general understanding of the history, social and cultural context surrounding the Trinidadian steelpan if one is to begin developing an analysis of the global dissemination of the *Hang*/handpan. Not only do the *Hang*/handpan making techniques premise the tuning of their instruments upon the template of the steelpan, the colonial history of the steelpan is highly relevant to the conception of the instrument, an uncomfortable fact that *PANArt* and the community of international handpan makers have failed to establish a considered consensus towards. It is clear from the above that *PANArt* was caught in a predicament with the introduction of the *Hang*. While the *Hang* has obvious influences from the Trinidad steelpan, one might certainly argue that the appearance of the instrument and the ways in which the *Hang* has been implemented musically generate a certain degree of alienation from the Trinidadian culture. Although it is perhaps impossible for the European *Hang* to distance itself from the Trinidadian steelpan, the *Hang* is also in an awkward situation, since seamless integration into the historical continuity of Trinidadian steelpan culture is unachievable. The identity predicament of the *Hang* arguably obligates *PANArt* to rethink its corporate identity and philosophy entirely. In some sense, the *Hang* has situated *PANArt* as the cultural 'Other' of the Trinidad steelpan, tasked with constituting the development of an entirely new musical instrument culture. It is perhaps for this reason that *PANArt* gradually became more reluctant in describing itself as a musical instrument manufacturer, with Rohner interestingly admitting himself to be a 'culturalist' (2018, p.c.).

Questions concerning the cultural identity and ownership of *PANArt's Hang* became even more complicated with the emergence of international handpans. Handpan makers generally enjoy a rather liberated approach towards instrument making by referencing the messy intellectual property protections surrounding the Trinidad steelpan, exploring grey areas which seemingly invite global participation. Having distanced themselves from the lineage of

[46] *Pan Drums,* last accessed 17 February 2023, http://www.soniccouture.com/en/products/26-percussion/g29-pan-drums/

the Trinidadian steelpan and choosing instead to draw direct associations with the *Hang*, handpan makers generally pay respect to these cultures while simultaneously introducing individual innovations into their citations of each. However, such freedom has been challenged by *PANArt's* litigious actions as well as the baggage of critical opinions from the Trinidadian steelpan community. These challenges, together with the complex corporate identity and the transformation of *PANArt's* philosophy are examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: Makers of the *Hang*/handpan

3.1 Introduction

After examining the materiality of the *Hang*/handpan, this chapter will focus upon the makers of the *Hang*, Rohner and Schärer, as well as the ever-expanding international community of handpan manufacturers. In 2017, I made two field trips to Switzerland. In April, I visited *PANArt* studio, otherwise known as the *Hanghaus*, situated in Bern. However, since Rohner withdrew from the agreement for an interview that we had made before my departure, I was not able to engage in a constructive dialogue with the makers of *Hang* in person. Notwithstanding the unfortunate circumstances, I made the best use of the trip by exploring the surroundings of the *Hanghaus*, and continued to exchange emails with Rohner occasionally. Despite declining my request to be interviewed in person, Rohner began replying my emails from 2017 onwards. These emails have been crucial in supplying me with a fuller conception of the philosophy behind the *Hang,* the termination of the *Hang,* and the tension between *PANArt* and handpan makers, at least from Rohner's perspective.

Apart from Bern, I also visited Lenzburg twice, where the studio of *Echo Sound Sculpture* (here abbreviated as ESS) is located. The founder of this handpan company, Ezahn Bueraheng and his small team of handpan makers were extremely supportive and friendly. There, I learnt about the conflicts between *PANArt* and ESS, which offered a snapshot of the challenges presently faced by international handpan makers. Between my visits, Bueraheng was engaged in an ongoing legal dispute between *PANArt* and his own company regarding copyright infringement of the *Hang*. I returned in June the same year for another interview, and purchased a prototype design off Bueraheng which had not been released to the market.

With the help of these field trips, interviews, emails, and personal communication both physically and digitally, I shall proceed to investigate the musical, cultural, and philosophical differences between the ways in which *PANArt* and the general handpan makers community approach instrument development, and how they envision the community surrounding their creations. These differences have sadly led to a seemingly unresolvable gap and continuous, ever-intensifying legal disputes which persist to this day.

I begin this chapter with the historical development of *PANArt*, the development of the *Hang,* and the patented material *Pang*. Next, with the aid of my personal experience of engaging *PANArt's* founder, I shall go into detail about how *PANArt's* corporate attitude as a music

instrument company gradually morphed into an increasingly exclusive, internally focused, and - in a certain sense - dogmatic 'cultural facilitator'. The ways in which *PANArt* concerns itself with its intellectual property and patent protection, I argue, are not mere means of protecting themselves from commercial exploitation. Rather, they can be regarded as the defence of a specific way of engaging with music on a philosophical level.

Following this discussion, the thesis turns to Bueraheng and his instrument company ESS. The corporate history of ESS is in some ways coextensive with the evolution of the handpan maker community. Beyond this, one might argue that Bueraheng demonstrates a certain degree of the handpan community ethos. This community, generally, displays relative openness, espouses mutual aid in their social interactions and a relatively inclusive attitude towards instrument making and ways of implementation. The story of Bueraheng reveals the necessity of communal solidarity on the part of handpan makers if they are to respond to the numerous legal disputes initiated by *PANArt*. Similar incidents of legal disputes and actions led to the formation of Handpan Makers United, later renamed as Handpan Community United. Modern music instrument patents and legal actions concerning instrument copyright infringement are not uncommon. For example, from 2005 to 2015 Gibson Brands, Inc. (formerly known as Gibson Guitar Corporation) issued cease & desist letters to Heritage Guitars (formed by some of its previous employees) and PRS Guitars concerning trademark infringement.[47] However, ethnographic examinations of the complexity involved in claiming intellectual property of a music instrument are relatively rare. It is the author's hope that the following evidence sheds light on the complications involved in making such claims. This chapter ends with a conclusion on the differences between *PANArt* and the handpan makers community at large, discussing the ways in which the instrument itself has navigated through and between these two different contexts and corporate philosophies.

3.2 Corporate history of *PANArt* and the *Pang* material

An email from professor Britta Sweers from the University of Bern made me feel rather less grim about the fact that my interview with *PANArt* had fallen through. Replying to my email enquiry, Sweers expressed her sympathy, adding that she was not surprised *PANArt* withdrew from my interview, as none of her students ever managed to talk to them (2017, p.c.).

[47] Gibson's Strumming The Blues In Litigation Over Iconic Guitar Shapes, last accessed, 16 January 2024, https://www.forbes.com/sites/williamhochberg/2022/09/20/gibsons-strumming-the-blues-in-litigation-over-iconic-guitar-shapes/?sh=bb9afd0299c8

It was perhaps the growing tension between *PANArt* and handpan makers, a tension of which I had little awareness of at the time, which indirectly led to the disruption of my interview with Rohner and Schärer. In November 2016, I received an email reply from *PANArt* responding positively to my invitation for academic research on the *Hang* culture, stating that they had always been keen on collaborating with scholars and scientists in various fields (2016, p.c.). At the time of having received this email, *PANArt* was preparing for a winter vacation during December and January, which they called the '*Hangruhe*' (Hang peace). As such, I proposed to visit in April 2017. However, when I contacted them again in March 2017, Rohner expressed a different attitude towards the interview, declaring in abrupt terms that he was no longer in favour of such a study (2016, p.c.). I gave a good deal of thought as to what I had done to jeopardize our trust, and I now believe that this sudden rejection may have been triggered by my Facebook profile picture. The picture was taken at a two-day London handpan workshop, Panopticon, led by famous Portuguese handpan player Kabeção (Fig 3.1). Rohner noted his surprise at seeing me with various handpans, a fact which I had failed to mention in the emails. The act of playing handpans, that is, made them sceptical about my familiarity and agreement with the *PANArt* philosophy (2017, p.c.)



Figure 3.1 Panopticon workshop with Kabeção (back row, fifth person), London, UK, 2017. Photograph by Dom Aversano.

This was perhaps the most significant 'unforeseen intrapersonal challenge' (Gill 2014) I had experienced as an ethnographer. Even though I was unable to conduct a proper interview with Rohner or Schärer, the field trip in Bern wasn't entirely pointless. I spent two days wandering and observing both old and newly established *PANArt* workshops, which are only several hundred meters apart in distance. This area is located approximately half an hour on foot from the Bern train station, off the Aare's river bank where an electrical substation stood as a landmark for residents and factories close by.

I arrived in a season too cold for street performances. Otherwise, I suspect the Bern streets would be populated by buskers and the air punctuated with the sound of *Hanghang*/handpans. I had the excitement of visiting the origin, the very wellspring of this *Hang*/handpan journey, and this excitement must have been shared by thousands who had made their pilgrimage to this site over the years, considering most *Hanghang* were not shipped to the customers. Over the years, thousands of people had come to Bern, all in awe of a rare instrument shaped like a flying-saucer. It was not uncommon to see uninvited enthusiasts camping around the workshops, trying their luck when the *Hang* was still highly sought after. The wooden shed seen in early footage of the *PANArt* site is now vacant (Fig. 3.2), with a note displayed at the very left of the site, on which is printed '*Pangmusikhaus*'. It was also named, according to *PANArt's* publications, as the *Hanghaus* or *Hangbauhaus*. The note highlights some of the important events happened in this building:

> *Pang Music House*
> *Engehalden Street 134*
>
> *In 1956, this barrack served to accommodate Hungarian refugees and stood beyond the city in the Marzili district.*
>
> *It was relocated to the upper Engehalde area a few years later and became part of the old animal clinic.*
>
> *In 1969, the Academic Fencing Club Bern used the barracks as a clubhouse and in the 1980s it was used by the University of Bern as a classroom.*
>
> *In 1988, the steel band BERNER OELGESELLSCHAFT moved in.*
>
> *In 1989, the canton of Bern sold the barrack to the association PAN Bern*

and Bern allowed the building as temporary properties to be established at this location.

Until 1995, the house which was known as Steelwyl, was the practice and gathering place for the steelband.

From 2000 to 2005, this house was used to work on assembling the Hang, a brass sound sculpture played by hands. Subsequently, as Hang House, it became famous among the Hang players worldwide.

What began in 1988 as a place for the fostering and development of pan culture at homeland, is now a sound space for instruments made with Pang steel developed by PANArt.

The association PAN Bern is responsible for the maintenance and use of the house.

Renovation inside 2010
Renovation outside 2015

The Association PAN BERN
Engehaldenstr. 131
3012 Bern
August 2015

(author's translation)



Figure 3.2 *Pangmusikhaus*, Bern, Switzerland, 2017. Photograph by the author.

The new workshop is situated nearby. There, a two-storey-high concrete house painted in lime yellow is now in operation. There, too, we find various forms of historical documentation on display, but unlike the note detailing the building's history, there are visual illustrations of musical journey of the *PANArt's* founders themselves (Fig. 3.3). *PANArt* has been relatively generous about displaying their history as music instrument makers, with a host of publications, both online and off, demonstrating exactly this fact (2013; 2014; 2017; 2019; 2020; 2021). Given their long history of involvement in instrument making, it is reasonable for them to have an enormous amount of historical data and experience to share. However, in some sense, this is also a symbolic act signifying and signalling authenticity. This is especially evident now that *PANArt* have initiated legal battles with international handpan makers, claiming that all handpans are 'merely counterfeits of the *Hang'* (PANArt 2020). My field trip alone wasn't fruitful enough for me to attempt to illustrate the entire corporate history of *PANArt*, a lack which would have to be supplemented by consulting the available literature. This literature, suggests that the examination of *PANArt* should begin with an examination of the global steelpan phenomenon.



Figure 3.3 *PANART* logo, with hand painted illustrations surrounding it, 2017. Photograph by the author.

The steelpan was practically unknown in Switzerland in the early seventies, and only small steel bands from UK occasionally performed in hotels, with larger steelpan orchestras proving to be even rarer, only seen in festivals such as the Bern-Fest in 1976 (Egger 2008). Rapid growth of interest in steelpan began in the mid-seventies, with Rohner being among those seized by this newfound fascination. Rohner and Alex Santischi, having witnessed the performance given by a Trinidadian steel orchestra in Bern in 1976, were immediately intent upon building their own steelpans. In our correspondence, Rohner stated that the sound of the Trinidadian band on the streets of Bern was:

> *Not music but a kind of bath of sounds… I saw the surprising impact it had on people and the next day began to make a pan out of a steel drum (Dacey, 2014)*

Rohner later founded the steelpan factory in 1985, providing bands with instruments which he would retune. In turn, Rohner formed many school and youth steel orchestras (Egger 2008). The original company name, *PANArt Steelpan-Manufaktur AG*, began its trade register on the 12th of May 1993, with Rohner, Michael Frey, Bernhard Wissler, Werner Egger, and Beat Eichenberger as the founding members. These people were also part of the

Berner Oelgesellschaft: The first steel band playing self-made steel pans in Switzerland (PANArt 2020).

Besides instrument making and repairing, *PANArt* engaged in different ways in contributing to the steelpan community. In June of the same year, *PANArt* organised an 'inauguration party' at the company's residence (PANArt 2020). Egger was granted with a 'pan builder' diploma for completing a 2 years apprenticeship under Rohner. Leslie Pichery from the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards was invited to give a speech about the standardization of steelpan, while Zurich ethnologist Gerold Lothmar also gave a presentation on the misconception of the steelpan in Switzerland (PANArt 2020). These attempts could be considered as evidence demonstrating *PANArt's* concern for the development of a musical culture surrounding the steelpan, as well as the potential role an instrument maker could play in the broader community besides the simple act of musical instrument making. The company name officially changed to *PANArt* on 25th of November 1993.

As the geometry of instruments goes, the company mainly focused on the conventional steelpan, round-the-neck pan, and a tenor pan they named the Black Pan. In order to explore the potential latent in different materials with regard to tuning and sound dynamics, in May 1994 *PANArt* started to experiment with different grades and thickness of steel sheets produced by Hösch Stahl AG. These steelpans were then enforced with nitrogen by hardening factory DUAP AG (PANArt 2020). Although the company gradually expanded along the years, by 1995 all of the original *PANArt* founding members besides Rohner had left the company. Egger left and co-founded the Cosmopan GmbH (PANArt 2020), which would turn its focus to more conventional steelpan construction. In August, Schärer joined *PANArt* as a steelpan tuner and Rohner and Schärer would begin researching the new raw form of the steelpan made of deep drawn metal.[48] Subsequently, they would begin cooperating with musician and drum instructor Martin Hägler in building a set of pentatonic steelpans as well as the 'Tschempan', which integrates the steelpan and the djembe (Fig. 3.4). This 'Tschempan', *PANArt* would claim, is the first 'hand-played sound sculpture' made from the later patented material, *Pang* (PANArt 2020).

[48] *PANArt Hang Manufacturing Ltd,* last accessed, 18 February 2023, https://www.hangblog.org/panart-hang-manufacturing-ltd/

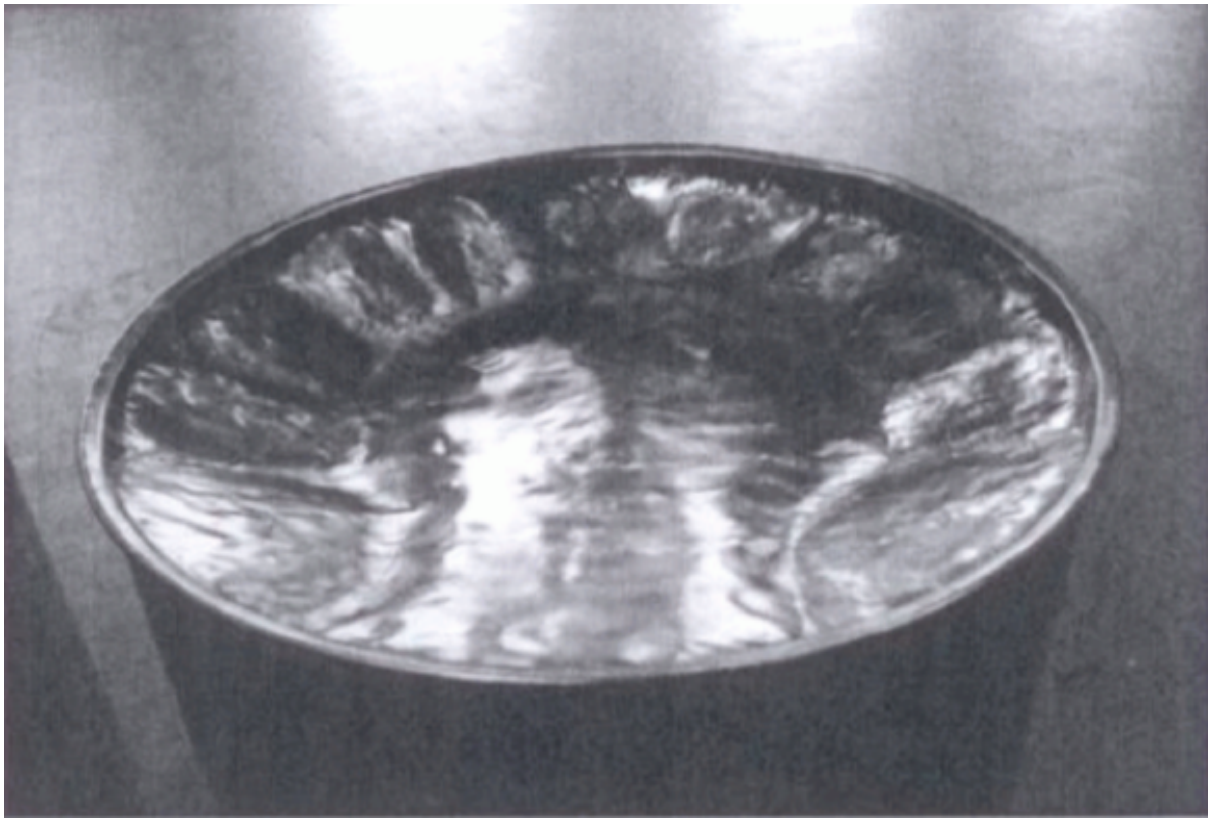


Figure 3.4 *Tschempan.* Photograph by *PANArt Hangbau AG.*

In their experiments, the newly-formed team of *PANArt* instrument builders had established that the quality of the raw material used for making steelpans had a profound impact upon the overall sound quality of the instrument, leading *PANArt* to devote itself to research in material development. As described in Chapter two, *Pang* is made by a gas nitriding method, which creates two harder outer layers with a softer core, formed at high temperature under an ammonia atmosphere. The new material not only produce a different timbre of raw steel, it is harder and more stable, benefiting from a stronger resistance to oxidation (Fig. 3.5).

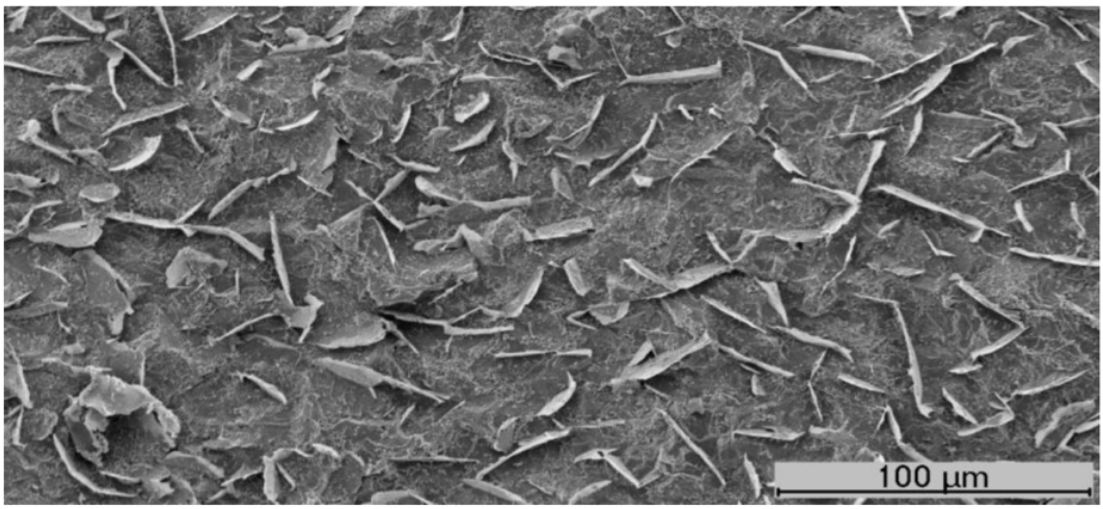


Figure 3.5 *Pang* up close: Steel sheet is nitrided until completely permeated with iron nitride needles. Photograph by *PANArt Hangbau AG.*

In 1996, *PANArt* started to produce a series of instrument built with steel nitrided in such a way, which they would name *Ping*, *Peng* and *Pong* depending on the instrument's sound register. Intuitively, Ping featured the highest register and Pong the lowest. *PANArt* named the assorted instruments made from this material Pang Instruments. This newly developed material opened up numerous doors for *PANArt*, gradually shifting *PANArt* from steelpan maker into assorted musical instrument developer.

In 1998, *PANArt* departed from the steelpan scene in Switzerland to devote itself to the study of new sonorous bodies more intensively (PANArt 2020). Between 1998 and 1999, *PANArt* had been attempting to apply the *Pang* material to musical instruments such as cowbells, glockenspiels, tonal cylindrical resonant percussion instruments they named *Tubal* and *Pung* as well as cymbals which they called *Orages* (Fig. 3.6). In 2000, *PANArt* published a research paper titled *The Pang Instrument* in the proceedings of the International Conference on the Science and Technology of the Steelpan 2000 (ICSTS). In the paper, the team addressed what it envisioned as the development of the Pang Orchestra, in which some of their instruments can be integrated in the art form of steelband, whilst others could find a place in other kinds of musical formations (Rohner & Schärer 2000).



Figure 3.6 Pang Instruments (Front left: *Ping*, *Peng*, *Pong*; back from left to right: *Orage*, *Pangglocken*, *Pung*; on the floor: *Tubal*). Photograph by *PANArt Hangbau AG.*

In summary, *PANArt,* throughout the course of the 90s, freed itself, in various ways, from being a conventional steelpan maker, transforming itself into a music instrument company which focusses on inventive designs. By 2013, it was perhaps under the similar aegis of 'freeing' itself as an instrument developer that *PANArt* once again made the significant decision to terminate the production of *Hanghang* before beginning to explore a series of new instrument designs premised upon the Pang material, turning their attention entirely to the accumulation in experience of, in Rohner's words, storing energy into metal (PANArt 2019). In an argument on the PANArt Hang Facebook page, *PANArt* wrote:

> *The Hang would never have come into existence if the PANArt tuners didn't do the same years ago when leaving the steelpan behind and experimenting with new instrument forms instead. The Swiss steelpan community wasn't amused with this decision (similar to the handpan community of today). They whished [sic] that PANArt works for their needs forever. But creativity cannot be fertile if it is bound by extrinsic needs and restrictions* (PANArt 2017)

With the imagination of new musical instruments, the imagination of new forms of musical culture also began to take shape:

> *The driving force was the hope of the tuners that the connotation of the steel band with carnival, which confined the «art form»steel band, could be overcome and that one would enjoy the charming sounds every day! For this purpose, the tuners built a room of barrels in which their instruments were*

> *hung like bells and for a time (winter 1994) a kind of carillon sounded daily* (PANArt 2019)

Some inventions, conceived before the year 2000, perhaps never left the *PANArt steelpan manufaktur Inc*. to see the public light. These new attempts were officially mentioned in the publication in the year 2000 for the first time, but no audio or video can be found displaying them in action. Perhaps, the development of Pang Instruments design has been postponed because of one simple reason: To make way for the *Hang*, which would take the world by storm for the next decade or more. In a sense, one might regard *PANArt's* corporate history as the history of a steelpan company having undergone the material and philosophical transition from steelpan makers using steel as a foundation, to instrument makers shifting to an entirely new material foundation, *Pang*. Gradually, Rohner and Schärer, in some sense, made a transition to become more than music instrument makers, becoming in the process 'Pang sculptors' who would 'build sound sculptures from *PANG* composite' (PANArt 2019).

Before the birth of *Hang*, besides producing steelpans with nitrided steel, *PANArt* mentioned its aspirations to make a Pang Orchestra, meaning assorted instruments created by *Pang* could be performed collectively. The global success of *Hang*, in some sense, would channel all of this creative energy into developing one particular instrument design. Between the *Hang* manufacturing period, in 2000 and 2013, a few new prototypes had been tested, but it was the termination of *Hang* production that would revive *PANArt's* creative force. Following this event, the Pang Orchestra envisioned in the 90s could finally be realised in the smaller form of a musical ensemble (Fig. 3.7). In December 2013, *PANArt* terminated the production and repair of *Hanghang* entirely. Since then, with the new recruitment of Rohner's sons Basil and David as PANArt's official tuners in the same year, the 'post-hang' era consists of at least the following new inventions: *Gubal* (2014), *Hang Gudu* (2015), *Hang Urgu* (2016), *Hang Bal* (2016), Pang strings (2016, consists of *Pang Sui*, *Pang Sai* and *Pang Sei*), *Hang Gede* (2017), *Hang Godo* (2018), and the latest *Hang Balu* (2019), and *Hang Balu Urgu* (2019). In 2020, *PANArt* renamed some of the instruments as *Hang Balu Sei*, the *Hang Balu Sai*, and the *Hang Balu Sui*. The 'Hang Balu' series, together with *Hang Godo*, were presented as the 'Balu Ensemble' in 2018.



Figure 3.7 *Pangensemble: Hands on Pang* (instrument shown from left to right: *Pang Sui*, *Hang Urgu*, *Gubal*, *Pang Sei*, *Pang Sai*). Screenshot by the author.[49]

It is also crucial here to point out that *PANArt* gradually morphed from a rather institutionalised form of operation into a small family business. In 1998, before *PANArt's* departure from the Switzerland's steelpan scene, *PANArt* trained more than forty steelpan tuners (PANArt 2020) in order to ensure that the scene could continue to thrive. Even though the global success of the *Hang* brought significant economic gain, *PANArt* did not expand, as some would expect from a successful instrument company. On the contrary, Rohner and Schärer remained as the only tuners in *PANArt* between 1995 to 2013. Although *PANArt* has never publically stated the relationship between Rohner and Schärer, with Basil and David Rohner being introduced only as 'the sons of Felix Rohner' (PANArt 2020), the company seemingly stopped employing and training tuners outside the Rohner family, a markedly different approach to that of *PANArt Steelpan Manufaktur AG* in the early 90s. If we dissect *PANArt's* corporate history from the steelpan building era, through the birth and popularisation of the *Hang*, all the way to the stage which would find them claiming themselves to be 'Pang sculptors', we could observe a trend of growing exclusiveness and specificity. Such growing exclusiveness and specificity, I would argue, can highlight the philosophical and ideological shift that they underwent over the course of the *Hang's* production.

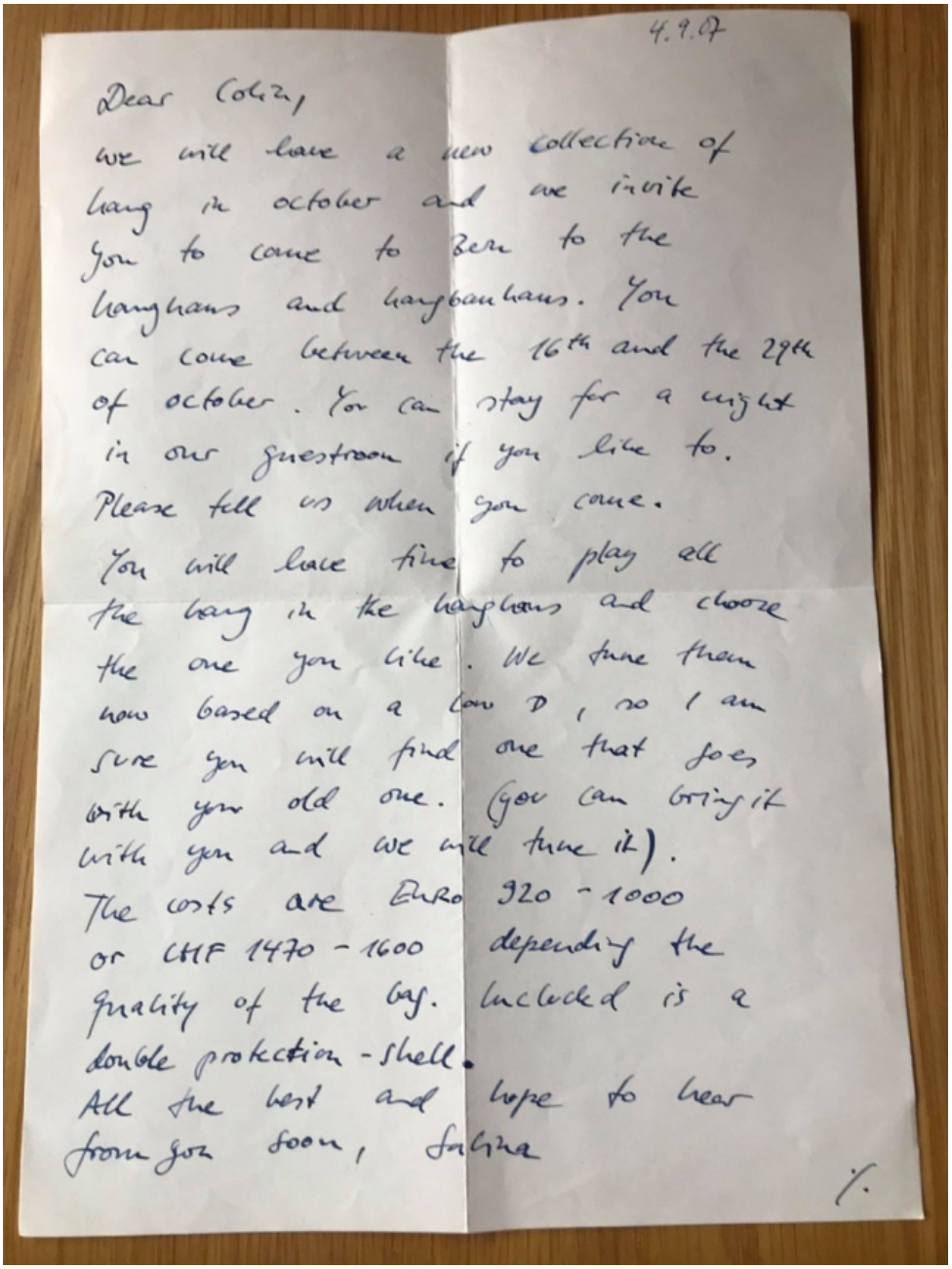
[49] *PANArt Pangensemble: Hands on Pang*, PANArt Hangbau AG, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xf_Bd5JqfvY

3.3 The *Hang* as evidence of the *PANArt* philosophical turn

From the very beginning, the *Hang* has always been a niche commodity. During the era of the first-generation *Hang*, one could purchase the new instrument in several independent musical instrument shops worldwide, given that *PANArt* had gradually developed an international retailer network after the *Hang* was presented in the Musikmesse Frankfurt. Distributors could be found in Austria, Australia, Canada, England, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and the U.S.A., as well as several music stores within Switzerland (Paschko 2012). Within this period, *PANArt* was able to make an average of 850 *Hanghang* per year. However, in 2006, after taking several months break from production, *PANArt* announced to their distribution network that they would no longer supply *Hanghang* for shops.

After such a break in production, they also reduced the quantity of production to approximately half of previous numbers. Whilst independent music retailers no longer stock the *Hang,* the only method to acquire one is to write handwritten letters to *PANArt* with an explanation on the reason for the purchase. The 'chosen' prospective owner is usually invited to Bern for a visit at their own travel expense, where they can often stay at the *Hanghaus,* and try before buying the instrument in person. Upon arrival, buyers can learn about the history of the *Hang*, the ways to play the instrument and how to care for it. This producer-consumer direct trading approach and the 'total immersion' experience of consumption became a huge success, contributing to the uniqueness, myths, and symbolic meanings of the instrument.

Informant Colin Dunn received a handwritten reply from Schärer in September 2007, in which he was invited to stay in *PANArt's* guestroom for a night between the 16th to the 29th of October (Fig. 3.8). Interestingly, the reply letter from *PANArt* differs in many significant ways from an 'official' response expected from a music instrument company. It is a handwritten letter with no company logo, indistinguishable from correspondence between friends or family members. This illustrates how *PANArt* successfully create unusual human bonds through the trade of instruments. Such bonding is central to the construction and maintenance of the *Hang*/handpan community identity, which I will examine in Chapter five.



4.9.07

Dear Colin,
we will have a new collection of Hang in october and we invite you to come to Bern to the Hanghaus and Hangbauhaus. You can come between the 16th and the 29th of october. You can stay for a night in our guestroom if you like to. Please tell us when you come. You will have time to play all the Hang in the Hanghaus and choose the one you like. We tune them now based on a low D, so I am sure you will find one that goes with your old one. (you can bring it with you and we will tune it).
The costs are EURO 920 - 1000 or CHF 1470 - 1600 depending the quality of the Hag. Included is a double protection - shell.
All the best and hope to hear from you soon, Sabina

Figure 3.8 Invitation letter from *PANArt* for selecting the *Hang.* Photograph by Colin Dunn.

Dunn could not remember the content of the letter he had written to *PANArt* nor could he recall the ‘reason’ behind his interest in acquiring the *Hang.* Besides this, the return letter from PANArt did not mention the reason why Dunn was chosen as a potential owner of the *Hanghang*. Nonetheless, Dunn recalled the joyful experience of receiving a positive response from *PANArt,* similar to that of ‘winning the lottery’ (Dunn 2018, p.c.), and treasures both the letter and receipt of purchase even today (Fig. 3.9). However, this marketing strategy of direct contact with customers, did come with a number of drawbacks. Not only did some people find the ways in which *PANArt* decides who was worthy to get the instrument ‘disturbing’ (Kraft 2021, p.c.), the combination of the scarcity of the commodity,

and a seemingly arbitrary selection of customers, created a number of complications. People from all over the world travelled to the *Hanghaus* in Bern, among them numbering enthusiasts without an invitation who had been turned down by *PANArt,* but who had insisted upon paying them a visit nonetheless. At times, these 'uninvited visitors' would show signs of emotional distress. In a 2014 interview with Swissinfo.ch, Rohner states:

> *The Hang is a virus (...) 20,000 letters and everyone is talking about the same thing. They tell us the story of when they first encountered this sound...you can imagine what it means when they get the news that they don't get a hang. Then some get frustrated, aggressive, crazy, cry all day long* (Dacey 2014).

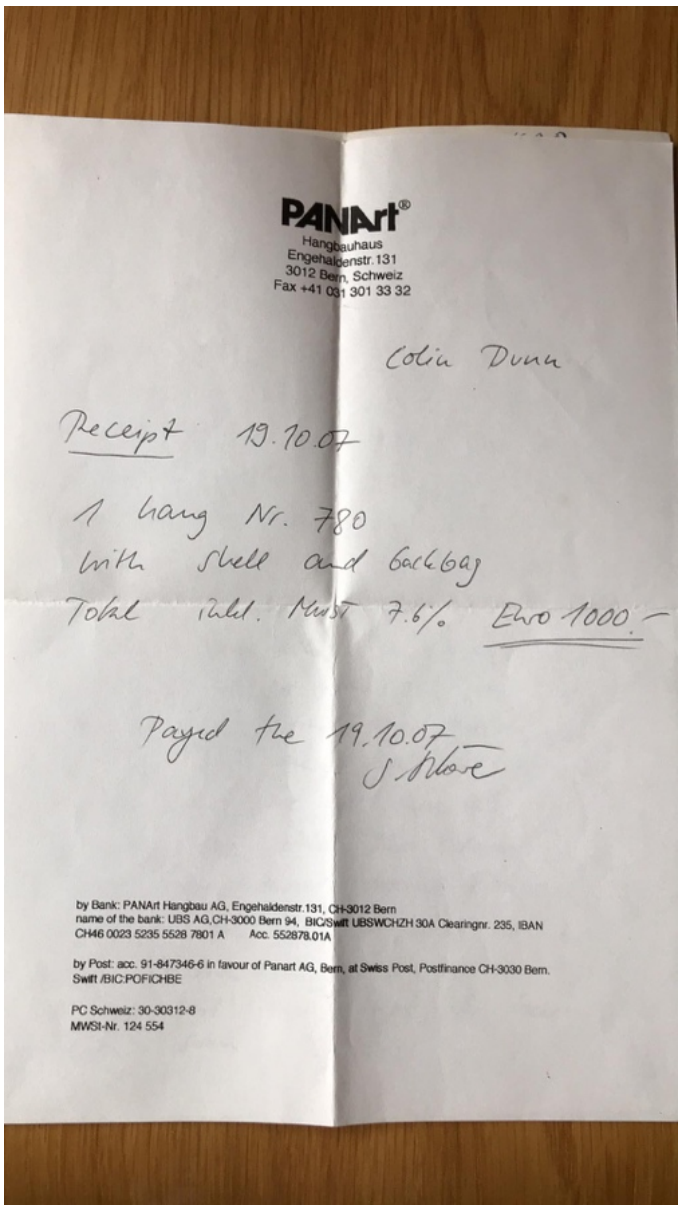


Figure 3.9 Receipt of purchase from *PANArt* to Dunn. Photograph by Colin Dunn.

After replacing the *Hang* production with a new series of Pang Instruments, *PANArt's* instrument retail method has changed slightly, requiring the prospective buyer to supply an email address on the website for sale enquiries. Smaller and more affordable instruments, such as the Hang Balu, Urgu and Hang Godo, are available for direct purchase online, and generally, *PANArt* is willing to ship internationally in the expense of the customer (Ng 2018, p.c.). The bulkier premium product, however, usually requires personal collection from the *Hanghaus* in Bern. Whilst I did not encounter customers approaching the new *Hanghaus* during my trip, and only a few Pang Instruments made an appearance at the *Hang/*handpan festivals I attended, I'm convinced that the Pang Instruments have declined in popularity following the *Hang* explosion, perhaps dramatically.

It is significant that PANArt not only adopted a relatively unusual method of selling the *Hanghang*, they also introduced regulations to the reselling of the instrument. The *Hang,* being incredibly scarce, stimulates market speculation of the commodity. *PANArt's* counter measure to this resale market was the introduction of a non-speculation agreement in 2008 (see appendix 6.), which all customers had to sign mandatorily. In 2019, *PANArt* announced a guide to buying their sound sculptures, which recommended customers not to buy *PANArt* products retuned by other tuners, as 'every sound sculpture bears the tuner's personal signature (PANArt 2019), despite *PANArt* publically announcing that they refused to repair *Hang* in 2013. *PANArt* also advised customers not to buy a *Hang* which was built before 2008 as the material wasn't refined prior to that year (PANArt 2019). Coincidentally, 2008 is the very year in which the material *Pang* would have its patent protection. I will explain further how regulations claiming intellectual ownership generated significant controversy in the later sections.

Since its establishment in 1993, *PANArt* has obtained numerous patents and trademark protections for intellectual properties in conjunction with the invention of various instruments. However, certain protections might only be exercised within a certain region of jurisdiction. Thus, similar patents or trademarks might have been registered multiple times across Switzerland, Europe, U.S., or other countries. Cross referencing between *PANArt's* publications, Hangblog, Google Patents, and Justia Patents only contributes to the confusion, considering results might indicate different sums of the total number of patents and trademarks granted. Furthermore, registration numbers which came from the same patent application might appear to be different in various sources. Here, I generally reference patent and copyright information published by *PANArt*.

According to *PANArt* themselves, German handpan maker Bill Brown of Kaisos Steel Drums initially named their product as the *Hang* (PANArt 2019), immediately sparking concerns over intellectual property protection on the part of *PANArt*. In 2008, *PANArt* successfully gained protection of the trademarks *Hang* and *Pang*. The method for producing *Pang*-like material for the purposes of manufacturing musical instruments s was filed in 2009, in both the European and US patent offices, and was subsequently approved. These *Pang* patent protections indicate that the nitrided handpan cannot contain a similar density of iron nitride needles as the *Pang* material. Since then, *PANArt* contacted several handpan companies worldwide, demanding material samples as proof of legitimacy, and handpan makers could actively send in material samples for analysis with the charge of 300 CHF. A license for nitrided material production method could be acquired from *PANArt*, which grants permission to label such a product as being 'made according to the patented PANArt method' (PANArt 2018). The license was offered at the price of CHF 250 (2013, p34), but was not accompanied by guidance as to how to make *Pang*. According to *PANArt,* in 2013 only the Japanese steelpan and handpan maker Ryo Sonobe 'actually made use of our offer' (2013, p34). Crosschecking with multiple handpan making/playing informants, perhaps one more company, Tzevaot Steel Drums, paid for such license. Facebook user Benoît Roussel II claims that at the time the license cost 100 per instrument, or 10,000 per year. However, he forgot what currency these figures were in (2019 p.c.).

On the 7th of May 2020, *PANArt* won the first copyright infringement lawsuit against German online music shop, World of Handpans, and published the verdict in German on its website (see appendix 7). This judgment explicitly asserted that the *Hang* is a work of creative art which should be protected by intellectual copyright, and that therefore the distribution of products which violate the copyright is strictly prohibited. The ruling also suggests that since the '*Hang* sound sculpture' is considered to be a 'work of applied art', instruments with a similar shape will be deemed as illegal copies (2020). This ruling shocked the global handpan community, it being surmised that if the ruling stands, there are possibilities that selling, buying, or even the public display of handpans resembling the *Hang* would become illegal. *PANArt* welcomed the verdict, and stated that it would bring the ruling to other courts outside Germany. Shortly after the verdict, the Dutch handpan company Ayasa Instruments received a Cease and Desist letter from *PANArt* (Handpan Community United, 2020).[50] Legal action was carried out on the 28th April 2021. The main instrument maker of Ayasa Instruments, Ralf van den Bor, announced on Facebook that a 'bailiff, locksmith, and police

[50] *Handpan Community United,* last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.sarazhandpans.com/news/hand-pan-community-united/

officer' seized all their instruments and parts for instrument production (van den Bor 2021).[51] However, while the case continues to unfold in the midst of a global pandemic, this thesis can only provide relatively limited information regarding the impact of the incident.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing questions regarding *PANArt* and the *Hang* concerns the reason for terminating the production of the *Hang*, especially after *PANArt* invested an enormous amount of resources and effort in claiming sole ownership of *Hang* production, having obtained the necessary trademark, patent, and copyright protections to support such a claim in international courts. Although the evidence presented - among which we can cite the ways in which *PANArt* transformed from an institutionalised music instrument corporation to a family business; cutting down production quantity of *Hanghang*; limiting scale choices of *Hanghang;* the withdrawal of global *Hanghang* distribution partners - in many ways suggest that *PANArt* has taken an unorthodox corporate direction, demonstrating little to no interest in market growth and capitalising upon the popularity of *Hanghang.* However, I would argue that the short history of the *Hang* production highlights the philosophical and ideological transition that *PANArt* went through over the course of its evolution. The philosophy of *PANArt*, largely developed and conceptualised during the production of *Hang,* not without a degree of irony, requires the termination of the *Hang*.

PANArt not only planned its departure from the steelpan scene in Switzerland by training steelpan tuners, it also expressed a growing desire to distance itself from the Trinidad carnival culture which was perceived to be its point of origin (2018, p.c.). Through several emails in our exchange, Rohner has stated that after forty years of steelpan making and accumulating tremendous knowledge on the Trinidadian steelpan movement,[52] he began to develop a certain degree of reluctance to participate in the carnival culture which had such close ties to the steelpan. To Rohner, although his performance with the steelpan with his group in Port-of-Spain in the 1992 Panorama festival was deemed a significant life experience, it also marked the end of a 'chapter' (2021, p.c.). He states that the *Hang* derives inspiration from the steelpan, though in spiritual terms the high metallic frequencies produced could elevate human beings (2018, p.c.). While therapeutically speaking the sound of steelpan could be a tool in aiding its users and listeners in shedding pain and trauma, Rohner considers the stimulating frequencies, in some sense, as 'drug-like', encouraging its

[51] Craig Reynolds May 2021, Facebook, last Accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.Facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10159289780291083&set=pcb.3029090147321394
[52] Rohner suggests I read Blake, Kim Johnson, Goddard, and Ancil Anthony Neil for the understanding of the Trinidad steelpan movement.

players to become addicted and disorientated, even damaging their sense of hearing (2018, p.c.).

In some sense, over the period of *Hang* production, *PANArt* distilled certain concepts from steelpan culture into its own cultural endeavour, which Rohner describes as an art form with 'hymnal qualities', and a collective art form which produces 'gospel power' (2018, p.c.). Interestingly, *Hanghang* are instruments which in many ways contradict the ideal, collective-oriented musical and cultural practices *PANArt* had conceptualised over the course of its history, since the *Hang* was at least partially popularised by the stimulating high frequencies it produced, and it is relatively difficult to implement in a music ensemble setting. Arguably, the music culture Rohner envisioned and advocated, cannot be fulfilled in practical terms by *Hanghang.* It is likely that this is one of the main reasons why *PANArt* decided to terminate the production of *Hang,* paving the way to the series of Pang Instruments which can be implemented collectively and without the potential 'damage' the *Hang* could cause. Pang Instruments, regardless of whether they are percussive or stringed, produced relatively short sustain, and are generally tuned under a specific intonation. While the stringed Pang instruments, to me as a guitarist, seem relatively unexciting, Rohner states that his idea is to challenge the old hierarchy where string instruments were considered as being superior, intentionally shifting his emphasis towards 'reciprocal respect' within the ensemble (2018, p.c.).

Arguably, the philosophical change in *PANArt,* developed throughout the duration of the production of *Hanghang*, was influenced by its reconsideration of individualism and collectivism. While the sound properties of the Trinidad steelpan have had a discernible influence upon the conception of the instrument, the *Hang* was in some sense an individualised adaptation of the carnival culture, a culture which is practised collectively. The highly customisable music scale makes *Hanghang* relatively difficult to be played as an ensemble, a task made even harder by the release of the *Free Integral Hang,* since *Hanghang* were no longer produced under a particular tuning system but tuned entirely by intuition. Interestingly, the Hang Guide, a guideline published by *PANArt* to accompany the introduction of the *Integral Hang* in 2010, describes the recommended musical practice of *Hanghang,* in terms which resemble a guide for New Age-like meditation. The Hang Guide claims that playing the *Hang* can activate 'deep and strengthening feeling', open doors 'to inner worlds' as the inner ear 'senses a cosmic expanse' (2010). Importantly, *PANArt* emphasise playing *Hanghang* 'is not drumming', should not played with 'gloves or drumsticks', but the player should 'sense the vibrations' by 'gliding' over the instrument and 'let the hands follow the chant' of *Hang (*2010*)*. Playing the *Hanghang* should be 'an intimate,

personal moment, even a sacred instant', whereas performing for audiences or deliberate composition with the instrument can disturb 'the dream-like state' in which one is 'completely yourself' (2010). Implementing the *Hang* as a drum, on the other hand, cannot achieve such a state of listening as 'rhythmic structures are perceived, melodies are created intentionally', and a performer is thereby tempted and distracted by becoming fixated with 'virtuosity and controlling skill' (2010).

In distancing itself from steelpan making and the Trinidad carnival culture, *PANArt* arguably turned its attention to notions borrowed from Eastern meditation for the construction of its corporate philosophy. The suggested use of the *Hang* is in some sense a method of meditation through an immersion in intensive listening and focusing upon the sense of touch. However, although *PANArt* recommends this form of contemplative musicking for its users, the ways in which the *Hang*/handpan community has implemented this instrument often conflicts with its corporate philosophy. In our exchange, Rohner has noted his distaste for some of the behaviours of the *Hang*/handpan community: The trance-like state which various *Hang*/handpan players enjoy, is regarded by Rohner as only 'losing ground', but 'not meditation' (2018, p.c.). While some players, as Rohner describes, are addicted to the sound of *Hang*/handpan, the community sometimes displays 'narcissistic' behaviours with 'blown-ego' (2018, p.c.). The *Hang*/handpan community ethos on emphasising the act of sharing, Rohner argues, are often business driven (2018, p.c.), while handpan makers are feeding 'opium' to people who are addicted to the sound (2022, p.c.). Elsewhere, he has claimed that the instrument-centric culture, should focus on 'awareness and bliss', rejecting financial gain and egocentric fulfilment (2022, p.c.).

One might argue, then, that *PANArt* attempts to remedy these unfavourable developments by terminating the production of the *Hang* and replacing it with Pang Instruments. Although legal actions against handpan makers and resellers are actions carried out for the sake of protecting the interest of the company, however, perhaps it is also a result of conflicting philosophical and ideological differences. Rohner claims that *PANArt's* legal actions are against ignorant market players filling the shops with 'expensive dreams', fantasies by which a person derives a feeling of belonging to a community, becomes an artist or even a therapist simply by buying a handpan (2022, p.c.). One of the most significant philosophical changes in the *PANArt* ethos which influenced the direction of the corporate philosophy, I argue, is the reintroduction of collectivism, likely an experience derived from participation in steelpan culture. Pang Instruments are the result of a conscious decision to make instruments without intonation choices, with relatively softer and shorter sound. Rohner claims that the sound of the *Hang* could 'heal or kill' (2022, p.c.) and that therefore the idea

behind new inventions is to nullify and neutralize the ‘drug’ aspect of the stimulating frequencies (2018, p.c.). Schärer also expresses similar concerns, and claims the Gubal created in 2014 is ‘no longer magical but you could make magical music out of it’. Schärer even goes so far as to claim that by playing the Gubal, one might ‘even be healed from the *Hang* virus’ (Dacey 2014). Interestingly, this is in contrast to the general preference among handpan makers for metallic high-frequencies, with handpans often being crafted from raw steel or stainless steel, materials capable of producing incredibly lush and long sustains.

In this light, the *Hang* can be almost identified as a transitional experiment in the development of *PANArt's* philosophy of music and musicking. The *Hang,* in some sense, is an instrument influenced by the steelpan, but designed mainly for the individual. During the production of the *Hang, PANArt* not only borrowed from various musical cultures for musical scales and instrument architecture, while Eastern meditation influenced, in more ways than one, the conceptual premise anchoring the production of *Hanghang.* While some properties of the *Hang* gradually diverged from the development of the corporate philosophy, there are certain aspects of this experiment which were successfully transposed to Pang Instruments. They are largely hand-struck diatonic instruments, but are built to be played collectively. The termination of the *Hang,* in this light, brings a close to *PANArt's* preoccupation with the introspective self, while Pang Instruments is the result of the reintroduction of collectivism influenced by the Trinidad steelpan culture. As Rohner states, Pang Instruments is an art form like the steelband, but existing after and beyond the carnival form. The art form he envisions has to be a collective one, since he believes that a collective is stronger than an individual (2018, p.c.). The new *PANArt* corporate direction is perhaps best demonstrated by the 2017 performance in which *PANArt* Pang Instruments were performed live at the premiere of *Spira Mirabilis*, a film which examines how humans overcome limitations. Rohner, as the leader of the ensemble, led the group on stage while playing the Hang Bal strapped around his shoulder. Schärer, Basil and David Rohner, playing assorted Pang Instruments, followed Rohner’s groove and chanting (Fig. 3.10). Such a specific way of playing Pang Instruments is further examined in the next chapter, where the thesis investigates various ways of implementing *Hang*/handpan.



Figure 3.10 *PANArt Pang ensemble* live performance. Screenshot by the author.[53]

3.4 *Echo Sound Sculptures*

After examining *PANArt's* corporate history and philosophy, this section focuses on the adaptation of the *Hang*, the handpan, with the interests of highlighting some key elements for the understanding of handpan makers. Since there are hundreds of handpan makers globally, a number which continues to expand, it is therefore difficult to present a precise overview of the handpan's corporate history and philosophy. However, out of all the handpan makers I have examined and interviewed, the story of Ezahn Bueraheng and his company, *Echo Sound Sculpture* (abbreviation: ESS) in many ways captures the essence of a handpan maker's trajectory, charting the development of an instrument manufacturer which emerged in the early stages of the formation of the handpan maker community, while demonstrating a different approach in nurturing and envisioning a new musical culture than *PANArt*.

Besides Bill Brown of *Kaisos Steel Drums*, which started making and commoditising instruments inspired by the *Hang*, Bueraheng was among the first five makers in the world who made their name in the early days of the handpan explosion. One might also argue that Bueraheng is among the very best as well: when I first discovered and stepped into the

[53] *Spira Mirabilis - Kinopremiere in Bern*, PANArt Hangbau AG, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZD2GTf-Uk9U

Hang/handpan world in 2013, an *Asachan* (the name of ESS's handpan) was considered to be one of the 'top-shelf' instruments. This was especially true of the relatively rare *Asachans* with the iconic double yellow circle painted around the ding built in the early days, since such instruments were arguably as highly sought-after as the *Hang* in the market. The eye-catching yellow circle has no musical function, but was introduced as a counter copyright infringement measure to distinguish the instrument from a *PANArt Hang*. The ESS studio is situated in Lenzburg, Switzerland, which could be reached in under an hour by train from Bern. Chris Ng, the founder of *Hong Kong Handpan Union*, helped in introducing my research to Bueraheng. Although Bueraheng's response was plain and short, I was nonetheless granted a visit to the ESS studio, where I examined his handpans (he preferred to refer to his instruments as 'pantam').

Bueraheng was a Bangkok-based designer, painter, and jazz guitarist who has now settled in Switzerland with his Swiss wife since 2008. It is rare to see Asian faces within the European and American *Hang/*handpan community (I was myself misidentified as Bueraheng when I attended *HangOut USA* 2017, although we barely lookalike, in my humble opinion). Bueraheng first encountered the *Hang* in Bangkok at the *World Rainbow Gathering 2006* – a periodic 'nomadic utopian' (Niman 1997) counterculture gathering which has travelled around the world annually since 1972, recently receiving criticism as an act of 'cultural exploitation' (Estes, TallBear, Meyers, et al 2015). Bueraheng re-encountered a busker equipped with the *Hang* in Switzerland not too long after the *World Rainbow Gathering*, and realised it is difficult to acquire one himself after some searching on the internet. Whilst being unemployed in a new country at the time, Bueraheng had the occasion to try and build one himself:

> *In my apartment I have two woks, we Asians have wok pans. I think to myself - what if I tried to make it from the wok? And I made one note from it, just one note. And I realised it is not easy, but of course the wok is too thick, but I have no idea. I started to get more and more curious* (2017, p.c.)

The learning process was difficult, especially when there was no information available regarding how to build the instrument. To Bueraheng, it was like 'running into a wall' (2017, p.c.). The situation improved when Bueraheng started exchanging questions with other handpan pioneers: Victor Levinson, founder of *SPB* from Russia; Luis Eguiguren, founder of *BEllArt* in Spain; American maker Kyle Cox, founder of *Pantheon Steel*; and Italian Marco Della Ratta who found *Disco Armonico*. Bueraheng also ordered books on how to tune a

steelpan, thinking the idea behind the handpan and the steelpan were effectively the same. When the handpan's quality reached Bueraheng's expectations after three years of experimentation, he named his product Asachan: a word derived from the Thai word for 'miraculous' (อัศจรรย์). However, at the time, Asachans were not produced for sale. Instead of monetising the instrument, Bueraheng's friends were able to acquire one with the exchange of vegetables, jeans or other items (2017, p.c.). In 2013, Bueraheng's friend suggested he could try selling the instrument, so he began trading from his basement workshop situated right outside his home, with the price of CHF 1200.

The instrument was extremely well received. In the early days, when the demand of the *Hang*/handpan was largely out of proportion, enthusiastic admirers, similar to those craving for the *Hang*, would camp near his residency hoping to acquire an *Asachan*. Bueraheng does not know how these campers received word about his location, and he would simply pretend that was not the maker of the *Asachan*. Now, Bueraheng's workshop has relocated itself to a spacious, well-lit, two-storey factory building, which is big enough to host regular handpan performances. Brazilian Flavio Brant Alvim joined the tuning team recently, and specialised on a smaller version of *Asachan* with a Tupi Guarani name: *MiRim*. In this native Brazilian language, 'mirim' literally means 'small'. Perhaps influenced by the emphasis upon the virtue of openness in the incipient stages of the handpan culture, Bueraheng is very generous in sharing handpan-related information to those who seek it: not only did he spend hours demonstrating his tuning procedures to me (Fig. 3.11), he has been exchanging handpan-building knowledge with a handful of tuners: Colin Foulke from the US, Frenchman Michael Colley, Jonathan Heaven from Canada, and Antonio Arvind from Brazil have been regulars and visit almost annually. These names are now relatively established in the *Hang*/handpan community as some of the finest makers around. Bueraheng claims that people cannot go to *PANArt* to learn as their technique is not open for sharing (2017, p.c.). Before my arrival, Bueraheng had also just finished contacting a new maker on how to setup an online ordering system, the need for which was made evident to him in a rather unpleasant way:

> *I'm not very well organised at the beginning. Because I only focus on making the instrument, didn't expect the rest of the things around. It is crazy, since 2012 to now I got like 12000 emails. I answer them maybe 10%* (…) *sitting in front of the computer and answer the emails is like another job. All of this part, I'm not ready. Now I'm okay* (…) *I'm teaching many builders, makers. Before, I also learn from them, and they learn from me. We exchange* (2017, p.c.).

Christian is the third member of ESS, a member who is not involved in hammering, but who works exclusively on accounting and replying email enquiries for the company. Valerio Menon, Italian handpan player and a relatively new maker in the scene, came to *ESS* for technical exchange and collaboration. In 2018, Menon officially joined ESS as the third handpan maker on the team.



Figure 3.11 Bueraheng, founder of *Echo Sound Sculpture*, tuning demonstration, Lenzburg, Switzerland, 2017. Photograph by the author.

Bueraheng's creativity and imagination shines in the making of *Asachan*. While *PANArt* named different *Hang* sound models with reference to a specific ethnicity (for instance, ake bono, Hungarian major), a practice which was widely adapted in the handpan community, ESS on the other hand posited names based on the mood inflected by the specific choice of notes. To give a few examples, by hearing notes D3, G3, A4, Bb4, C#4, D4, E4, F4, and G4 on the handpan, Bueraheng imagined himself walking in the desert, so he named this sound model 'TalaySai', a name derived from the sandy shore of Talay Sai in Thailand. The sound of D3, G3, A4, C4, D4, Eb4, F#4, G4, and A5, on the other hand, evokes 'the energy of a fight', so he named it 'Saladin', after the famous Muslim hero. Sometimes, Bueraheng would goes as far as inventing new names for scale choices. The word for one of the most popular sound models, the 'Annaziska' (C#3, G#3, A4, B4, C#4, D#4, E4, F#4, G#4), is a word-play of the name of Bueraheng's wife:

> *Because it is a minor scale, it has a feeling of melancholies. I feel it is like a European energy. I use my wife's name, Franziska, her middle name is Anna. I play with it for something new, and then, ooh, Annaziska. After that people stick to this name. When she is in the workshop, and people come, I say this is the original Annaziska* (2017, p.c.).

Bueraheng's artistic imagination also exhibits itself in the experimentation in new instrument designs. There is a wooden rack stretched out on the second floor of the studio, and besides newly completed *Asachans*, we find several instruments which are not available for purchasing (Fig. 3.12). It is likely that some of them will remain here as prototypes. In 2010, Bueraheng was experimenting with building notes on the bottom-half of a handpan, at the time dubbing his experiment 'double gu', a process which he documented with the filming of a demonstration video. However, after viewing the video, *PANArt* was convinced the design was a replication of *Gubal*, which was introduced and patented in 2013. In response to this, Bueraheng noted that he never registered his design because of financial difficulties. To avoid future complications, he bleakly dropped the 'double gu' indefinitely:

> *Which is sad, because I do a lot of stuff alone, without trying to copy them. Not at all, honestly from my heart. But they are faster. It is a business competition (…) This is actually too much money in it, if you do patent stuff, you have to keep checking, who will do the same, all is lost in the money system* (2017, p.c.)



Figure 3.12 Wooden rack in *Echo Sound Sculpture* studio, displaying some prototype instruments. Photograph by the author.

Drawing from his fine-art background and training, Bueraheng is also one of the first handpan makers to have experimented with remarkable ornamental designs by applying metal inscriptions on the instrument (Fig 3.13). The colouration of the shell could also be changed with variation in heat treatments. The dazzling decorative work serves as a visual signature to distinguish the instrument from the *Hang,* a design detail which makers like the Spaniard Luis Eguiguren, one of the first five handpan makers who produced an instrument which Bueraheng felt looked 'a little too close' to the original *PANArt Hang*, may have neglected to take into account. (2017, p.c.). I personally inspected the seemingly problematic (and now discontinued) *BEllart* design myself in several festivals, and I was stunned by the fact that it was virtually indistinguishable from the *PANArt Hang*. Without taking into account the fact that the brand name is inconspicuously imprinted on the instrument, it is perhaps impossible for the audience to distinguish one from the other. Bueraheng's way of understanding copyright infringement, to him, is that the producer deliberately confuses a customer with a similar product. For such a reason, Bueraheng specifically requests that his customers not refer to his instrument as a *Hang*. With a different name and different ornamentation, Bueraheng insists that he did not infringe upon the original *Hang* design. However, as a jazz guitarist, he considered the argument of *Hang* patent protection, should be in some way similar to the legal concerns surrounding guitar design infringement:

individual guitar makers should have the freedom to make their own guitar, provided that they introduce sufficient cosmetic differences.



Fig 3.13 *Asachan* Limited Edition "Annaziska F#" #002. Photograph by *Echo Sound Sculpture.*

In the midst of the 2010s, demand for the *Hang*/handpans were phenomenal. Being one of the most sought-after brands in the market, a brand which in those days only produced approximately 50 handpans annually, ESS was under constant market pressure. Consequently, ESS introduced a ‘waiting-list’ system, a common practice endorsed by many reputable handpan makers. This system would operate on a first-come-first-served basis, usually via email confirmation. Customers would then have to wait until their turn to pick their chosen sound models. It was not uncommon among handpan makers to request full payment before the instrument was built. Among some of the most popular makers, the waiting-list alone could have stretched from a year to four years, or more, with some makers

even putting a stop to the taking of new orders and closing their waiting lists due to the sheer length of the wait. For instance, *Pantheon Steel*, one of the five international handpan pioneers, claimed that in 2010 their waiting list soared to around 800 people (Cox 2011). However, as I gained a firmer affiliation with several makers in the community, they would often grant me a private trial at their workshops, during which I was presented with a chance of purchasing their finest instruments instantly.

In conjunction with the secondary market speculation of *Hanghang*, *Asachans* were also one of the most profitable aftermarket commodities among handpan 'flippers'. Previously, Bueraheng had stumbled upon an *Asachan* on EBay, listed six times over the original price (2017, p.c.). Most of them would easily reach prices averaging 5000 Euro, some even reaching 8000 Euro. While Bueraheng was not pleased to see people profiting on the instrument against his wishes, he decided not to intervene as he did not intend upon exerting 'control [over] everything', since he believes that everything in the world has two sides (2017, p.c.). Whilst many handpan makers, in a way, followed *PANArt's* footsteps in attempting to actively stop handpan resellers from manipulating reselling prices, these makers would constantly monitor EBay, Facebook, and other major online marketplace for handpan trades. A common practice among handpan makers would be the issue of a warning to sellers with listings for unreasonable prices, followed by a threat refusing to retune the instrument in the future (Fig 3.14). Under surveillance from the makers themselves, the community generally followed the 'rule' of reselling the instrument at the original price, plus the addition of reasonable shipping or travelling costs from the previous trade. However, reselling outside of these online marketplaces is difficult to monitor, and trades of *Hang*/handpan with excessive prices can continue in discreet fashion. It is important to note that around 2017 there was an obvious saturation of handpans in the market, arguably shifting the traffic of handpans from a 'maker's market to a buyer's market' (Pandeiro 2018, p.c.). The monitoring of reselling prices eventually became relatively unnecessary, and the waiting list system generally shrank significantly. In this period, emails and social media advertisements on handpans available for immediate purchase began to appear gradually.

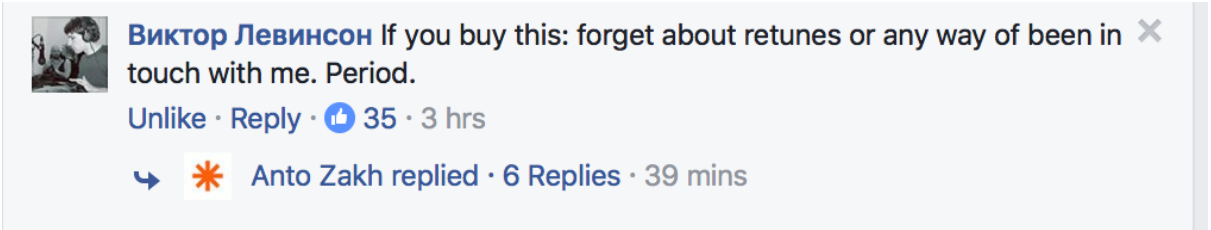


Figure 3.14 Victor Levinson, the maker of the *SPB* pantam, discourages a reselling trade of his instrument. Screenshot by the author.

As a jazz guitarist, Bueraheng is well trained in Western music theories. This provides him with a different perspective for appreciating the diatonic *Hang*/handpan. Given the advantages of such a training, Bueraheng has expressed to me that this sort of musical sophistication is not for everyone, and that adeptness in musical theory effectively creates a hierarchy in which the 'freak people' (comprised of '1 or 2%' in the whole world) who can play an instrument on a virtuoso level separate themselves from everyone else (2017, p.c.). *Hang*/handpan, on the other hand, comes with only 7 or 8 diatonic notes, which everyone can play, enjoy, and understand in their own terms. Appreciation of the instrument and the tones it produces is no longer premised entirely upon music theories, which is 'too much nerd (sic)' (2017, p.c.). Music, to Bueraheng, can be introduced differently with the help of the *Hang*/handpan. For instance, on ESS's official website the sound model SaByeD (D3, G3, A4, B4, C#4, D4, E4, F#4, and A5) is described as:

> *An introverted, sub-conscious energy; SabyeD is a strangely heartbreaking variation of the D-major scale. With musically flexibility, this sound model brings feelings of vulnerability and wistful nostalgia, but also joy and laughter. Triumphant in the high end and humble in the low end, SabyeD is a beautiful, and well-rounded scale* [54]

Most of these descriptions could be interpreted by anyone without Western music knowledge, which makes it appealing to music amateurs. To Bueraheng, an ordinary instrument attracts ordinary people, and he is especially pleased to be able to sell his art to ordinary individuals: lawyers, businessmen and street musicians alike came to the workshop for the collection of *Asachans*, the instrument serving as a conduit which connects people from different backgrounds (2017, p.c.). He claims that this exchange contributes to the openness and kindness of the community:

> *I love this community* (…) *99% is good people* (…) *The reason why people in the community is very sharing is because we just like it, we just like this instrument because of sound, because of this kind of minimal*

[54] *Asachan* sound models, last accessed 17 February 2023, https://echosoundsculptures.com/media/videos/

> *idea and stuff. I don't know, if the pantam have chromatic notes, it maybe not like this* (2017, p.c.)

However, he is also relatively sceptical, since he suspects that the kindness of the community might begin to diminish when it expands (2017, p.c.). Bueraheng loves participating in handpan festivals, choosing at least one to attend every year. He has noticed that in recent years some festivals have begun to expand, becoming relatively commercial. In the early days, such gatherings were very intimate since everyone knows each other (2017, p.c.). Now, he feels that this community is still nice, being extremely trusting in such a way that handpan owners could still enjoy handpan-couch-surfing: just bring along a handpan when you travel, and you are likely to find someone to shelter you through the journey. Bueraheng predicts that the automation and mass production of the handpan will completely change the community (2017, p.c.). In the meantime, before the onset of the inevitable, *Hang/*handpan festivals should resist the temptation of expanding and commercialising:

> *As long as people not try to make business out of it too much, it is still very nice. Depends also on the policy of each festival. If we try to keep it small or non-profit style, then we can keep this nice energy going around* (2017, p.c.)

Bueraheng's beliefs in openness do not come without challenges. In 2014, *PANArt* contacted ESS through a legal representative for the examination of the material used on *Asachans*, with a solid submission deadline to meet to avoid legal actions. Although Bueraheng was unwilling to cooperate, he claims *PANArt* was not prepared or open for discussion (2017, p.c.). Whilst believing himself as innocent, Bueraheng cut two pieces of material samples from an Asachan shell, handed one directly to Schärer's hand, another one to Bueraheng's selected laboratory (2017, p.c.). After the examination, *PANArt* gave approval for the material developed by ESS, with an email stating the clearance of suspected patent infringement (2017, p.c.). However, during the time of this interview, ESS was involved in another legal trial with *PANArt* for the accusation of copyright infringement. Bueraheng suspects that since ESS and *PANArt* happen to be located in the same country, it became an obvious target for legal actions. Bueraheng was positive about the case, but admitted he has to deal with it maturely. Bueraheng credited the *Hang* invention to Reto Weber, who brought the idea to *PANArt*, and since *PANArt* discontinued the *Hang*, he was convinced that the role of *PANArt* and the role for the rest of handpan makers, became different. While *PANArt* devoted itself to the

invention of other instruments, the handpan makers continued exploring the possibilities opened up by the *Hang* design. Now, in the form of handpans, the idea of the *Hang* has been stretched in various different directions. Claiming handpan makers are merely copying the *Hang*, Bueraheng argues, is 'not fair' (2017, p.c.).

Brazilian maker Alvim, who is the new addition to the ESS team, has a strong opinion on the lawsuits ahead. In his opinion, this legal process is going to bring the global handpan makers closer together than ever. Alvim here drew an analogy to the ancient Roman god, Saturn (Chronos), the 'papa god who eats his own child' (2018, p.c.), in describing Rohner suing handpan makers. Consequently, handpan makers united in solidarity with one another to protect themselves against being 'eaten' (2018, p.c.). In response to these conflicts and the desire to transcend them, Alvim has also expressed a wish to visit Trinidad and Tobago, to the roots of this 'sound sculpture culture', where he thinks the science of making the steelpan is much more advanced than that of the handpan (2018, p.c.). He also sees the resemblance between the struggles that the steelpan and handpan engender:

> *[they are] forbidden to have carnival, to have party. We are doing this again, the guys there were forbidden from the government to play leather (drum skin), and they create from the metal. And now there's always PANArt tries to forbid us, but we are doing something anyway. It's like this, resistance!* (2018, p.c.)

Bueraheng is confident things will turn out just fine. The worst scenario for them, he imagines, is to open a sushi shop, and to use the wok pan to cook soup noodles, he smiles while remarking.

3.5 Handpan Makers United and Handpan Community United

The case of Bueraheng and his music instrument company ESS highlights in miniature the development of the handpan community over time. Being one the earliest notable handpan makers and perhaps affected by the locality of the company, Bueraheng faces a wave of challenges by the litigious *PANArt.* To a certain degree, these incidents demonstrate the potential threats the handpan maker community faces collectively, and as Alvim states, these challenges have served to unite international handpan makers, exerting a pronounced influence upon the *Hang*/handpan community. Arguably, conflicts such as these have created a discernible cleavage between *Hang* and Pang instrument supporters and critics.

Notably, the Cease and Desist action launched by *PANArt* targeting *Ayasa Instrument* had a marked influence upon the global *Hang*/handpan community. Among many members of the international community, *PANArt* was no longer the mythical and highly respectable instrument pioneer that it once was, but transformed into the 'common enemy' of the handpan community. For example, the administrative representative of the Facebook page Handpan Instruments publicly denounced 'hate speech' targeting *PANArt*, hoping that 'handpans are able to survive this persecution and continue for future generations in a positive way (Steil 2021)[55]. However, as stated above, the ethnographic data in this study was largely collected before the *Ayasa Instrument* incident. Therefore, I will return to the case of Bueraheng and ESS for the examination of these developments.

In March 2019, *PANArt* published an announcement on its official website titled 'A Legal Case In Switzerland - Peacefully Resolved'.[56] In the words of *PANArt* themselves, Bueraheng 'copied the instruments of *PANArt* a little too boldly' (2019), which led to a lawsuit on copyright infringement. It also states that the case had reached pre-trial settlement between both instrument companies in autumn 2016 before the Commercial Court of Aarau, which I suspect was a writing mistake. To my knowledge, the settlement should have been reached in 2017 between April and June, during which I made two field trips to Lenzburg. However, the requirements for such a settlement mentioned in *PANArt*'s announcement match Bueraheng's explanation during my second visit: three physical changes had to be made to the instruments produced by ESS to enhance the visual differences between the *Hang* and *Asachan*. The domes on *Asachan*'s tone fields and the construction of the central note 'ding' must be constructed differently, whilst the bottom opening 'gu' must be off-set from the center of the instrument. *PANArt's* announcement also mentions that ESS must openly state that *PANArt* serves as the origin of their inspiration. Cross checking with ESS website, inside the 'creation' page are images of the new Asachan with the mentioned changes (Fig. 3.15) and a disclaimer at the bottom of the page explicitly stating that Bueraheng has been 'inspired by the sound sculpture Hang®'.[57] Bueraheng, in a way, was relieved by the pre-trial settlement. He was relatively happy that ESS was not obliged to take responsibility for the legal expenditures of the case, and claims that making physical changes to the instrument was part of the ESS 2017 plan anyway (pc, 2017).

[55] *Handpan Instruments,* last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.Facebook.com/groups/1420146368215788/permalink/3029817470581995
[56] *A legal case in Switzerland - peacefully resolved,* last accessed 18 February 2023, https://panart.ch/en/articles/ein-rechtsfall-in-der-schweiz-friedlich-gel%C3%B6st
[57] *Creation,* last accessed 18 February 2023, https://echosoundsculptures.com/creation/



Figure 3.15 New handpan design by *Echo Sound Sculpture.* Photograph by *Echo Sound Sculpture.*

PANArt considers this pre-trial settlement as an exemplary precedent to induce other Switzerland handpan makers to make similar adjustments. It also claims that all handpans imported to Switzerland are subject to the same requirements (PANArt, 2019). To *PANArt* at the time, the verdict was perhaps one of the most satisfying results to have emerged from the legal wrangles with international handpan builders, since the legal actions targeting the US company Pantheon Steel and Harmonic Arts in Columbia were both 'bad experiences' from *PANArt's* point of view (2019).

Distressed by these legal disputes, by the end of 2017 international handpan makers took action in forming Handpan Makers United (abbreviation: HMU), a closed organization formed in the interests of promoting the handpan while challenging 'oppression and intimidation'

(2017, p.c.). People could express their interest in becoming a member by sending in emails, and I was accepted after a vote held by existing members. HMU's two main goals lay in aiding the handpan movement in a positive direction, explicitly mentioning their wish to offer legal security for the movement (2017, p.c.). HMU took legal action to challenge both the EU and US patents obtained by *PANArt* in the use of gas nitriding methods in instrument making. HMU believes that these patents were obtained improperly and should not be used as litigious weapons by *PANArt* (2017, p.c.). HMU has also expressed its desire for the financial burden of such legal actions to be shared by public donations and other means of contributions. As such, it has been active in the coordination of public fundraising events for this purpose.

The name of the collective, Handpan Makers United, originated from the legal action taken to challenge the EU patent. At the time, some global handpan makers were responding to the call for patent re-examination, an intervention which legally required a name for such collaboration, a problem which was eventually settled with the collective adoption of the name Handpan Makers United. Meanwhile, the US patent re-examination was led by *Pantheon Steel*, the US handpan pioneer which invented their own metal rolling process as well as being one of the biggest handpan manufacturers in the world. The name Handpan Makers United was then further expanded as an international organisation for the pursuit of similar causes. The endeavour also provides alternative information regarding the legal disputes, and argues that some of the public announcements made by *PANArt* are simply not true.

Interestingly, perhaps out of a wish to demonstrate a different mind-set towards the cultural ownership of instruments, handpan makers generally adopt a community ethos demonstrating a relative openness towards sharing handpan-making information. As examples of this, apprenticeships and collaborations between handpan makers are common, while rich resources on the procedures and technology involved in handpan making are readily available on the internet. Online platforms such as the Facebook page 'Exchange of knowledge handpan',[58] were created with the intention for knowledge sharing among new and experienced handpan makers. This virtue was perhaps exemplified in 2016 by US handpan maker Colin Foulke, when he gave a presentation on his newly developed DIY hydroforming technology for handpan shell formation (Fig. 3.16). Foulke openly shared the machinery template of his development online (see appendix 8), and emphasised that

[58] *Exchange of knowledge handpan,* Facebook, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/groups/415394298532244

this was undertaken out of the love for sharing. Such actions have arguably created a ripple effect, which has in some ways inspired Pantheon Steel's taking the lead in dedicating their US patent on 'Musical Instrument And Method Of Forming A Surface Thereof' (patent number US8455745 B2) to the public.



Figure 3.16 Foulke's presentation of hydro-forming machine, HOUSA 2016. Screenshot by the author.[59]

However, the handpan scene was once again shocked by the ruling of the case against Germany's online music instrument shop World of Handpans in 2020. As briefly mentioned, the verdict released by Berlin Court indicates The *Hang* is a work of creative art, thus it should be protected by intellectual copyright. *PANArt* expresses its appreciation of the ruling, by publishing the verdict on their website (see appendix 7), followed by an article titled 'Confirmed: PANArt's "Hang" protected by copyright' (2020).[60] It claims Rohner and Schärer were the first to consider their creation as sound sculpture, thus 'a work of art' (2020). Whilst musical instruments are not usually protected by intellectual copyright as they have obviously functional values, successfully claiming the *Hang* as primarily a work of 'fine art', provides *PANArt* with enormous power against activities which may violate the copyright protection. Not only handpan makers could face legal claims for copyright infringement, but also any selling or trading of handpans in similar shape could be considered illegal. The

[59] *CFoulke's Hydroforming HOUSA 2016 Presentation*, Colin Foulke, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yf2ssRUMqAQ
[60] *Confirmed: PANArt's "Hang" protected by copyright,* last accessed 18 February 2023, https://panart.ch/en/news/confirmed-panarts-hang-protected-by-copyright

public display of such 'fine art' counterfeits through live concerts, videos, workshops, so on and so forth, could potentially lead to lawsuits.

This far-reaching consequence of the Berlin Court verdict, pressured HMU for the re-evaluation of its target of alliance. Within the same year of the legal verdict, it reformed into a non-profit organisation: Handpan Community United (abbreviation: HCU). HCU hired the high profile international law firm Bird & Bird in order to contest this copyright claim (Saraz 2020)[61] and launched crowdfunding campaign for the legal costs. It also expanded as a social media campaign, where people could show their support in applying a profile picture skin stating they 'joined the movement' (Fig. 3.17). In a sense, this was perhaps the most significant sign indicating a full-on contestation between handpan enthusiasts and *PANArt*. Unsurprisingly, while the *Hang*/handpan community initially displayed a certain enthusiasm for naming the instrument as 'sound sculptures', after the Berlin Court case the community is seemingly more reluctant to use such a term. 'Music instrument' is now a relatively popular term in describing handpans.

[61] *HANDPAN COMMUNITY UNITED,* last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.sarazhandpans.com/news/hand-pan-community-united/



Figure 3.17 Italian handpan festival organiser Albino Sala changed his profile ‘skin’ on Facebook. Screenshot by the author.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the rich corporate history of *PANArt* at length, highlighting some of the significant choices the company has made as a musical instrument developer, researcher, manufacturer and international trader. *PANArt* has introduced various interesting and rather unique strategies, to regulate the trade of *Hanghang,* with some of these strategies having a pronounced influence upon the international handpan maker community in direct and indirect ways. Although inspired by the *Hang*, the handpan community gradually diverged from such a ‘cultural root’, and continues to develop instrumentally and culturally. While in the early days the difference between *PANArt* and other handpan companies may have been perceived as being merely different brands of similar instrument design, these differences have widened to the point of creating a division between *PANArt* and the broader community which it has distinguished itself from, creating the most heated 'crisis' that these circles have faced to date.

The corporate history of *PANArt* has been a rather idiosyncratic one for a musical instrument manufacturer. While a more common progression for a instrument manufacturer begins from its basis as family business which could potentially thrive and expand into a larger corporation, *PANArt* 's trajectory has taken the reverse direction: from an institutionalised instrument manufacturer offering apprenticeships and a system of certification into an instrument company built around its patented material *Pang*, operated entirely by one family. As its reputation continues to develop in the 2000s, the number of *Hanghang* produced annually has, interestingly, declined. Rohner states that the *Hang* 'is not something to put in a shop window' and that it belongs to the 'flow of gift' (Castan & Pagnon 2006). In some sense, the company is mindful of being 'taken over by the market force' and has wilfully maintained itself as a 'no-growth' business (Castan & Pagnon 2006). Perhaps, to the handpan community at large, *PANArt's* way of doing business is more than simply 'no-growth', but that it rather positions itself as an 'anti-growth' business. Technically speaking, *PANArt* had the demonstrated capacity to terminate its 'flagship' instrument instantly, restricting others from reproducing the instrument. It is in many ways difficult to position *PANArt* and to situate it as a conventional a music instrument corporation. In this light, I concur with Rohner in his description of the company as being a collective of artists, 'not instrument makers' (2022, p.c.). They are, in this precise sense, making 'provocative' 'sound sculptures' (2022, p.c.).

The birth and the termination of the *Hang,* as I have argued, highlights the significant philosophical change that *PANArt* went through over the course of its evolution. The *Hang*, while seemingly adopting certain sound properties of the Trinidad steelpan, is arguably an instrument for the music amateur to experience musicking on an intensely individual and introspective basis. The termination of the final generation of the *Hang, Free Integral Hang*, arguably marked the reintroduction of collectivism into *PANArt's* corporate philosophy. Although *PANArt* often underlines that it wishes to establish a distance between itself and the carnival culture from which it came, this reintroduced dimension of collectivism, in some sense, draws inspiration from the same culture. With a seemingly growing concern for the high frequencies produced by *Hanghang,* the latest Pang Instruments made by *PANArt* generally produce relatively softer and less exciting sound. To *PANArt*, this new direction marks an explicit turn towards collectivism.

Whilst the *Hang* was, at least in *PANArt's* estimation, an ‘art-work’ developed by two ‘artists’, the emergence of the international handpan makers, however, was largely a collective endeavour. The case of Bueraheng and his handpan company ESS illustrates a certain degree of reciprocity by a collective of international DIY handpan makers. The community's sense of openness in sharing and the global demand of *Hang/*handpan contributed to the rapid growth of international handpan makers. Generally, handpan makers have no qualms in paying respect to *PANArt* as the inventor of *Hang,* and situate the act of handpan making within a cultural continuum originally deriving from the Trinidad steelpan, a music instrument-making culture which invites public participants. Thus, it seemed intuitive for the international handpan makers community to take the liberty of exploring and expanding the foundation laid by *PANArt Hang*. Handpans, as adaptations of the *Hang,* are now manufactured in various structures and boast ornamental designs. Interestingly, in contrast to the direction which *PANArt* subsequently took, the stimulating high frequencies are generally treasured, and even intensified.

In response to these developments, *PANArt’s* litigious response shook the international handpan makers community, leading to a deteriorating relationship between *PANArt* and the rest. Arguably, the development of the handpan instrument not only exploits the original *Hang,* one might go so far as to say that the course of this development, is essentially incompatible with *PANArt’s* philosophical development. To *PANArt*, a proportion of the handpan community is associated with blindly capitalising upon the instruments, promoting the addiction of high frequencies, and the propagation of somewhat narcissistic behaviours. Even the apparent reciprocity and solidarity of the community, as Rohner suggests, is influenced by a market-driven mentality. In successfully claiming art-work copyright protection of the *Hang*, the ominous legal threat that *PANArt* poses to the handpan community at large has resulted in a sense of solidarity among both handpan makers and players. The ways in which Brazilian handpan tuner Alvim drew a parallel between *PANArt’s* legal actions and the history of Trinidad colonial suppression is nonetheless fascinating and inspiring. His critiques of the ‘cultural imperialism’ instigated by *PANArt* highlights the complex interplay involved in disputes over cultural ownership and contestation, between *PANArt,* the burgeoning community of international handpan makers and the Trinidadian steelpan culture.

Chapter 4: The *Hang*/handpan and its Performance Contexts

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the musical activities in which the *Hang*/handpan has been utilised. I begin by examining my own experience, revisiting the process I went through when learning how to perform with the handpan, an experience which hopefully will contribute to an understanding of the steps required to reach a basic competence in *Hang/*handpan playing. Vocal culture is a significant part of the *Hang/*handpan community, and this section of the thesis will attempt to illustrate how different vocal techniques have been utilised with the instrument. Although the instrument has been invented in the West, it has, interestingly, been adopted with great enthusiasm by 'world music' practitioners. By drawing a parallel with the global use of the didjeridu, the sound of the *Hang*/handpan can be examined as a new entry within a broader 'world music scene'. The New Age-inspired narrative oriented around the notion of sound healing creates a global need for sound objects correlating to supposed therapeutic properties which are of benefit to one's health, mind, or self-proclaimed spirituality. By drawing from literature concerning the purported health benefits of the didjeridu, singing bowl and gamelan, this chapter considers how the *Han*g/handpan is similarly utilised in the realm of New Age sound healing.

Finally, the practice advocated by *PANArt* themselves, 'harking', is subjected to close scrutiny. Such a recommendation corresponds to the current corporate philosophy of *PANArt,* although this sometimes sits uncomfortably with the relatively liberal, exploratory culture of the *Hang/*handpan community. The supplementary questionnaire conducted in 2018 highlights the differences between *PANArt* and the broader community in imagining the implementation of the instrument. For example, one comment proposes that the *Hang/*handpan should not be treated 'like band instruments all mic'd up and a zillion notes', but that it should rather be intended for 'something else' (2018). Meanwhile, another comment envisions the *Hang* being 'truly mastered and used in BBC proms along-side other classical artists' as a goal (2018). Thus, the ways in which the instrument might be played or deployed can be very different across the community, and these divergent imaginings can sometimes come into conflict with one another.

4.2 *Hang/*handpan and instant music gratification

Similar to how the design of the saxophone allows performers to achieve a level of basic competence comparatively easily (Cottrell 2012), the *Hang*/handpan is perhaps one of the

most approachable acoustic instruments available in the marketplace. By comparison, although the guitar is generally known as one of the most commonly self-taught instruments, it took me roughly two years of daily practice during my teens in order to start performing simple cover songs with other musicians. However, I spent less than a month teaching myself how to play the handpan after acquiring it in 2014 before developing the requisite basic competence and confidence as a handpan player; I began to write new compositions and upload performances on social media shortly afterwards. Within a year after acquiring the handpan, my duo project, 問米 (Ask Rice), which features a female vocalist chanting over handpan melodies, received numerous invitations to perform in public (Fig. 4.1).

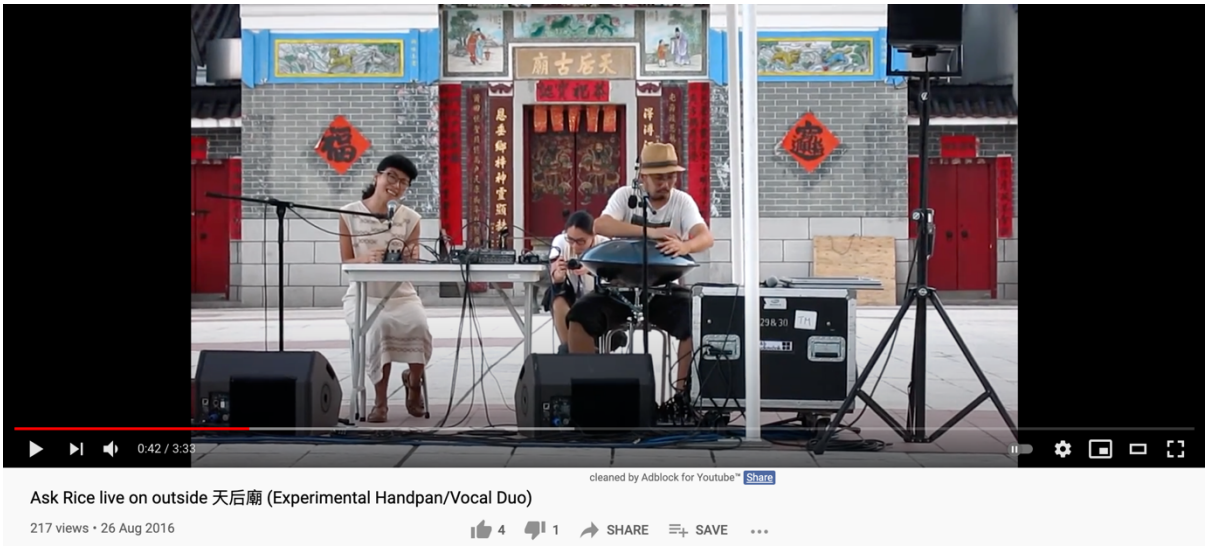


Figure 4.1 Ask Rice first performance by invitation. Screenshot by the author.[62]

David Beery, owner of the California-based instrument shop which stocks his own brand of handpans, published a five-part YouTube video in 2020 which documented a student who was able to learn the basic technique of handpan playing in four days, successfully performing at a coffee shop on the final day of shooting. The student was Tim Ferriss, a millionaire 'lifestyle guru' who earned his fame as an author and podcaster. Ferriss claims he had tried many instruments as a kid, among which were the piano and trumpet, but eventually quit because 'in the beginning it is very hard to sound good' (YouTube 2020).[63] The *Hang*/handpan, on the contrary, allows the player to activate rich harmonies by a simple touch. Ferriss made a video introducing the handpan on his own channel after having

[62] *Ask Rice live on outside 天后廟 (Experimental Handpan/Vocal Duo*), Today's Remedy, YouTube, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Dcufq6Wqls
[63] *What I'm Currently Learning (Or, "The Joys of Handpan Music") | Tim Ferriss,* Tim Ferriss, YouTube, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://youtu.be/KKOTBT0Utv4

undertaken the crash course with Beery. With just four days of one to one tutorials, Ferriss was able to perform with basic left and right hand alternating movements on a 4/4-time signature, usually with accents on the 'ding' on every '1', followed by other notes randomly, leaving spaces in between by incorporating ghost notes (gentle music notes with rhythmic value but without discernible pitch). Ferriss also demonstrates how to produce a crisp tone by striking with the right part of the finger. In a sense, he acquired the technicality of an average handpan player, largely indistinguishable from any other that I might have encountered in festivals and gatherings, with less than a week of training. I could well imagine Ferriss calling himself a handpan player afterwards, a qualified member of the *Hang*/handpan community.

Basic competence in the *Hang*/handpan thus requires minimal effort to attain. Playing the *Hang,* as *PANArt* claims, requires 'no technique, no prior knowledge, no classes, no teachers - only the curiosity and the joy of discovering and playing' (2013, p28). Acquiring the *Hang*/handpan, then, can be said to be the equivalent of gaining instant musical gratification. The simplicity of the instrument, to a certain degree, contributes to the diversity among the community's participants, in terms of age, gender, musical training, and career background. Handpan makers whom I interviewed (Bueraheng; Handschuch; Weglinski; Garner, p.c.) share similar observations, disclosing that the majority of their clients are composed of music amateurs. Amateur *Hang*/handpan players can also experience the joy of music collaboration, but under one specific condition: the *Hanghang*/handpans used for these performances are in identical or highly compatible intonation.

One of the earliest examples of *Hanghang* duo performance is the YouTube video uploaded in 2008 titled 'Hang Insomniac Jam',[64] performed and uploaded by one of the most high-profile handpan educators, David Charrier. This nine-minute long video captures Charrier, together with his cousin Sylvain Paslier, improvising on two identically tuned *Hanghang*, each on their own lap, with incredible freedom. The video was shot in the *PANArt* Hanghaus where the company used to build the instrument, now reserved for occasional gatherings and hosting visitors. In Paslier's own words:

> *We must have played for hours that night… It was the beginning of something. Something that brought us all over Europe and even to the USA.* (2015) [65]

[64] *Hang Insomniac Jam,* David Charrier – Master The Handpan, YouTube, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0xxnFqdBCE
[65] *Hang Insomniac Jam,* Sylvian Paslier 2015, last accessed 19 February 2023,

The video clearly demonstrates how two *Hanghang*/handpans with the same 'sound model' - which some have speculated to be the Integral *Hang* (D_3, A_3, $B\flat_3$, C_4, D_4, E_4, F_4, A_4) - provides opportunities for multiple players to participate as a musical collective, exploring music without concerns for intonation. Although the video was shot in relatively low sound and video quality, it became viral with almost five million views to date. Perhaps this formidable viewership owes itself to the video's clarity in demonstrating the inclusivity of the instrument and its compatibility within collaborative contexts, as well as the freedom of exploration and expression that both performers enjoy, even with relatively limited experience as *Hang*/handpan players. However, such fluidity is relatively challenging to achieve with *Hanghang*/handpans built in different intonations.

In many ways, the amateur-friendly nature of the instrument shapes the sorts of activities which manifest themselves within *Hang*/handpan festivals: interactions are often not musical, but social. While *Hanghang*/handpans are largely built across various note choices, forming a music ensemble is relatively challenging for amateur players, unless participants acquire instruments with identical or largely harmonious intonation. In a *Hang*/handpan ensemble setting, it is not uncommon among amateur players for them to experiment and memorise, through trial and error, which musical notes could be activated without causing dissonance. The compatible notes are often limited, and thus the ensemble is usually restricted in number, with the constrained note choices leading to challenges in individual musical expression and enjoyment.

However, community participants found an interesting way to collaborate despite these restrictions: sharing a single *Hang*/handpan between multiple players. Usually, the size of a *Hang*/handpan invites two to perform on the same instrument, and each participant usually improvises on notes within close reach, leaving further notes on the instrument for the mirroring improviser. Such music collaboration makes good use of the diatonic feature of the *Hang*/handpan, allowing amateur players to interact musically with basic music competency. Perhaps two to more improvisers interacting on a single instrument may not offer much in the way of aesthetic satisfaction, but one might argue that the promise of being always in harmony with said collaborator(s) never fails to generate a sense of community between the participants, at least to a certain degree. From my personal experience with such a method of music implementation, it is relatively convenient in developing a sense of connectedness between participants, regardless of differences in musical competence. Interestingly, while

https://www.sylvainpasliermusic.com/post/2015/06/02/hang-insomniac-jam-en

staged performance rarely results from such an implementation of the *Hang*/handpan (Fig. 4.2), however, the simple act of sharing an instrument while playing on it together is an important display of communal ethos.



Figure 4.2 Relatively rare display of multiple musicians performing on a singular *Hang*/handpan on stage. Screenshot by the author.[66]

Much like how Bueraheng suggests in Chapter three, there's an undeniable hierarchy at work in learning to perform with music, which is 'not for everyone' (2017, p.c.). The simple, diatonic design and the 'exotic' look of *Hang*/handpan is unquestionably appealing to the masses. However, I would argue that the 'newness' of the instrument is one of the most remarkable qualities which should be carefully examined. Similar to the invention of the saxophone in the 1920s, the new instrument avoids the anxiety of influence (Cottrell 2013, p155). Perhaps one could even draw a parallel here to the 'exhaustion' of the symphonic instrumentarium during the 1920s and 1930s in Weimar Germany, which led to a movement of creation of new instruments, driven by the pursuit of an of aesthetic of automation in the field of musical instruments, such as the mechanical organ by Hindemith (Patteson 2016). If

[66] *8 Hands of Sound @ Perelandra, Asheville – Intro*, brunussapiens, YouTube, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d30BWg7q-GM

the automatic musical instruments made in Weimar Germany exemplify the techno-scientific mind-set of European modernity (2016, p10), perhaps the invention and popularity of the *Hang/*handpan suggest an interesting interplay between the production and consumption of musical instruments and postmodernity.

In this sense, the *Hang/handpan* can be regarded as a product designed to separate itself from the accumulated weight of musical experience and expectations inherited from the 'old' Western music instrumentarium. A diatonic instrument in Western music is certainly not new - the harp and harmonica are quick examples of instruments with diatonic versions. The Trinidadian handpan maker Mark Wilson even claims that there have been diatonic steelpans built for children with special needs (2017, p.c.) prior to the creation of the *Hang*, but these did not reach the levels of popularity of *Hang/*handpan. Hence, I would argue that the diatonic design is not the sole factor for the *Hang*/handpan's popularity among music amateurs, it is rather the comparative lack of history/historical context behind the instrument which allows amateur players to feel comfortable enough to participate in playing it. Without a fixed expectation of a performer's competency beforehand, it allows the musicking of the *Hang*/handpan to start from scratch.

Baron, who leads the Pang Orchestra in Bristol, has described what he feels to be the difficulties inherent to the musical hierarchy in Western music, and how the *Hang/*handpan, to a certain degree, resolves it:

> *But, as we grow up, in our different cultures and different societies, and the culture defines what is music and what is a musician. And that affects us. And then, a lot of people grow up thinking, I didn't do guitar, I didn't play clarinet, music's not for me, I'm not a musician (…) And I think that's what the handpan thing has done in its own right.* (2018, p.c.)

Siberian multi-instrumentalist and composer Vladiswar Nadishana, a virtuoso who specialises in world fusion music, claims that there are 'no kings or masters in playing *Hang/*handpan, right now everyone is a beginner' (pc, 2016). When we refer to the advertisements which have placed heavy emphasis upon how the instrument is relatively easy to play (Cottrell 2012, p155), we can begin to see how the global dissemination of saxophone and *Hang/*handpan, in this context, are comparable to one another. However, the seemingly egalitarian nature of the *Hang/*handpan community, which explicitly places less emphasis upon hierarchy and competitions while placing the accent upon universal self-transformation, perhaps differs from the community which has formed around the

saxophone. In this sense, one could make a case for the handpan community being a singularly unique one. The manner in which the *Hang/*handpan community is constructed and maintained will be examined in the next chapter.

This crucial property is not only reflected in the amateur-oriented nature of the community, it also largely shapes the pedagogical approach towards the instrument. An examination of the most popular *Ha*ng/handpan online training courses reveals some interesting similarities. In all of these courses, the instructors would invent new types of notation systems to circumvent the conventional requirements of Western music theories. Charrier, French *Hang/*handpan performer and educator, is the founder of the relatively popular online learning platform, *Master the Handpan*. Charrier invented a unique notation system comprised of innovative symbols, a system which indicates how hard the player should strike, and by which hand (Fig. 4.3). Similarly, acclaimed world percussionist and *Hang/*handpan virtuoso Kuckhermann is one of the pioneers in teaching how to play the instrument, having released a three-part series of instructional videos/DVDs between 2012 to 2014 titled *Handpans and Sound Sculptures*. The final release, which targets intermediate and advanced players, comes with a notation book coded in traditional Western musical notations and staff, explaining the rhythmical aspect of the video instruction (Fig. 4.4). However, the notation system avoids certain musical information, such as indicating the key of a piece and which notes to play. Rather, the position of the designated area which the student should strike is marked with a simple numerical system and phonic descriptions (such as tak, slap, and palm bass).

Although the first instalment of the *Handpans and Sound Sculptures* series came almost four years earlier than Charrier's *Master the Handpan*, the relatively more approachable online learning platform and simple notation system invented by Charrier are arguably more in line with the needs of the market. In 2016, around the time when *Master the Handpan* officially launched, Kuckhermann released his own version of an online *Hang/*handpan learning platform: *The Handpan Dojo,* which provides a wide range of instructional materials which can be purchased as a bundle for 476 US dollars. While browsing the free materials, I encountered a completely new and simplistic set of pedagogical tools which eliminate the western notation system completely (Fig. 4.5). This is especially significant since there is an obvious trend of *Hang*/handpan instructors reserving reference to music theories only for relatively advanced students, or even neglecting them entirely.

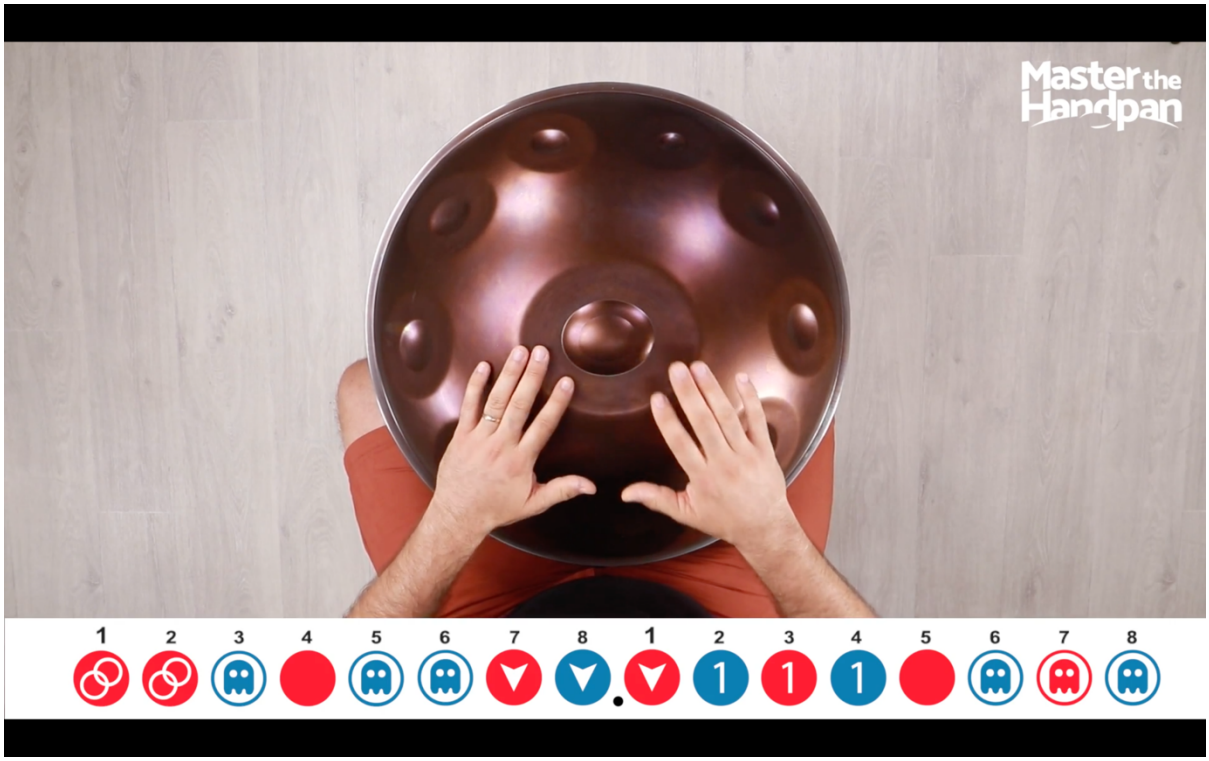
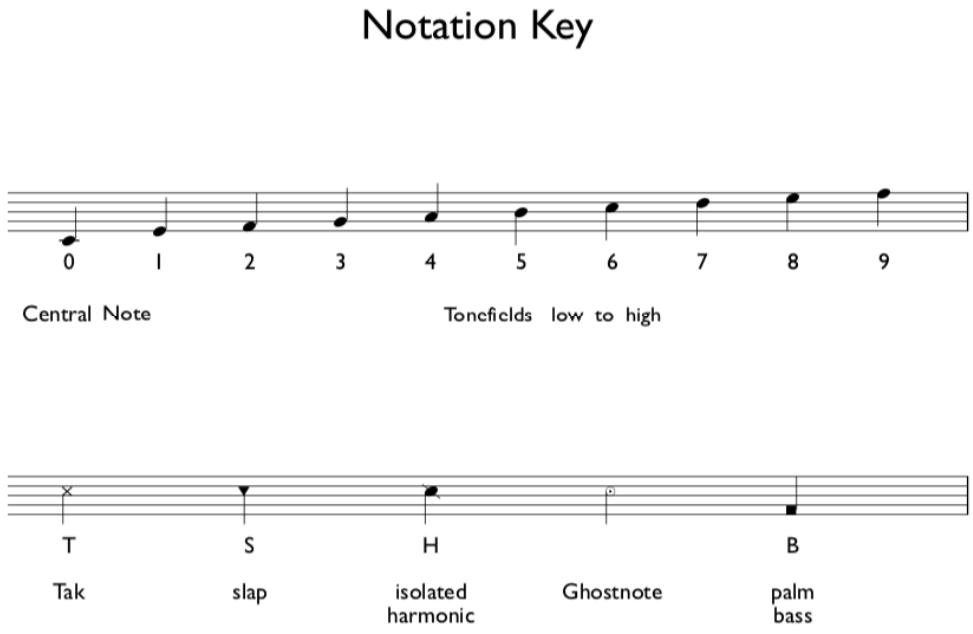


Figure 4.3 *Understanding the symbols,* a video lesson in *Master the Handpan* free trial course. Screenshot by the author.[67]



[67] *Understanding the symbols*, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://masterthehandpan.teachable.com/courses/511335/lectures/32796118

Figure. 4.4 Notation system incorporated into *Handpan and Sound Sculptures III.* Screenshot by the author.[68]



Figure 4.5. *Let's add melodies!*, *Handpan 101* Free Course, *Handpan Dojo*. Screenshot by the author.[69]

Although in many ways one might say that the instrument was influenced by the Trinidad steelpan, the newly invented hand-struck *Hang*/handpan perhaps creates a new musical world in which music technique, aesthetics and pedagogy have an unprecedented opportunity to be built from the ground up. Informants across all levels of musicianship generally espouse such new-found freedoms in musical expression. *Hang*/handpan players often reach basic competence without external assistance, and there is arguably no collective pressure suggesting that a *Hang*/handpan player should perpetually challenge the self to reach higher levels of competency. Although *Hang*/handpan workshops and tutorials are available, players leading such workshops usually share their unique approach to perform on the instrument, rather than claiming authenticity or teaching 'the right way' to perform the *Hang*/handpan. However, whilst my claim on how amateur players benefit from this relatively new, simple, and diatonic instrument is supported by ample evidence, the potential of the *Hang*/handpan has also been explored by more advanced players in various ways. The following sections examine how the instrument is utilised in different musical

[68] *Handpans And Sound Sculptures III Notation Book*, David Kuckhermann 2014
[69] *Let's add melodies!*, *Handpan 101* Free Course, *Handpan Dojo*, last accessed 20 November 2020, https://courses.handpandojo.com/courses/470664/lectures/8670756

settings, and highlights some of the musical milestones which have impacted the community.

4.3 Performing *Hang*/handpan with voice

Musical performances blending the sound *of Hang*/handpan and different vocal techniques are not uncommon and were surprisingly popular during my field work at HOUSA 2017. There were at least four different performers who coupled playing of the *Hang*/handpan with singing: David Charrier, who has been mentioned early in this chapter, and Italian handpan player/maker Emma Grassia, also known by her artist name Mumi, are among some of the most popular handpan players who occasionally perform the instrument while singing mainstream cover songs. One of the highlights of HOUSA 2017 was perhaps the collaboration between Charrier and Mumi, performing Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah.*[70] Later that year, Charrier uploaded his version of *Mad World* on YouTube[71] - a mainstream hit in the early 80s by Bath's pop rock duo Tears for Fears - which has been re-arranged by American singer-songwriter Gary Jules and film score composer Michael Andrews in 2006. Charrier's stripped down version of the song appears to be more influenced by Jules and Andrew's rearrangement, and has received 70k views to date. Mumi's version of *Nothing Else Matters*[72] - a rock-ballad smash hit written by thrash metal icon Metallica - was uploaded in 2020, and received over one million views on YouTube within a year. Similar to the defence of singers performing cover songs written by others offered by Don Cusic (2005), these cover recordings can perhaps reveal the influences of the artist and help in bridging audiences who may have been separated by a generation or more of musical taste. In some ways, it is also an effective method to introduce new *Hang*/handpan artists to the general public, based on specific keyword-based exploration paths (M. Airoldi et al. 2016). New interpretations of an already familiar work also create a coherent worldview, expressed in a context in which the artist's intention could be understood by the audience (Miller, ed. by Plasketes 2013). Interestingly, although the *Hang*/handpan is generally associated with spirituality and a future-primitive imaginary (as I will discuss below), the music worldview demonstrated by these performers are actually relatively mainstream and pop-oriented.

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[70] Danny Sorensen 2017, Facebook, Last Accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/danny.sorensen/videos/10213930103189001/

[71] *Mad World (Tears For Fears) Handpan cover by David Charrier*, David Charrier – Master The Handpan, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIbeQVmWiCE

[72] *Mumi - Nothing Else Matters (handpan cover)*, mumi handpan, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32v8ARqaBas

Although Charrier and Mumi's 2017 HOUSA performance was memorable, it was the original songs performed by Judith Lerner and Mama Mojo which I considered to be more intriguing. Lerner and Mama Mojo in many ways do not fit into the stereotypical image of a music performer appearing on stage in a music festival. They are both older, middle-aged Caucasian women. While Charrier and Mumi have aspirations to establish themselves as professional handpan players, Lerner and Mama Mojo approach the instrument more casually. Their technical proficiency on the *Hang*/handpan may be limited, but they utilised the instrument as a mean to support their original songs, similar to ways in which folk singers employ simple arpeggios on the acoustic guitar while singing. Lerner is a grandmother and cancer survivor, trained classically on the violin when she was young, and subsequently picked up the djembe in the 1990s. To her, the discovery of the *Hang/*handpan was like 'an avenue for expressing in a way that the violin certainly didn't' (Paslier 2019). Quoting Pete Seeger as one of her inspirations, she began writing *Hang/*handpan folk songs, occasionally performing children's songs with *Hang/*handpan such as *Frère Jacques* or *Itsy Bitsy Spider*. Lerner performed an original song named *I'd Always Known* on stage during HOUSA 2017, written for her son who was leaving home to attend university.

Imani White, also known as Mama Mojo, is one of the co-organisers of HOUSA. She calls herself a spiritual activist and new world alchemist, having trained with various new world shamanic ceremonialists. During HOUSA 2017, White led one of the sound healing sessions in which she instructed participants to relax on the floor while she facilitated meditation through the activation of assorted sound objects such as *Hang*, bells and gongs placed across the room (Fig. 4.5). More on *Hang/*handpan and New Age sound healing is examined later in this chapter. The performance, which I witnessed on stage, has a similar sound healing motif: with a *Hang* on her lap, she improvised a chant about nature, ancestors, spirits, and the universe. The mesmerising yet fragile sound of the *Hang* and its geometrical resemblance to a flying-saucer seemed to be an excellent fit for the occasion.



Fig. 4.5 Sound healing session led by Imani White at HOUSA 2017. Photograph by Slightly Removed Photography.

Vocal technique with the *Hang*/handpan is of course not limited to songs and lyrics. In the documentary *PANArt* made and released in 2006, we find footage of a street performer who demonstrated an incredible range of vocal techniques while performing with the *Hang.* It began with the performer yodelling,[73] which intuitively leads the audience to draw connections to the mountainous Swiss climes where this vocal technique is used. However, the performer then transitions, with exceptional technique, from yodelling into Khoomei (Хөөмий) - a unique singing style originating from the republic of Tuva in central Asia which involves a vocalist generating a rattling low-frequency while simultaneously activating a whistle-like high pitch, with a third note sometimes being discernible between the two (Pegg 2001). This performer is Bruno Bieri, a Bernese musician and university lecturer who plays the alphorn. This case of combining the *Hang* and Khoomei demonstrates the potential which the *Hang* affords, one which could be utilised for the deterritorialisation of cultures (Connell & Gibson 2004). This essentially aligns with the logic behind the consumption of world music. More evidence on how the *Hang*/handpan could engage in the realm of world music will be provided later in this chapter, as I examine how the *Hang*/handpan has been seamlessly integrated into the sonic arsenal and canvas of world music performers.

[73] Yodelling is executed by addressing the sound that evolves as the voice passes from bass registers (low chest voice) to higher registers (head voice) and the other way around (Plantenga 2013).



Figure 4.6 Bieri performed Khoomei and handpan for Dalai Lama. Screenshot by the author.[74]

Although the combination of Khoomei and *Hang*/handpan has proven to be successful and influential, Khoomei is in itself a relatively challenging vocal technique. Consequently, such practices are far less common among the community. Alternatively, a method of vocalisation which requires significantly less technical expertise is relatively popular, and has been seen on YouTube videos, street performance, and around the camps in music festivals: beatboxing. Beatboxing is a percussive vocal tradition that dates back to the 1980s and is closely linked to the culture of hip-hop. With this practice, the beatboxer creates the illusion of polyphonic music, vocalising by imitating the sound of drums, drum machines, and other percussive instruments. With this beat as the foundation, competent beatboxers can further develop their technique, allowing themselves to simultaneously produce basslines, melodies, vocals, and other sounds based upon imitating assorted instruments (Stowell & Plumbley 2008). Although beatboxing is strongly associated with hip-hop culture, Tok Thompson argues that the internet has unmoored beatboxing from this association, giving it a new and global significance. Now un-copyrighted, flexible, and communal, beatboxing could be

[74] *Bruno Bieri sings for Dalai Lama - Berner Zeitung online*, Bruno Bieri, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://youtu.be/YRK-kBKFHAw?t=41 Anecdote: When the Dalai Lama visited Bern in 2017, Beiri performed to His Holiness in an event organised by the Bernese newspaper company Berner Zeitung. Beiri sang in Khoomei with the words 'I like Tsampa' (Tibetan and Himalayan diet) for comical effect while playing a BEllArt handpan. The act of choosing a Spanish 'counterfeit' handpan rather than a Bernese invention *Hang*, sparked numerous online arguments, compelling Berner Zeitung to turn off the comment function on this video clip uploaded on YouTube. *PANArt* was not pleased. However, for unknown reasons, Beiri continued to perform on the handpan while singing in Khoomei in other presentations.

recognised as folk music for the 21st century (Thompson 2011). However, the popularity of utilising beatboxing techniques in the *Hang*/handpan community may have little to do with such modes of 'folk recognition' and more to do with being coextensive with multiculturalism and the significant number of music amateurs within the community. Despite the fact that beatboxing virtuosos are capable of producing incredibly complicated sounds and rhythms which require considerable practice, as noted above, reaching basic competence in the *Hang*/handpan is reasonably easy.

Broadly associated with black street culture and highly popular among young YouTube viewers, beatboxing is widely accepted among young *Hang*/handpan performers, especially street performers. One of the pioneers in coupling the *Hang*/handpan with beatboxing is Reo Matsumoto, a beatboxing street performer from Japan who is both active and well received in the *Hang*/handpan community. Matsumoto travels the world performing on streets and stages, often accompanied by other *Hang*/handpan players (Fig. 4.7). In the context of street performance, there are interesting correlations between beatboxing and *Hang*/handpan performance, largely due to the ability of both to quickly draw attention from audiences on the street. (Street performances will be further examined later in this thesis, where I examine the reasons behind the successful global dissemination of *Hang*/handpan and the interplay between busking and social media).



Figure 4.7 Reo Matsumoto (left) beatboxing along with Japanese handpan player. Screenshot by the author.[75]

[75] *BEATBOX & HANDPAN | Save the HandPan | 2020*, re os - REO MATSUMOTO, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ab0v6A7HY7o

Another vocal technique not uncommon among the *Hang*/handpan community (and one which is also technically demanding) is the south Indian 'rhythm-speak' method for vocalising Indian drum music, *Konnakol*. While this vocal technique is abstract and heavily based upon the sound of drums, *Konnakol* has its own grammar and syntax (Athnerton 2007). One of the main reasons behind the utilisation of *Konnakol* in the *Hang*/handpan community is the fact that the community is made up of a healthy proportion of percussionists with interests in world music. For instance, informant and London based percussion player Dom Aversano is a committed student of *mridangham* virtuoso Sri Balachander. In 2017, Aversano participated in *Konnakol Wednesday*, the Instagram campaign for the promotion of *Konnakol*. For this endeavour, he uploaded fifteen short videos on Instagram every consecutive Wednesday, all of them demonstrating the application of *Konnakol* on the *Hang*/handpan,[76] beginning by vocalising the complex rhythmic pattern in *Konnakol* before repeating the phrase on the instrument.

Although this could be considered as one of the most innovative series of *Hang*/handpan videos available online, the response to these videos has been merely moderate. Perhaps the southern Indian vocal techniques are considered too advanced for the *Hang*/handpan community to appreciate, given that this community is largely composed of musical amateurs. However, there are many cases in which proficient world music percussionists have utilised the *Konnakol* technique for their compositions with *Hang*/handpan. There have also been occasions in which *Hang*/handpan players can be seen collaborating with *Konnakol* artists. Aversano later developed his own handpan instruction courses based on the synthesis of *Konnakol* and handpans. By learning from different musical cultures, Aversano claims that people can grow closer through the forming of a 'globalised musical language that enriches our collective cultural landscape' (Aversano 2021).[77]

An examination of the diverse vocal cultures embedded into the *Hang*/handpan community, could help in revealing some of the key elements of the community. A wide spectrum of vocal techniques utilised in *Hang*/handpan performances could be characterised as what is often referred to as 'the natural voice movement',[78] in which participants express themselves naturally with their instinctive voice, without being constrained by existing notions of 'proper' vocal technique and its requisite application (2014, p3). Although some of the above cases

[76] Instagram of Dom Aversano, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.instagram.com/domaversano/?hl=en-gb
[77] *Indian Rhythms for Handpan*, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://domaversano.teachable.com/
[78] A term which describes a global network of Natural Voice practitioners. See Bithell 2014.

may not seem to correspond to the amateur-oriented nature of the natural voice movement, one might argue that these vocal techniques, no matter whether they were professionally trained or not, were able to align themselves with the performance of the *Hang*/handpan precisely because there is no established or known 'proper' method of how such alignment might be done. A *Hang/*handpan player who implements the instrument with *Konnakol*, *Khoomei*, or beatboxing is not necessarily an advanced vocalist within the realm of the specific vocal technique, and the adoption of such techniques throughout the duration of a *Hang/*handpan performance is in some sense liberated from the anxiety which accompanies a particular music culture and the expectations that its audience typically holds. The rather 'empty' history of *Hang*/handpan encourages multiple ways of exploration in which performers could project their 'deepest layers of their own identity, commitment, intentions, and aspirations' (Bithell 2014, p2) into this metallic sound vessel. The mysterious and ambiguous cultural representation of the *Hang*/handpan further contributes to the inclusiveness which practitioners and performers enjoy without fearing the possibility of being wrong.

However, to employ yodelling, *Konnakol*, *Khoomei,* beatboxing and chanting (in my own case) freely when performing with the *Hang/*handpan is illustrative of a broader observation regarding the community and its affirmation of universalism. Modern universalism, which enables culture to penetrate everywhere by deterritorialising it from its origin, place and context (Sachs 2006, 219), is a phenomenon embraced by New Age practitioners (Farias & Lalljee 2008), and is generally in harmony with the *Hang/*handpan community ethos. Borrowing vocal techniques from Western culture, India, black street culture from the U.S., and chanting, the *Hang/*handpan community intuitively performs and instantiates its inclusive, multicultural imagination, the rudiments of which have much in common with New Ageism, an argument which I will explore further in Chapter six.

Although the community generally places great emphasis upon its egalitarian properties and openness towards musical amateurs, community members who seek economic gain through performances or training courses involving the *Hang/*handpan inevitably attempt to develop their own uniqueness and signature style which differentiates themselves from others. The above cases of employing vocals alongside *Hang*/handpan performances, or embedding such performances in their unique training courses, are all examples of players looking to demonstrate a certain degree of musical professionalism. They are, in many ways, *Hang/*handpan players looking for ways to cultivate their own brand, developing a signature which separates themselves from the amateur community. Despite the proliferation of more amateur, folksy approaches which could be examined within the natural voice movement

framework, there is certainly another layer of virtuosic professionalism which can be found in the community, composed of those who prize or valorise individual novelty. Vocal techniques are also relatively popular among *Hang*/handpan street performers, as the voice is also a 'musical instrument we are all born with and carry it wherever we go' (Bithell 2014, p.1), in this sense, the voice is one of the best instruments a travelling performer in pursuit of economic opportunity can wield: it is free, mobile and natural.

Another interesting dimension of this discussion concerning vocal techniques and the nature of the community which they reveal involves power and language. Despite the origins of the performers, the folksy songs and cover versions I encountered were all sung in English. On the other hand, artists who made use of *Khoomei* or beatboxing are musicians with English as their second language. For non-English street music performers to garner attention as they travel through metropolitan cities around the Western world, it seems essential for them to cultivate exotic vocal techniques that can transcend the language barrier, whereas English speakers need only sing songs in the seemingly global *lingua franca* of English to generate an affective response from listeners. In the case of the *Hang*/handpan community, one might argue that however much it embraces universalism and egalitarianism, there is an invariable cultural hierarchy at work which is determined by geography and hegemonic cultures. Yodelling, *Khoomei, Konnakol* and beatboxing are ideal tools by which non-English speakers can gain admittance into and acceptance in the performing community, substituting novel vocal technique for meaningful lyrical content, whereas English speakers only have to sing folksy or mainstream pop songs in their own native language.

4.3 *Hang*/handpan and didjeridu: The 'Yin and Yang' in world music

Although the *Hang* originated in Bern, Switzerland and was created by two Swiss instrument makers who studied the construction of traditional Swiss bells (PANArt 2000), few people would perceive the *Hang* as a western music instrument along the lines of the saxophone or the piano. The complex cultural historical background and influence of the Trinidad steelpan, coupled with udu player Reto Weber's original idea of building an 'udu with notes', inevitably blurs the identity of the *Hang,* at least to a certain degree. Throughout the history of *Hang* distribution, *PANArt* did not intend to target local musicians specifically, nor did they promote it as a Swiss instrument. Rohner would even assert that where he lived was of 'no importance', and that it did not matter where the *Hang* was born (Castan & Pagnon 2006, 50:33). To Rohner, the *Hang* is 'something the world has dreamt of', which has been 'inside of everyone' (Castan & Pagnon 2006, 50:51). It is rather unusual for instrument makers to dismiss the significance of where an instrument was born while downplaying the contribution

of their own biographical context, but in the case of the *Hang*, it is reasonable as the development of the instrument was highly influenced by various instruments around the world. Rohner and Schärer readily acknowledge the steelpan (a gift from Trinidad) as their inspiration (PANArt 2019) and often face criticism of ‘cultural exploitation'. Perhaps aware that the *Hang* owes its genesis to such a wide range of inspirations*,* Rohner and Schärer, in a relatively difficult position as far as claiming full credit for the invention goes, make it rather impossible ethically to claim that Switzerland is its rightful birthplace. It is also reasonable to hypothesise that the pair of creators, being long-time ‘ex’ steelpan tuners, embrace a certain global mindset. The deep devotion that they have shown for Trinidad steelpan culture has certainly exerted an influence upon the cultural identity of *Hang* makers at the expense of their identification with the nation of their birth.

The relatively ambiguous identity of the *Hang* is perhaps one of the main reasons behind its swift ascent in the realm of world music. Here, it would be prudent to note that 'world music' is a problematic term which demands careful explanation. Before the 1990s, scholarly interest in ethnomusicology was often simply referred to as a preoccupation with world music (Post 2006, p2). The origin of the term came from North American music conservatories in the 60s (Feld, 2001). Such conservatories, which focus upon the Western musical canon, led to criticism of the programmes’ ethnocentrism. The problematic nature of the term emerged in the 1980s, when a number of artists and the A&R departments of their record companies began to use it more widely as a catch-all umbrella term for musical traditions outside the Western industrialized nations (White 2012). This new marketing tag was obviously influenced by the ethnomusicologists’ recordings of ‘traditional’ music. With the commercial successes of the very first WOMAD (World Of Music And Dance) festival, held by the British musician Peter Gabriel in 1982, and the 1985 release of American singer-songwriter/ producer Paul Simon’s world music album *Graceland*, the scale of cultural exploitation and commodification of indigenous cultural heritage expanded exponentially. With the expansion of this market's prospects, such developments inspired record companies to adapt the term ‘world music’ as a label used for marketing and promotion. An improved strategy for promoting musicians from non-Western countries was conceived during a series of promotional meetings in 1987 (Cottrell 2010). Criticism of world music have argued that it is little more than a marketing tool (Brennan 2001; Byrne 1999; Goodwin & Gore 1990). According to such criticism, the term has no meaning, as it is generally used to designate a hodge-podge of non-Western music with no concern for the formal or historical characteristics of the genre (White 2012, p4).

Interestingly, although the *Hang*/handpan is in fact produced in the West, the instrument is deeply entwined with the 'world music' concept, its use occasionally leading to considerable commercial success. In 2016, British multi-instrumentalist Andy Duroe released a 'world fusion' album titled 'Eat Your Guru', featuring the *Hang*/handpan sound driven song 'Sushi Sing'. The song reached 'number 2 in the Ethno Cloud world music Charts for India' (Facebook 2022). The sound of *Hang*/handpan has exhibited potential for integration into the arsenal of 'exotic sound' which 'world' percussionists often seek. Weber (Fig. 4.8), who has inspired the invention of the *Hang*, is a contemporary percussionist who performs internationally across various genres. As a jazz percussionist, he was involved in numerous projects or recordings which could all be conceivably marketed with the 'world music' label. The previously mentioned Nadishana and Kuckhermann were both world percussion virtuosi before acquiring the *Hand*/handpan. Informant Tong, a Hong Kong percussionist who makes use of the *asalato*, frame drum and Zimbabwe mbira suspects that contemporary percussionists are often attracted by the sound of exotic, 'foreign' percussive instruments, and are likely to become an 'instrument collector' to some extent, mining the sonic terrain and market for sounds which are relatively unfamiliar locally (2017, p.c.).



Figure 4.8 Reto Weber performing with Indian udu. Photograph by Reto Weber.

The *Hang*/handpan does not merely appeal to professional contemporary percussionists, as it is often seen accompanied by non-Western music instruments on music amateur sites, particularly in festivals which invite multicultural musical exchange. Although *Hang*/handpan

festivals generally unite international enthusiasts who share an appreciation for one particular instrument, such gatherings generally welcome the participation of performers using various 'world music' instruments. There are, essentially, a growing trend of European *Hang*/handpan festivals organised with an explicit 'world music' motif: The annual *Handpan World Music Festival* in Mèze, France; *GRIASDI Handpan & World Music Gathering & Festival* in Austria; and the *Handpan & Global Music Festival* in Italy. It is more likely that one would encounter a Western Africa asalato in *Hang*/handpan festivals than a violin. Some 'world' instruments favoured by *Hang*/handpan players have a particular functionality. For instance, one of the most popular companion instruments in such gatherings is perhaps the cajón, an Afro-Peruvian instrument which originated in 16th century colonial Peru, constituted by the African slave drums which had been forbidden by their masters. The original cajón (Fig. 4.9.), literally meaning wooden 'crate' in Spanish, were shipping crates used on a daily basis (Joshua & Lesson 2013) which allowed performer to sit on top while playing. In a sense, cajón is a fusion of hand played drum and stool, which enables amateur musicians to attain a basic level of competence relatively easily. The west African djembe exhibits certain similarities in this respect: the 'exotic' identity of the instrument and relative ease of learning lends great attractiveness to these instruments for musical amateurs. While the djembe is not uncommonly seen in *Hang*/handpan gatherings, the cajón is slightly more popular for travelling and busking players due to its functionality, lower maintenance requirement, and lower cost.



Figure 4.9 *HangOut UK* 2015 with cajón (on the left) accompanying handpans. Screenshot by the author.[79]

Although other music instruments associated with 'world music'-for instance, assorted frame drums, Indian tabla, asalato from Ghana, jew's harp, foot rattles, to name a few-are commonly presented in *Hang/*handpan festival, there is one specific instrument which should be examined in the realm of the 'exotic' instrument choices among the community, the Australian Aboriginal didjeridu. Didjeridu, or *yiḏaki/ yirḏaki* in indigenous Yolngu, commonly known as the didgeridoo, is a considerably ancient instrument with a remarkably simple construction. It is a straight wooden tube aerophone made out of Eucalyptus trunk or branch hollowed out by termites and fire (Fletcher 1996; Ryan 2015). Despite of its simple geometry, playing the didjeridu is relatively challenging. Musicians are required to master the necessary lip vibration mechanics by blowing into the narrower side of the tube, similar to performing on Western brass instruments (Fig. 4.10). However, since the didjeridu has a rather huge cylinder, one which reaches one meter in length or more, it demands a high rate of continuous air flow just to reach the level of basic competence. Hence, to maintain the significant drone sound, a 'circular breathing' technique is essential for all didjeridu player across different levels of musicianship. This involves maintaining air flows by squeezing the cheek muscle while quickly inhaling through the nose to sustain the droning sound of the instrument.

[79] *Marcel Hutter - Adrian j. Portia - hangout UK 2015*, Marcel Hutter, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiQPghYORUo



Figure 4.10 Street performer Ananda Krishna Röösli plays the *Hang* and didjeridu simultaneously in Lisbon, Portugal. Screenshot by the author.[80]

It was informant Kelly Hutchinson, the co-founder of the very first international *Hang* festival, HOUK, who inspired me to observe the globalisation of the didjeridu more closely. Hutchinson and HOUK co-founder Rob Watkins were UK-based didjeridu players as well as frequent didjeridu gathering participants. Hutchinson encountered the *Hang* first hand by witnessing a performance at the *Didje in Devon* in 2004, a didjeridu festival in Devon, UK (2018, p.c.). The sound of this steel percussive instrument greatly impressed Hutchinson, and he discovered that it bore the name of the *Hang* a year later at another didjeridu festival named The Gathering. After acquiring the *Hang* from *PANArt* in 2006, Hutchison and Watkins attended a small *Hang* weekend event in Glastonbury, following which they conceived an idea of organising a *Hang* festival based on their experience in participating the past didjeridu festivals. It would be a simple instrument-centric music weekend with a camping site as well as indoor space for performances and workshops. Hence, it is reasonable to claim that HOUK, arguably the most 'authentic' *Hang*/handpan festival for some festival-goers (Ng 2017, p.c.; Lai 2021, p.c.), is to some degree influenced by experience gained by attending didjeridu gatherings.

[80] *Hang & Gidgeridoo - Ananda Krishna Röösli in Lisbon*, Ariel Mch, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAxwRPbDw3k

European didjeridu gatherings, similar to *Hang*/handpan festivals, welcome multicultural musical exchange. While the *Hang*/handpan can appear in UK didjeridu gatherings, the didjeridu indeed often presents itself in *Hang*/handpan festivals. If the European didjeridu and *Hang*/handpan festivals in some ways celebrate 'cultural diversity' in a fashion akin to world music festivals, then such temporal celebration is often 'wrapped in rhetoric of multiculturalism, tolerance and political correctness, as some sort of global sampling or postmodern bricolage' (Piškor 2006, p196). Notwithstanding the fact that the didjeridu's identity is deeply rooted in the Australian national imagination presenting aboriginality, musical tradition and ritual practices (Magowan 2005), commodifying the didjeridu on a global scale provides opportunities for non-Indigenous practitioners, who are perhaps unaware or uninterested in appreciating the cultural background of the instrument to appropriate the instrument in other cultural contexts (Neuenfeldt 1997). When one takes a cursory glance at the history of didjeridu globalisation and its role in broader processes of cultural appropriation in the context of world music consumption, one finds that it too is entwined with the modern New Age movement. According to Magowan (2005), practitioners who propagate New Age or alternative lifestyles usually see the didjeridu as a symbol of spirituality, healing, and holism, in which all living things are interconnected to the mother-earth (p96). This sense of reconnection of the spiritual self with nature, is essential for New Age and alternative lifestyle practitioners who claim that Western society is alienated and removed from the natural origin (Magowan 2005, p96).

Before didjeridu-specific gatherings became global, music festivals such as Glastonbury, WOMAD, and the global Rainbow Gathering contributed to the exposure of the didjeridu (Welch 2002). This is in spite of the fact that music festivals, such as WOMAD which brands itself as a festival that focusses on promoting cultural awareness and tolerance,[81] are effectively mega commercial events sponsored by corporate brands, a fact which might be in contradiction to festival-goers in pursuit of authenticity, community and interaction with intimate crowds (Anderton 2018). In the context of authenticity, independent music festivals are much easier for on-site regulations with minimum intervention from commercial sponsors or the state, with such relatively anarchic, utopian sites of carnivalesque freedom gaining increasing popularity in recent years (Anderton 2018). Similar to the globalisation of didjeridu, the *Hang*/handpan has gained growing popularity in global mega music events, specifically events in harmony with the New Age discourse. Bueraheng discovered the use of the *Hang* in the Rainbow Gathering, long before the appearance of *Hang*/handpan-centric

[81] *WOMAD Festival*, Facebook, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/womadfestival/

festivals. However, the incident in which the *Hang* had been violently abused by a 2007 *Burning Man* festival-goer (Fig. 4.11), remains one of the most controversial appearances of the *Hang*/handpan in similar mega events. The video shows a burner (a common term for describing *Burning Man* participant) fanatically bashing and occasionally hammering the *Hang* on the ground surface. The performance ended with the instrument spinning on the ground, up-side down and unattended. This incident has arguably become the 'gold-standard' among the *Hang*/handpan community on how not to approach the instrument.



Figure 4.11 *Hang Drum at Burning Man 2007.* Screenshot by the author.[82]

In many ways, the didjeridu and *Hang*/handpan are a rather interesting pair. Although there is no verifiable evidence on the birth of the didjeridu, the fact that the rock art of Arnhem Land is certifiably the oldest art tradition in the world (Cunby 1996) and cultural purists credit the north-east Arnhem Land as the traditional heartland of didjeridu (Ryan 2015, p4), it is likely that the didjeridu is comparably ancient, the instrument even being considered by some New Agers to be 'the oldest' musical instrument, 'the mother of all flutes' (Fruhwacht 1996, cited by Neuenfeldt 1998). The construction of the didjeridu, often assuming a form as

[82] *Hang Drum at Burning Man 2007*, KruiZen, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lK2Rfy6c8jU

simple as a tree trunk hollowed out by termites, without any other man-made features such as tone holes or a mouthpiece, easily lends itself to representation as a present from Mother Earth or the universe. If the didjeridu represents the oldest musical culture of humanity, then the *Hang*/handpan is no doubt the newest. To have these polar opposites feature alongside one another in New Age carnival sites is a curious and revelatory phenomenon for any researcher seeking to understand the formation of New Age as an ideology and practice, disclosing the sense that New Age is essentially not a monolithic lifestyle (Neuenfeldt 1998) but an intrinsically 'unstable and variegated' (Pfeil 1995, cited by Neuenfeldt 1998) pursuit of a 'resacralization' (Wexler 1996, cited by Neuenfeldt 1998) of culture, the 'rediscovering' (Wuthnow 1992, cited by Neuenfeldt 1998) of the sacred in the West. Through a paradoxical blend of 'respect and rip-off' (Feld 1988), cultures and cultural history are drawn into a vortex of comprehensive pastiche where 'time has no meaning' (Coats & Murchison 2014, p173).

Another interesting way to examine the didjeridu and *Hang*/handpan as a distinctive pair in isolation from all the other instruments associated with world music is to take a look at the sexual stereotyping and gendering of the instruments. The long narrow shape of the didjeridu, which was considered as part of an esoteric male rite of Arnhem Land even in the 80s (Moyle 1981, p327), is invariably regarded as a phallic symbol. Interestingly, Lerner, the performer I encountered in HOUSA 2017, dreamed about a hand played percussive instrument with musical notes that 'looked like a woman lying down with a belly'[83] (Paslier 2019) (Fig. 4.12), and the dream was perceived as an ominous 'sign' pointing towards the discovery of the *Hang*/handpan in 2012. The oval shaped *Hang*, placed upon the lap of a cross-legged player sitting on the floor, suggests allusions to Mother Earth and the womb of a female body. Baron also has an interesting way of indicating the 'feminine' idea of the *Hang:* the minimisation of music notes, a feature inherited from the steelpan*,* suggests a different approach to that which typically features in instruments invented by men and driven by a maximalist ethos where men 'compete and have more stuff of it' (2018, p.c.). The *Hang,* then, is a fascinating culmination of various contributing phenomena- the presence of Schärer as a music instrument inventor, the yonic instrument shape, the fact that the *Hang*/handpan is to be played resting on one's lap, as well as the comparatively non-competitive musical culture which has formed around it, resulting in a large proportion of women in the community, among which are a number of female handpan makers who feel comfortable with picking up the hammer. Among these are makers such as *Spirit Handpans*,

[83] *Finding Your Voice with Judith Lerner,* last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.sylvainpasliermusic.com/post/finding-your-voice-with-judith-lerner

ELAIA Handpans, *Isthmus Instruments*, all of which contribute to an ecology which also features numerous women-only *Hang*/handpan gatherings.

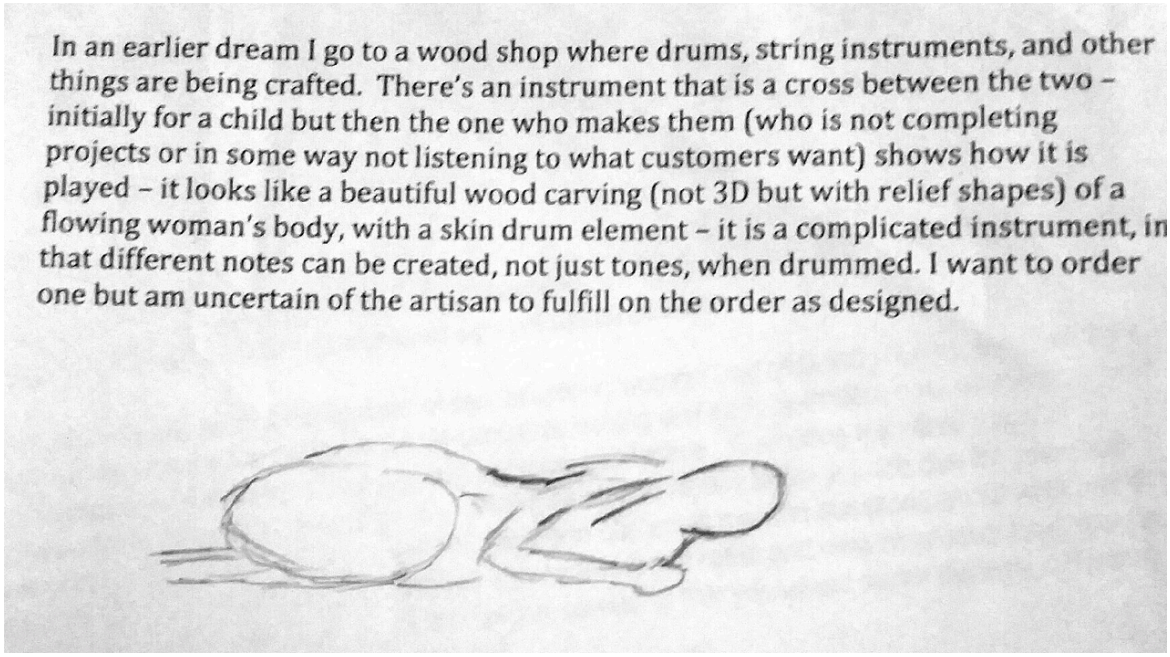

In an earlier dream I go to a wood shop where drums, string instruments, and other things are being crafted. There's an instrument that is a cross between the two – initially for a child but then the one who makes them (who is not completing projects or in some way not listening to what customers want) shows how it is played – it looks like a beautiful wood carving (not 3D but with relief shapes) of a flowing woman's body, with a skin drum element – it is a complicated instrument, in that different notes can be created, not just tones, when drummed. I want to order one but am uncertain of the artisan to fulfill on the order as designed.

Figure 4.12 Lerner's sketch of her dreamt instrument and notes about the dream. Photograph by Judith Lerner.

Notwithstanding the differences between didjeridu and *Hang*/handpan, the combination has been perfectly integrated in the 'world music' marketplace. The globalisation of the *Hang*/handpan, to a certain degree, repeats the 'successful' formula of the didjeridu, and both illustrate the elasticity of the 'world music' marketing label. Not only can this label accommodate the use of 'ancient' instruments, even the 'newest' addition to this family, the Western *Hang*/handpan, has encountered few difficulties in drawing audiences in perpetual pursuit of 'exotic' sounds. Perhaps 'world music', as an elusive music marketing strategy, is in some ways constituted by our postmodern times. For the New Age subject the combination of the didjeridu and *Hang*/handpan completes the New Age imagination of inclusiveness: as phallic and yonic symbols; as the 'oldest' and 'youngest' music instruments; a consummate coupling of the aboriginal and Western-modernity together. The pair, exemplarily representative of the most polarised meanings from distinctly different worlds, can be subjectively tamed, domesticated and consumed in a complementary way. Viewing all of this through the New Age lens, the *Hang*/handpan and the didjeridu are in this sense the 'yin and yang' in 'world music'.

4.5 Implementation of *Hang*/handpan and the race for popularity

The global dissemination of the *Hang* arises in part from the international stardom of the first players who first brought the instrument to popular consciousness. Besides Waples, the iconic *Hang*/handpan persona who goes by the artist name Hang In Balance, there are three significant artists/music groups who deserve credit for introducing the instrument to the global audience. Hang Massive, the UK based duo which consists of Danny Cudd (who played the didjeridu before discovering the *Hang*) and Markus Offbeat, met in Goa, India, known as one of the most popular sites for New Age and alternative lifestyle pursuers. After acquiring the *Hang*, the duo performed as street musicians as a *Hang* duo, performing with the *Hang* alongside an array of assorted percussive instruments. In 2011, Hang Massive released the YouTube video named 'Hang Massive - Once Again - 2011 (hang drum duo) (HD)' [sic],[84] which features Cudd and Offbeat playing two *Hanghang* against a woodland as background. While a professionally-produced video was unavailable during the time of its release, Cudd predicted their YouTube video would go viral (2017).[85] This transpired exactly as they had hoped. The 2011 video topped the YouTube keyword search results for 'Hang', with close to 52 million views to date. Being the most popular *Hang* musical group, Hang Massive gradually transformed from street performers to playing sold-out stadiums worldwide. The duo now resides in their own resort in Goa during the European winter period, where they shot a new video during the global pandemic lockdown, merging the sound of *Hanghang* with electronic elements drawn from dub to techno (Fig. 9). The production for this live set, again, is done relatively professionally, with mesmerizing lighting, quality audio, camera movement, and plant decorations. Additionally, a link for enquiries on how to acquire the handpan is available in the video descriptions.

[84] *Hang Massive - Once Again - 2011 (hang drum duo) (HD)*, Hang Massive, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xk3BvNLeNgw
[85] *Hanging out with Hang Massive (UK) on their debut Australian tour,* Toks Ogundare 2017, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.theaureview.com/music/hanging-out-with-hang-massive-uk-on-their-debut-australian-tour/



Figure 4.13. Hang Massive performance in Goa Garden, India, 2020. Screenshot by the author.[86]

Hang Massive is a fascinating example of a quiet hand-struck acoustic instrument being successfully utilised in heavily amplified dance music, such as techno or trance. Although the *Hang*/handpan is both an ear and eye-catching instrument, the delicate sound it produces might fail to hold the attention of audiences in a stadium setting or a longer performance, even amplified. It is not uncommon, then, for *Hang*/handpan musicians to make use of electronic beats to generate excitement and to impel the audience to move with the generated rhythms. The use of the *Hang*/handpan in trance music owes itself in part to the longstanding culture of psychedelic trance music, which started in south India among Western hippies drawing on the scene's iconography from Hindu/Buddhist sources, shamanism, Christianity, and other religious traditions (Coggins 2018, p30). The psytrance rave is a ritualized hybrid of symbols, texts, and sound (Sylvan 2005, p12), making the *Hang*/handpan a perfect sonic accessory for such a scenario, with its mysterious look, soothing sound, and its relative ease of learning. Perhaps referencing the formula invented by Hang Massive, Italian electronic duo Giolì & Assia released a professionally-produced live video on YouTube in 2019 (Fig. 4.14). The blend of electronica, the sound of the handpan and the scenic Sicily seaside background gained over 9 million views in just over 2 years, once again demonstrating the commercial promise of this kind of musical synthesis.

[86] *Hang Massive - Goa Garden Live Concert*, Hang Massive, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDqLEl3yp8I



Figure 4.14. Giolì & Assia performance in Sicily, Italy. Screenshot by the author.[87]

YouTube, of course, has not simply functioned as a platform which catapults street performers into becoming global sensations: Manu Delago, the London-based Austrian drummer, had a rather unusual encounter as a result of one specific YouTube video. In 2003, Delago discovered the *Hang* and began exploring music composition outside the musical world of a rock band drummer. In 2007, Delago uploaded his *Hang* live performance onto YouTube. This was one of the earliest displays of *Hang* performance featuring a relatively high level of technicality: the video was named *Manu Delago – Hang solo*, which captures his performance of his composition named *Mono Desire* on two *Hanghang* simultaneously. The video subsequently caught the attention of the Icelandic global superstar Björk. With a long history of utilising 'exotic' sounds in her music, Björk invited Delago to contribute to her 2011 conceptual 'app album' *Biophilia*, in which she explores 'the links between nature, music and technology'.[88] Later, Delago's involvement in the *Biophilia* global tour became much deeper, when he went on to play drums, xylosynth (MIDI marimba), and assorted percussion as Björk's touring musician.[89]

Also based in London, Portico Quartet, a band comprised of four School of Oriental and African Studies ethnomusicology students, is another relatively successful example of performing artists making use of the *Hang*. Portico Quartet, known for injecting elements of

[87] *Giolì & Assia - #DiesisLive @Milazzo, Sicily [Handpan Set]*, Giolì & Assia, YouTube, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKyfohLjAt8
[88] App Store Preview of *Björk: Biophilia*, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://apps.apple.com/us/app/bj%C3%B6rk-biophilia/id434122935
[89] *Drummers, On The Beat. Manu Delago with Bjork'*, Modern Drummer, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.moderndrummer.com/2012/01/manu-delago-with-bjork/

folk, jazz, and electronica into their compositions, appeals to audiences with a taste for relatively alternative and independent music styles. Informant Issac, a hip café owner in Bow, London, discovered the *Hang* through the music of Portico Quartet (2018, p.c.). He later hosted an acoustic show in his café, allowing London-based percussionist Aversano to perform a handpan set with the classical cellist Shizuku Tansuno. Interestingly, Nick Mulvey, one of the founding members of Portico Quartet, performs with the *Hang* in a controversial way, with a pair of mallets. Ignoring *PANArt*'s written suggestions to strike the *Hang* with one's bare hands, as well as the scepticism from *Hang*/handpan community members, who believe that mallets detune the instrument, Mulvey's persistence in striking the handpan with mallets and processing the sound through assorted sound effecters is central to the early sound of the 2008 Mercury Prize nominees. However, Mulvey left the band in 2011 to pursue a solo career. In 2013, he released his first solo album titled *First Mind*, an album which has him credited for Vocals, Guitar, Harmonium, Prophet Synthesizer, Percussion, ukulele, Mellotron, without any involvement of the *Hang*. Mulvey claims, in an interview conducted by The Guardian, that he 'got bored of the H*ang* drum as a musician' (2014).[90]

As noted previously, the majority of the *Hang*/handpan community are music amateurs, a fact which aligns with the egalitarian and non-competitive community ethos of the New Age community. Interestingly, the *Hang*/handpan icons mentioned above who reached global success and gained financial power for professional music and video productions exhibit a level of musicianship which can still be described as 'amateur'. While there are *Hang*/handpan virtuosi with tremendous composition skills, interestingly, my informants claim there is arguably no identifiable *Hang*/handpan musical repertoire, with perhaps only one exception. One of the most recognisable and widely-circulated piece is Land Of Cole, original composition by Kabeção (Chor 2024, p.c.; Lok 2024, p.c;).[91]Although recognisable *Hang*/handpan compositions are not uncommon, this particular piece hits the 'sweet spot' of being not too challenging to learn, yet not too easy as 'playing an one string solo on the guitar' (Lok 2024, p.c.). The most popular *Hang*/handpan musicians often do not demonstrate elevated skill levels. Rather, the most successful musicians have developed a combination of good timing and canny marketing strategies to assert themselves as pioneers in the visualisation, utilisation, and representation of *Hang*/handpan. Hence, it is not uncommon for artists to name themselves based on word-play oriented around the *Hang,* a

[90] *Nick Mulvey interview – 'My aim is to appeal to your subconscious first'*, Tom Lamont 2014, The Guardian, last accessed 18 February 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/may/11/nick-mulvey-interview-portico-quartet-percussionist-solo-album

[91] '*Kabeção - Land of Cole (Touching Souls - Studio Sessions) Handpan Pantam'*, Kabeção 2018, last accessed 16 January 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HESjC9o_pg0

naming strategy which is of considerable benefit in the age of online keyword search engines.

4.6 New Age sound healing

As briefly mentioned previously, *Hang*/handpan festivals often provide sound healing sessions for the benefit of the festival-goers. An examination of this phenomenon can shed light on the intersection between the *Hang*/handpan, New Ageism and sound healing discourse, an examination which has certain resonances with literature on the didjeridu. Being one of the most iconic 'world' and New Age instruments, the didjeridu became a site of contestation due to its appropriation by non-native performers for generalised discourses of nativism and self-proclaimed spiritualism. However, the circulation of a certain myth, now backed by numerous science journals,[92] has been central to the didjeridu's appeal to New Age and alternative lifestyle practitioners, that the sound generated by the instrument is of great benefit to the wellbeing of the performer (and perhaps for the audience too). Before examining the case of the didjeridu and its implementation in sound healing practices, it is necessary to explain the emergence of New Ageism, and how sound healing discourse has evolved during recent years.

Although coined as 'new', New Ageism certainly is anything but. Rooted in 1960s America counter-culture (Urban 2015; Lau 2015), New Ageism has been itself across borders and invites global participants outside the West, although New Age culture liberally borrows, or arguably, exploits without bias religious symbols from the East and elsewhere. Recent scholars have been able to identify New Age activities in Israel (Werczberger & Huss 2014), Latin America (D'Andrea 2018), Japan (Shimazono 1999), and India (Islam 2012), and traces of what can be broadly termed 'New Ageism' can be discovered globally. Through their participation in *Hang*/handpan events in Hong Kong and Taiwan, informants confirm that New Age activities exist in these regions, and New Age-like elements can often be identified in *Hang*/handpan-centric gatherings across different continents. One of the strongest reasons behind the globalisation of the New Age movement lies in the ambiguity of the practice, which is largely based on the subjective, apocryphal evaluation and interpretation of various elements of science, religion and spirituality (Charlton 2006). The seemingly inclusive, dogma-free approach invites subjective interpretations of any and all cultural and ethnical backgrounds. As such, it is very compatible with the seemingly rootless, deterritorialised, 'exotic' looking and sounding *Hang*/handpan.

[92] For examples: Lee et al 2019; Philips et al 2019; Eley et al 2010; Puhan et al 2006

In the New Age worldview, Christian millennialism, Zen, alternative healing, cosmology, horoscopes, ufology and belief in ghosts, are essentially compatible concepts and perhaps even mutually-reinforcing ideas (Charlton 2006). Scholars often hesitate to identify New Age as a religious group, rather referring to it as something akin to a cult (Tucker 2002), a buzzword or religion of the self (Hanegraff 2002). Even practitioners of such a tendency resist being identified as such as New Age subjects tend to refuse the stereotype, simply referring to themselves as 'alternative people' (D'Andrea 2006). Informants in the *Hang/*handpan community generally avoid branding themselves with the New Ager label, even going so far as to deny that their belief systems and ways of life involve New Ageism. Considering the elusive identity of New Agers, it is perhaps best to acknowledge New Ageism in our times as characterized by thoughts and life choices which multiple countercultural practices must convey and reflect, at least partially.

The notion of sound healing (or therapy), a practice through which listeners can gain health benefits by auditory experience, has been profoundly impacted by New Age discourse. In 1989, Patti Jean Birosik published *The New Age Music Guide*, describing New Age music as music which 'encourages personal empowerment, earth connectedness, space consciousness, and interpersonal awareness' (p ix). New Age music is created by musicians which acknowledge sound has effects on a listener's mind, and that utilizing sound for mental and emotional benefits is the 'ultimate blend of art and science' (1989). The book's introduction, written by Steve Halpern-a jazz composer who arguably created new-age healing music in the 60s-calls New Age music a 'return to roots, to belief in the primordial power of sound' (1989). He describes New Age music as having liberated itself from the bonds of 'harmonic tension, melodic patterns, and rhythmic pulse', and New Age compositions as pieces of music which make use of enhanced instrumental tones, drenched with effects such as reverb and echo, for 'sounds rendered above all soothing and spacious' (1989). New Age music is also distinguished by the psychic state of the composer, ideally one of balance and love, as opposed to ego-centeredness or anxiety. True New Age music, Halpern claims, should 'take you out of yourself... your body may feel lighter and your mood will be uplifted and refreshed' (p xx).

In a 1983 publication, Robert C. Ehle compares the differences between New Age music to typical Western music aesthetics. According to Ehle, the emotions and tensions generated and intrinsic to Western music are produced by means of a cause-and-effect relationship within the composition: an audience would anticipate a musical resolution after hearing a dissonance, which forms into consonance. Additionally, an audience might anticipate how a

musical theme would develop and recapitulate; or how a modulated new key would then return to the original. Meanwhile, New Age music avoids all of this. It goes to the opposite extreme, and seeks to produce a state of total relaxation and serenity in the listener by means of the use of only the purest sounds and the most consonant and clear textures. As such, it is a 'totally new concept in Western music and has few forerunners in the music of any culture' (1983). In Ehle's estimation the closest thing he has heard to it are a few examples of Japanese or Indian music. According to Ehle, New Age music is deliberately and distinctly an electronic idiom, since most of it cannot be produced in any other way. It uses slow-moving sounds that are so slow and gradual that a human performer could not control them manually. It uses sounds that are so pure that few acoustical instruments could produce them. The Sine wave, for example, is the purest sound known to man and it can only be produced by an oscillator. Finally, it employs extensive natural sounds (the sounds of wind and rain on the roof, for example) and these are best synthesized, although they may be recorded and then played back.

In recent years, the New Age sound healing discourse has gradually expanded beyond the realm of the electronic instrumentarium. The didjeridu, for instance, is regularly associated with health benefits. However, in the case of the didjeridu, purported health benefits are not only a myth, but supported by scientific research. With the correct performing technique (i.e. with circular breathing) and done regularly, it has been suggested that the didjeridu relieves patients suffering from moderate obstructive sleep apnoea syndrome (Puhan et al. 2006; Bron et al. 2009; Petro et al. 2017), asthma (Eley & Gormon 2019) and stress reduction or general mood enhancement (Philips et al, 2019; Lee et al, 2019). New Age sound healing discourse, however, separates itself from such scientific discourses, with the healing practice often involving 'exotic' sound objects which the performer and audiences, the vibrations of which the audience purportedly benefits from. Such beneficial properties can even exceed the physical world, stretching deep into the spiritual realm. Didjeridu player Josephn Carringer combines the sound of 'concert class didgeridoos', 'traditional Chinese medicine organ', and 'meridian theory with Ayurvedic Chakra philosophies' in his own brand of therapeutic sound healing experience (idgetherapy.com).[93] In an article published by Somatic Psychotherapy Today, Carringer (2015) claims sound therapy is a form of 'vibrational medicine' which encourages the listeners to 'synchronize and resonate' with the sound to reach a 'healthy vibrational level' (p.79). It is important to differentiate the sound healing discourse in New Age health and wellness discourses from its therapeutic use by the

[93] *Biography,* Didge Therapy, last accessed 18 February 2023, http://didgetherapy.com/biography-joseph-carringer

indigenous people. While the New Age variant blends and borrows logics and discourses from multiple cultures, the indigenous discourse of therapeutic properties in sound and music is constructed upon a specific social system of meaning. (Neuenfeldt 1998, p76).

Similar New Age sound healing discourses often appear in the *Hang*/handpan community. One of the major American handpan companies, Saraz, affirms that 'all things in the universe has a vibration' and 'replicating nature's vibration by sound or music could affect health and wellbeing positively' (2019).[94] According to Saraz, handpans are coined as 'the holy grail of sound therapy' resulting in the instrument's ability to project 'superb resonance' in 'all directions' (2019). The Conscious Club-an Amsterdam based centre promoting 'spiritual and sustainable style', published an article titled *The Magic of The Handpan: The Instrument For Stress-Release And Harmony* (2019).[95] The article suggests that all things 'in the universe is [*sic*] energy' which vibrates at its 'specific frequency' (2019), and the principle of sound therapy is to work with 'the science of vibration, frequency and resonance of sounds'. The article also suggests that the *Hang*/handpan possesses 'magical healing power' (2019). It is, in many ways, intriguing to observe and compare New Age sound healing discourses surrounding the *Hang*/handpan and didjeridu. While these musical instruments originate from entirely different cultural roots and historical eras, each with their own distinctive architectures and raw materials, the discourses which outline the use of these instruments for the purposes of healing however, are largely interchangeable.

Although the *Hang*/handpan is an acoustic instrument, and the majority of participants generally prefer the non-amplified sonic experience of the handpan in a live setting rather than listening through mics and speakers, traces of 'classical' electronic New Age music discourse can be found in the online representation of the *Hang*/handpan. The earliest resemblance I can recall here is perhaps the similarities in YouTube video descriptions for New Age music and *Hang*/handpan YouTube videos. The YouTube video of *Shambhala*, from Steve Halpern's Chakra Suite, uploaded by LSDCoatedBrain, comes with the following listening guide:

> *I have tried listening to allot* [sic] *of music that claims to match brainwaves and relax you, but out of all I've tried, Halpern's only works. For the best*

[94] *Hand Pan Sound Therapy, Healing, & Meditation,* Sarazhandpans, 19 January 2019, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.sarazhandpans.com/handpan-community/sound-healing-meditation/
[95] *The Magic of The Handpan: The Instrument For Stress-Release And Harmony,* Marketing The Conscious Club 2019, last accessed 19 February2023, https://theconsciousclub.com/articles/2019/10/24/the-magic-of-the-handpan-the-instrument-for-stress-release-and-harmonynbsp

> *listening experience use headphones theres allot* [sic] *of really low frequencies, that my computer speakers can't pick up. If you happen to have anything like the God-like Sony MDR-7506, than* [sic] *their* [sic] *ideal for this.* (2008)[96]

It is not uncommon for *Hang*/handpan performers to suggest such precise listening instructions to their social media content. In one of his music videos, Adrian Portia - Australian handpan virtuoso - recommends listening to his composition with headphones, and in the highest video definition possible (YouTube, 2014).[97] In some senses, these *Hang*/handpan listening guides are in keeping with the tenets of New Age sound healing discourse. While 'regular' music is seemingly more forgiving in terms of the equipment required to listen to it, for therapeutic sound such an equipment requirement is almost necessary in 'clinical' terms, given that no healing properties should be lost due to the technical limitation of speakers or headphones. Such instructions also highlight the commodification of the instrument. Since these rare instruments are relatively difficult to encounter in real life, videos on social media became one of the main sources of promotion for different brands and makers. Decent playback devices offering faithful reproduction of the true sound properties of the instrument are vital for its marketing. Portia's video, for example, states clearly which brand of handpan was used in the performance.

Another myth which connects 'classic' electronic New Age music the *Hang*/handpan is the Internet-propagated claim that the Western standardized pitch of A-440 Hz is somehow not-in-tune with nature and humanity, and music tuned in A-432 Hz should be promoted as the new standard for a new music which can afford physical, psychological and spiritual benefits to its listeners (Rosenberg 2021). A scientific study with a relatively small pool of participants (33 volunteers) shows the A-432 Hz tuning slightly lowers the listeners' blood pressure (Calamassi & Pomponi 2019). Historically, the A-432 Hz tuning is in fact related to the far-right politician Lyndon LaRouche. The Schiller Institute, a LaRouche entity, urged the Italian legislature to adapt A-432 Hz as the new standard for preserving Western music culture, which they mainly implied for Italian music (Rosenberg 2021). Rosenberg argues, then, that the 'revival' of the A-432 Hz tuning is largely related to a recent Western cultural turn towards 'dubious scientific or historical merit, and can veer into conspiratorial excess' (2021, p149). Steve Halpern, arguably the godfather of New Age music, released an album titled

[96] *Steven Halpern: Shambhala,* LCDCoatedBrain, YouTube, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9JwXktRE9U
[97] *AsaChan – Minkara,* Adrian Portia, YouTube, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uvt5TZy0aAc

Sound Healing 432 Hz (2018), which claims that an increasing amount of research shows that music tuned in A-432 Hz has greater healing potential (2018).[98] Although *PANArt* never released a version of the *Hang* in A-432 Hz, and the fourth generation *Hang* (known as the Free Integral *Hang*), released in 2009, was not tuned to a A-440 Hz standard, many handpan makers have acknowledged that there is a market demand, and have offered A-432 Hz as an available tuning option.

The notion that the *Hang*/handpan has healing properties has also gained credence through stories and testimonies circulating within the community. While several informants mentioned that the sound of the *Hang* successfully enhanced the mood of blind audiences (Baron 2017, p.c.; Hutchinson 2018, p.c.), the most significant story which is widely known in the *Hang/*handpan community is that of Josiah Collett. According to The Atlantic (2014), Collett grew up in Broxbourne, UK, but was diagnosed as autistic at the age of ten. After his mother, Georgia, bought him a handpan, she claims the instrument greatly helped his condition. In 2014, she told a reporter that prior to this, 'he was retreating into his own world, we couldn't get through to him, and he couldn't get through to us. Handpan completely changed his world, he's with us again".[99] Now Josiah has transformed into a 'calmer, happier boy who comes out of his own mind to be with other people' (Strauss 2014).
Collett became a music student and relocated to London, learning music composition when he turned seventeen. I met him personally in several HOUK festivals and he was often eager to jam with other community members.

The only academic writing remotely related to the health benefits of the *Hang* so far is a Bachelor degree thesis titled 'Can the *Hang* Sound-Sculpture be used as a Therapeutic Tool to Influence Change?' (Baron 2016). In this research, Chris Baron led a group music therapy workshop in Bristol named Pang Orchestra, during which he invited participants to improvise with the assorted Pang Instruments he bought from *PANArt*. I enrolled for two sessions, and felt relatively relaxed after participation. However, I would argue that similar mood enhancing effects could be enjoyed with the employment of other instruments. But the ease of learning the *Hang/*handpan, or Pang Instruments, gives them an edge over other instruments, since participants are required to perform in therapeutic sessions such as these.

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[98] *SOUND HEALING 432 Hz,* Steven Halpern's Inn 2018, https://www.stevenhalpernmusic.com/product/soundhealing432/

[99] *The Weird Little Industry Behind a Mesmerizing Instrument*, Ilana E. Strauss 2014, The Atlantic, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/09/the-weird-industry-behind-a-mesmerizing-instrument/380087/

The myth of the didjeridu and *Hang*/handpan's therapeutic properties, might also have been consolidated in part by the ways in which the perception of time for players and audiences are disoriented throughout the duration of its playing or listening. In scrutinizing drone metal, Coggins (2018) interviewed audiences who attended a metal concert performed by the iconic drone metal band SunnO))), ritualistic performances which audiences would describe as being religious (p153). One participant compares the extreme heavy droning noise to the experience of listening to mantras in a Bon Buddhist monastery near the Tibetan border in 2013 (Coggins, 2018). An experiment which compares participants who listen to meditation exercises with participants listening to audio books suggests that the former induces rhythmic breathing, which leads to the changing of the internal clock (Kramer, Weger & Sharma 2013, p846-852). It is likely that music or sonic activities without leading melodies and without a strong sense of a beginning or an end, such as metal drone, didjeridu drone and perhaps even the random striking sound of the *Hang*/handpan can also alter our perception of time. In this light, the therapeutic properties of music are perhaps not determined by genres or loudness. Rather, it is likely that an impact on time perception can be induced by certain auditory experiences which listeners correlate and compare to mental and health benefits in mindfulness meditation discourse.

New Age sound healing discourse and community testimonies suggesting the *Hang*/handpan have positive impact upon health and spirituality are largely endorsed and espoused by community participants. Informants are generally firm believers that the *Hang*/handpan infuses a certain degree of positive energy. It is not uncommon for them to actively seek opportunities to perform in hospices or prisons, or to utilise the instrument in sound healing sessions, often along with gongs, Tibetan singing bowls, and so forth. Empirically speaking, however, the high frequency generated by striking the *Hang*/handpan, does have an effect, at least upon the performer themselves. Playing the *Hang*/handpan can make the performer feel elevated, a sensation which is perhaps even more apparent on handpans with relatively long sustains. Bueraheng mentions that tuning handpans generally involves repetitions of hammering on the metallic shell, and that the sound of a hammer striking a handpan, even with noise-reducing headphones on, can ‘get you high’ (2017, p.c.). Other informants have similarly stated that certain types of handpan sounds can make them feel light-headed and uncomfortable (Lou 2019, p.c.; Mak 2019, p.c.). Whether such intensely stimulating frequencies have health benefits is a subject of great controversy, with *PANArt* perhaps being the most significant luminaries in the scene articulating explicit reservations towards such perceptions.

While there is no research to suggest that the sound of the *Hang*/handpan has healing properties, we can perhaps refer to analogous research examining the Tibetan singing bowl and Javanese gamelan. The Tibetan singing bowl, remarkably, is absent in historical Tibetan texts, and there are no museum collections displaying a pre-1959 singing bowl (Martin 2017). The history of the singing bowl, which connects the object with Buddhism or Buddhist meditation, might prove to be completely fictitious (Martin 2017), and the idea of the singing bowl as a tool in aiding meditation, or an instrument beneficial for the wellbeing of listeners, could be a Western 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawn 1983, cited by Martin 2017, p1). However, there is an increasing amount of research suggesting potential benefits of a singing bowl for mood enhancement or the lowering of blood pressure (Humphries 2010; Barrass 2014; Goldsby et al 2017). Similarly, the indigenous Javanese tuned metallic instrument, the gamelan, is also clinically proven to reduce anxiety, decrease the sensation of pain and have other favourable psychological impacts (Suhartini 2011, p129-146). In a PhD thesis on music therapy, it was found that playing in a gamelan ensemble can also enhance mutual tolerance, communication skills, levels of concentration and generate a sense of achievement (Loth 2014). It would appear that the growing field of music or sound therapy invites wide and occasionally overly ambiguous interpretations of positive health benefits. The answer for whether *Hang*/handpan has healing properties requires better scientific research, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I would predict that similar research on the health benefits of the singing bowl and gamelan will be available in the realm of *Hang*/handpan studies in the near future.

4.7 Harking

After examining more idiosyncratic, liberated implementations of the *Hang/*handpan, it is perhaps important to include an account of the opposite extreme, an orthodox enunciation and codification of how the instrument should (not) be played or integrated. For instance, *PANArt* expressed their reservation at seeing the integration of the *Hang* into Western classical music, largely based on the experience of the European steelpan scene:

> *Attempts of this kind have been made time and again in the past – they all quickly faded away (…) Playing the hang is a path – a path that leads to oneself.* (PANArt 2013)

Harking, initiated as a concept of musicking by *PANArt* and Chris Baron, is perhaps the most unique musical technique to have featured among the various implementations of the *Hang*. However, unlike the other ways of performing on the *Hang/*handpan, harking is challenging

to define. As Rohner states, harking involves allowing the hands to flow and 'reveal itself' in a musical language which cannot be grasped rationally but which instigates an intimate conversation with the 'inner world', a way of meditation (2022, p.c.). With rather limited evidence, this relatively short section attempts to illustrate what harking means in terms of musical performance, the philosophy and concept behind it, and why the understanding of harking is crucial to an examination of the *Hang*/handpan's dissemination.

While participating in my first Pang Orchestra in 2018, a 'music therapy retreat for human development & creativity'[100] in Bristol organised by Baron, I was introduced to the technique of harking for the first time. As the name of the retreat suggests, an assortment of instruments which *PANArt* manufactured after the termination of *Hanghang* production were present in the workshop, and were at the disposal of the participants. Although *Hanghang* were also available, however, Baron led the ensemble mainly on other Pang Instruments, such as *Hang Bal, Hang Balu,* and *Hang Gubal.* Unlike the *Hang,* these Pang Instruments are all tuned to the same music scale, and straps were attached to the larger instruments, allowing participants to walk or dance during the performance. *Hanghang,* on the other hand, mainly lay still on the floor, and were occasionally played by curious workshop participants during breaks.

By following Baron, my own experience of harking was, in some sense, a collective musical activity involving improvisational hand movements and a meditation-like motif. From my own experience, I would say that harking encourages collective engagement and unconscious music performance, which removes the emphasis from individual music expression. Although Baron, when leading the ensemble, often incorporated improvisational speech and chanting, participants only participated non-verbally. Generally, before each session, participants would select the preferred Pang Instrument. A leader, a role often played by Baron, would begin the session at a certain tempo, with the rest joining in by exploring and exciting the instrument freely. Since the instruments are tuned diatonically and all under the same scale, every sound we made was in harmony. The tempo varied in each session, depending upon the discretion of the ensemble leader, but generally the rhythm employed was similar to the tempo of walking moderately. Apart from a series of hand-struck instruments, some Pang Instruments also come with strings. However, when I chose the banjo-like Pang Instrument with two strings and strum notes that are in the scale of most

[100] *Pang Orchestra,* Facebook, last accessed 10 September 2019, https://www.facebook.com/pangmusictherapy/?ref=page_internal

hand-struck Pang Instruments, I was not certain whether my activity with this instrument could be considered as harking.

As a long-time loyal *PANArt* supporter, Baron has had the opportunity to participate in the company's relatively exclusive annual gatherings held in Bern, Switzerland, where he borrowed the harking concept 'metaphorically' to describe a player mimicking the movement of how *PANArt* makers hammer their instruments, only replacing the hammer with the player's bare-hands (Baron 2019).[101] In Baron's own words, harking is a way of playing the instrument without trying to play (2022, p.c.). Before Baron began applying harking as a way of performance, *PANArt* described harking as a way to construct *Hanghang*, following the maker's intuition and 'inner sound', without the use of technical tuners (PANArt 2010).[102] To *PANArt,* harking is considered an elevated state of listening in which the listener's ear is 'opened up to the more profound dimensions in hearing' (PANArt 2010). Thus, harking is a relatively vague term when used to define a particular musical technique, but rather alludes metaphorically to an internal state and a way of listening which players should learn through their own experience and development. (2022, p.c.)

The commonality between harking as tuning method and music performance appears to lie in the striking of the instrument, and the highly intuitive response of the sound created. Both are means of personal communication with the sound object. Although no observations have been conducted as to how *PANArt* built the *Free Integral Hang* and assorted Pang Instruments, the manner in which *PANArt* makers hammer the instruments is well documented in the 2006 documentary: *HANG - A Discreet Revolution* (Fig. 4.15). The tuning process of *Hanghang* is*,* to me, similar to handpan tuning which I examined in handpan workshops, and retuning services in festivals. Generally, tuning of the *Hang*/handpan requires striking on certain parts of the shell, which produces musical notes. With the help of electronic devices, the instrument maker could identify the pitch of the sound, and experienced makers know where to hammer to raise or lower a certain pitch. Although electronic devices or tuning software such as *linotune* – developed by computer programmer and long-time *Hang*/handpan community member Lino – can provide an extremely accurate representation of the instrument's intonation, the process of tuning often requires the maker's own intuition. Having all the notes in perfect intonation does not make the instrument sound good (Wilson 2017, p.c.). Interestingly, hammering the instrument often

[101] *Hang® Balu's Musical Vitality,* Christopher Baron 2019, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://panart.ch/en/articles/hang-balus-musical-vitality
[102] *Hang Guide,* Felix Rohner & Sabina Schärer 2010, last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.hangblog.org/panart/hang-guide-en-web.pdf

involves a certain rhythmic pattern, requiring a vast range of attack intensity, deep concentration, and intuition. Thus, the tuning of *Hang/*handpan is almost a musical performance on its own.



Figure 4.15 Rohner tuning the *Hang* in the 2006 documentary by Castan & Pagnon 2006. Screenshot by the author.[103]

Rohner's description of the unique process of tuning the *Hang* sheds light on the fascinating internal world of a *Hang/*handpan maker. In the 2006 documentary of *Hang*, Rohner claims:

> *In some way, this is my music. It is a form of freedom. I'm not driven by time, nor by the regard of others. I'm concentrated. It's a form of trance. We study this state, it is very interesting. It frees our minds from rigidity* (…) *It is also a curious profession, which has, no doubt, something to do with art.* (Castan & Pagnon, 2006)

However, the term harking did not make an appearance in the documentary. It was in the publication by *PANArt* in 2010, *Hang Guide*, where harking was used to describe a trance-like state of listening. To *PANArt,* harking is the listening and following of 'the inner ear'

[103] *HANG - a discreet revolution*, Thibaut Castan & Véronice Pagnon 2006.

(2010); by harking without the guidance of electronic tuners, The *Free Integral Hang* was born. It is likely that harking was not conceived as a specific term but was an allusion to a general state of listening and intuitive response of *Hang* makers. Although in 2010 harking was not considered to be a way of musical performance, the *Hang Guide* came with detailed suggestions on how to perform with the *Hang,* instructions largely informed by the same principle of deep listening and intuitive response. According to *Hang Guide*, *Hang* players should not set on a melody or rhythm, but are rather advised to follow the sound and sense of touch on the instrument (2010). Players should immerse themselves in the intensive listening of *Hang,* where 'appellative thoughts are dismissed, breath seizes its position' (2010). In such a 'dream-like state', the *Hang* player is completely oneself, and this experience is 'healing and lends strength' (2010). Interestingly, the advised form of *Hang* performance resembles the tuning of *Hang,* given that both are highly solitary activities. The recommended immersive state in playing the *Hang* is only possible when the player can 'listen undisturbed', since the 'intimate dialog with the *Hang* can easily be troubled' (2010). *PANArt* suggests:

> *Trust this surge!* (…) *You may encounter everyday life more vigilantly, discern the nearby more closely. Playing the hang is an intimate, personal moment, even a sacred instant*. (2010)

The recommended approach advocated in the *Hang Guide* was the archetypal blueprint of musical performances later demonstrated by *PANArt* and Baron. As an illustration of this principle, *PANArt* has from 2013 onwards uploaded performances and demonstrations of Pang Instruments on YouTube (Fig. 4.16). Rohner and Schärer's demonstrations generally are not composed and display an almost amateur approach towards musical performance. Such Pang instrument demonstrations are very similar to my own experience in participating in Pang Orchestra workshops led by Baron. If the *Hang Guide*, at least partially, outlines the early concept of harking, some recent performances by *PANArt* and Baron's Pang Orchestra can be understood as the introduction of collective harking. Although when participating in the Pang Orchestra harking was, to a degree, an amateur approach to musical performance, with participants randomly striking diatonic instruments, I would argue that the development of *PANArt's* corporate philosophy (see Chapter three), reveals why *PANArt* and Baron abandoned the route of music composition and turned away from emphasising individual artistic expression.



Figure 4.16 Rohner and Schärer performing on *Hang Gubal.* Screenshot by the author.[104]

Harking, then, as a form of musicking, is deeply entwined with *PANArt's* concern for and ambivalence towards individualism. If some cases of *Hang*/handpan performance examined in this chapter can be considered as individualistic, or even egoistic, then harking is a complex means by which the knot between individuality and musical performance can be negotiated. Harking, as a way of instrument making and performance, is indeed a highly individualistic activity, in which the person can access a meditative state by intensive listening and intuitive response. However, the corporate philosophy of *PANArt* is deeply ambivalent towards a preoccupation with such individual exploration, an ambivalence which Baron seems to share. To him, as a Pang Orchestra therapist, harking can be seen as a pathway to 'free the ego', and experience 'the depth of collective play' (Baron 2022, p.c.). Such a seemingly amateur approach in playing allows the performer to grasp the magic of non-performance creativity, and should be considered as a kind of 'folk music' (Baron 2022, p.c.). Harking can be regarded as a music performance in development, a fascinating interplay between amateur music improvisation, eastern-meditation concept, and a philosophical negotiation between the collective and the individual.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter examines the various ways in which the sound of the *Hang*/handpan has been explored and utilised. This relatively recent instrument has demonstrated its capacity to

[104] *Sound of Gubal*, PANArt Hangbau AG, YouTube, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XAlf1pFCEw

generate a surprisingly wide range of sonic applications which often transcend the usual expectations of a Western music instrument. Despite its association with the Trinidadian steelpan, the use of the *Hang* has been divorced from its inspiration, an instrument heavily associated with the global carnival culture. The relatively simple construction and diatonic 'fool-proof' design allows beginners to reach a basic level of music competence within a short period of time. By the use of a simple left- and right-hand alternating movement and light touches with the finger-tips arbitrarily applied upon the instrument's tone-fields, amateur players with little to no musical training are able to explore the musical life which it affords, an experience which may have been left aside by some due to previous challenging experiences in learning another musical instrument. The comparatively short instrument history also contributes to the popularity of *Hang*/handpan, given that there is virtually no anxiety involved in performing the instrument the 'right way'. World fusion music performer Nadishana precisely described the *Hang*/handpan community as being entirely composed of 'beginners'. Besides this, any community member finds it unnecessary to advance their technicality, and are confident enough to attend gatherings, festivals, perform as street musicians, or even put out their own records within a relatively short amount of time.

However, some members of the community have explored the percussive potential of the *Hang*/handpan and pushed it to its limit. My ethnographic data shows that these virtuosi were all relatively advanced musicians prior to their acquisition of the *Hang*/handpan. These musicians range from jazz guitarists and classically-trained string musicians, to drummers and world music percussionists. Drummers and percussionists who are fluent in rhythmic expressions are often fascinated by the *Hang*/handpan because it is primarily a hand percussion instrument in conjunction with musical pitches. Weber, who expressed the idea of building a 'metallic udu with notes' to *PANArt*, apparently spoke the mind of numerous percussionists. Although one might argue that the glockenspiel is also a metallic idiophone with musical notes, the reason behind the popularity of *Hang*/handpan among percussionists is perhaps similar to the reasons I mentioned above: it is diatonic, and more importantly, it is new. A new instrument opens a path towards new economic possibilities. Experienced drummers and percussionists usually have a 'head start' in performing with the *Hang*/handpan by applying musical techniques they acquired from playing other percussion instruments. These players demonstrate a much more advanced way of performance on this new invention than an amateur would. While they might be less recognised in their other occupations, as a rock drummer or world music percussionist, they quickly receive global attention as the most technical *Han*g/handpan players around.

A wide range of vocal techniques have been employed in tandem with the *Hang*/handpan. Ethnographic data indicates that community members have implemented the instrument with adaptations of pop songs, composing folk style music, chanting with the *Hang*/handpan, and performing with more advanced vocal technique in yodelling, *Khoomei, Konnakol* and beatboxing. Although these choices derive from different musical cultures, Bithell's notion of the 'natural voice movement' (2014) is fitting in some contexts. These vocal techniques performed by the *Hang*/handpan community are often untrained (self-taught), imbued with a sense of connectedness with Mother Earth, with the voice being regarded as one of the best 'instruments' to accompany the *Hang/*handpan with its portability and flexibility. Although the *Hang/*handpan community places pronounced emphasis upon the egalitarian, anarchic, non-competitive properties of the community, in reality it is rather more complicated. While previously trained drummers and percussionists are able to establish themselves as comparatively advanced *Hang/*handpan players through utilisation of the instrument, certain community members are able to differentiate themselves from the amateur majority. By merging the use of this instrument with novel vocal techniques, musicians are able to pioneer new forms of fusion and capitalise upon this new sound, and potentially establish themselves internationally. They are, arguably, opportunists foreseeing the demand for such sound (and perhaps shape) in a particular music market.

Drawing parallels with the globalisation of the didjeridu and the ways in which such aboriginal instruments are appropriated by the 'world music' market and New Age sound healing discourses assists in our understanding of the global dissemination of the *Hang*/handpan. The West invented the *Hang*, and with its 'exotic' look, multicultural influences and relative lack of history, the instrument perhaps surprisingly became one of the newest successes of the world music phenomenon. In one sense, the sound of the *Hang*/handpan is a sound created in the West for purposes of Western cultural appropriation. New Agers further make use of the *Hang*/handpan beyond the realm of music composition in the traditional sense. New Age sound healing discourses promote an alternative market in the appropriation of the didjeridu, gong, singing bowl, or *Hang*/handpan, situating the handpan among other 'exotic' instruments. Although there is no scientific evidence for the health benefits of the instrument, New Agers make connections between the *Hang*/handpan and discussions on meditation, wellbeing, mood enhancement, and self-proclaimed spiritual development. In this context, the global popularity of the singing bowl is an example of an 'invented tradition' (Hobsbawn 1983) in which the newly invented object becomes a vessel containing fantasmatic constructions and imaginings. And since the notion of sound healing is often associated with metallic sound objects, I suggest that playing the *Hang*/handpan is a perfect foil for the fascination of New Age practitioners.

Harking, as the ‘official’ method of playing the *Hang,* begs deeper scholarly examination. While it is similar to how a music amateur might initially approach the *Hang/*handpan, it is largely an internalised musicking method which is in harmony with the development of *PANArt's* corporate philosophy. The concept of harking was developed from the transcendent experience of tuning *Hanghang,* a process which involves intensive listening and intuitive hand responses. It would seem that notions taken from Eastern meditation discourse have been borrowed in describing such a transcendent state, which the *Hang* makers perceive as beneficial for the self. While harking is not recommended as a way to perform the *Hang* for audiences, it is relatively neglected by *Hang/*handpan performers, and *PANArt* suspects that certain *Hang/*handpan community participants who profess appreciation for the sound of *Hang/*handpan are not participating in meditation, but are merely addicted to the stimulating sound. Arguably, the concept of harking reached maturity when *PANArt* terminated the production of *Hang* and replaced it with a series of Pang Instruments. These instruments compel and encourage collective performance, reviving the link with carnival steelpan culture, a feat which is relatively difficult to accomplish with *Hanghang.* By making instruments with relatively short sustain, eliminating the stimulating high frequencies, and tuning all the instruments in the same intonation, harking is now possible, and encouraged, to practice collectively.

Chapter 5: Collective Identity and Community Building with the *Hang*/handpan

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how the international *Hang*/handpan community is constructed and maintained, in both online and offline settings. Ethnographic work on individual and collective identity construction and maintenance in the relatively new *Hang*/handpan community invariably involves an examination of the forms that this community assumes on the Internet. When I was scrutinizing the *Hang*/handpan community, I found it is impossible to separate online and offline ethnography, which are parts of the same whole. Consequently, following Miller and Slater's (2000; 2004) suggestion, this chapter approaches research data on the *Hang*/handpan community construction and maintenance from both online and offline sites as being part of the same process.

By acquiring a *Hang*/handpan, one is almost instantly granted admission into the international instrument-centric community. 'Community' is not only a description regularly used by online and offline *Hang*/handpan participants, in some senses it is also 'imposed' upon newcomers by the collective of *Hang*/handpan makers and users. There have been situations where I have felt slightly awkward, when the research protagonists whom I had only briefly met began calling me brother or bro, or showing an unexpected amount of confidence and attentiveness towards me as a fellow handpan player. However, the dissertation has largely benefitted from such communal solidarity, thanks to which I received enormous assistance and support as a fellow *Hang*/handpan enthusiast generally. This community ethos, which encourages sharing and sheltering travelling *Hang*/handpan performers, has played such a central role in my fieldwork.

While all communities are in some ways imagined (Anderson 1991), and arguably all music instrument-centric communities can be conceptualised as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991), this chapter scrutinises the relatively unique ways in which the international *Hang*/handpan community is formed and sustained. The ways in which the *Hang*/handpan is marketed and traded influences the community ethos and discourse, and arguably generates collective affects responsible for community building. My experience in participating in the *Hang*/handpan community also suggests a tendency for more 'positive' affects to dominate public discourse and representation of the community. In some ways, the community is built upon 'positive' correlation towards the instrument and community participants, while relatively 'negative' affects are generally reserved for and only identifiable in private communications. Lastly, a certain sense of musical cosmopolitanism can be

identified within the international *Hang*/handpan community. It appears that an imagination of a global community is at least partially constituted by the relatively ambiguous cultural identity of the instrument. Hence, I argue that this particular mode of music cosmopolitanism can be examined within a framework of identity construction that forgoes national identification.

5.2 Community of producer-consumer connection

The establishment of close relationships between *Hang*/handpan producers and consumers are critical to the construction and smooth functioning of the community as a whole. Such relationships are predicated upon physical engagement effectuated by modern hypermobility, and/or online interactions in the digital age. It is evident that this community ethos is generated, at least partially, by such human connections. Buying the instrument in shops without engaging in such producer-consumer interactions, or reselling an instrument for profit, are generally seen as contrary to the community ethos. Such an ethos, one might argue, is the consequence of the rather unusual way in which the instruments are sold in the first place.

As explained in Chapters two and three, *PANArt* endorsed a rather unorthodox business approach towards music instrument manufacturing and trading. As Rohner describes, *PANArt* has intentionally avoided allowing its business strategy to be shaped by 'the market forces' (Castan & Pagnon 2006, 47:23) and claims its business model is a 'steady-state business' which is 'not looking to grow' (Castan & Pagnon 2006, 47:26). *PANArt's* actions, in many ways, are consistent with such claims. Notwithstanding the global popularity of its creation, *PANArt* remains largely a 'music cottage industry' (Abd Hamid & Isa 2016), as the highly creative roles regarding instrument development and manufacture are shared by family members: Rohner, Schärer, and later on with the addition of sons Basil Rohner and David Rohner. While evidence suggests that *PANArt* has hired employees responsible for tasks not directly related to instrument design or manufacturing,[105] the small-scale, family-run business model remains intact, regardless of the opportunity to up-scale or mass-produce, given the popularity of the *Hang.*

The history of the distribution method of the *Hang,* on the other hand, has taken considerably more twists and turns than the relatively static nature of the company's

[105] *Michael Paschko,* Handpan.org, last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.handpan.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=65&t=18300

business model. Briefly examined in Chapter three, here the dissertation will go into further detail on the testimony of Ron Kravitz on *The Handpan Podcast* in December 2020, when he elaborated upon the nuances in *Hang* global distribution adjustment. At one point the sole distributor of *Hang* in the US market, Kravitz states in the podcast that he contacted Rohner via email in around 2002 enquiring about the *Hang,* with Rohner hinting that Kravitz could participate in distribution as a private reseller.[106] Although he did not own a physical music store, Kravitz took the chance and began importing *Hanghang* to the US, becoming one of the fourteen *Hang* distributors in the world. Kravitz initially targeted his percussionist friends and listed the *Hang* on his website,[107] following which interest gradually grew.

Despite the rise of global demand, *PANArt* readjusted the distribution method in 2005. Most distributors were eliminated, with Kravitz being one of two remaining global distributors after the purge. In 2007, *PANArt* decided to halt all worldwide distribution. According to Paschko[108] - co-founder of *Hangforum*, a forum which was active between 2009 to 2014 - *PANArt's* official website was unavailable for several years until a relaunch in 2013, following which Paschko was invited for editorial contribution. *PANArt* officially retired the *Hang* on the relaunched website and introduced their new creations. Between roughly 2007 to 2013, the only way for international *Hang* enthusiasts to gather or exchange *Hanghang* related information was to make direct enquiry to *PANArt,* contact musicians who had already acquired the instrument, or engage with web-based forums such as *Hang-music*,[109] *Hangforum*,[110] or the later *Handpan.org*[111] which featured discussion about the emerging handpans alongside the original *PANArt Hang*. Since there was little to no advertising promoting the *Hang*, the popularity of the instrument was largely the consequence of active consumer-based information distribution through online and offline sources. Acquiring the *Hang* often involved assistance from relatively knowledgeable *Hanghang* owners who were willing to direct enquirers in the right direction.

These online forums, although initiated by different *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts, shared one common similarity: functioning as the platform for educating, monitoring, and establishing a communal consent of the ways in which the instrument should be traded. Across separate

[106] *PANArt History with Ron Kravitz (2002-07 Hang Distributor),* Sylvain Paslier 2020, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.sylvainpasliermusic.com/post/panart-history-with-ron-kravitz-hang-distributor
[107] *Music In The Moment,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://musicinthemoment.com
[108] *The Hang Blog,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.hangblog.org/about-this-website/
[109] *Hang-Music Forum : The Place for Hang musicians*, last accessed 19 February 2023, http://web.archive.org/web/20071017202743/http://www.hang-music.com/forum/index.php
[110] *hangforum.com – The Archive,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.hangforum.com/
[111] *Handpan.org,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.handpan.org/forum/

forums we could find topics such as 'Hang Scams !!! Warning !'[112] or sections named 'Buyer Beware'[113] which had been initiated by forum administrators, encouraging forum participants to actively report and monitor 'known or suspected scams, fake sales, and other dubious offers'.[114] Guidelines on *Hang*/handpan reselling are explicitly emphasised on these forums, all of which generally honoured *PANArt's* official position towards reselling, as well as the pre-emptive right that they reserved to in purchase the instrument for its original price. These measures were stated as ways to help extend the longevity of the community,[115] since reselling for maximum profit was generally perceived as counter to 'the spirit of the community'.[116] When the *Hang*/handpan was relatively scarce, forum members were encouraged not to profit, or profit only moderately, from instrument resale. Being 'a valued part of the community' was also recommended, as the second-hand *Hang*/handpan trade within forums was intended to be 'community-based' (Swap and Sale Guide 2013).[117] Although there are separate sections within these forums which allow topics unrelated to trading, trade-related topics and similar sub-forums were generally more popular than other threads. If a sense of community was facilitated by these digital forums, at least partially, perhaps the active participation in the establishment and maintenance of the *Hang*/handpan market played a significant role in the consolidation of such communal solidarity.

PANArt's small-scale and arguably 'anti-globalisation' business approach profoundly influenced the creation of the *Hang*/handpan community. Industrialisation, the mass production of music instruments and globalisation can be said to 'disconnect' or 'alienate' the link between music composers, performers, and instrument makers (Smith 2016), while short-circuiting the creative and inventive expressions of the makers (Abd Hamid & Isa 2016). The notion that modern small-scale community-based music instrument manufacturers can function as an ecologically sustainable music business model is not uncommon within ecomusicology (e.g. Forner 2006; Ryan 2015; Smith 2016), with research in the field often highlighting the importance of 'reconnectedness' of producer and consumer.

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[112] *Hang Scams !!! Warning !,* hangforum.com – The Archive*,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.hangforum.com/viewtopic.php?f=11&t=793
[113] *Buyer Beware,* Handpan.org*,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.handpan.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=32&t=8896
[114] *Guidelines of the Buyer Beware section.* Handpan.org*,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.handpan.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=32&t=8896
[115] *Hang-Bay Forum Rules,* Hang-Music Forum: The Place for Hang musicians*,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://web.archive.org/web/20071018020531/http://www.hang-music.com/forum/viewtopic.php?id=14
[116] *Swap and Sale Guide (updated March 2013),* Handpan.org*,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.handpan.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=4183
[117] *Swap and Sale Guide (update March 2013),* Handpan.org*,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.handpan.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=4183&sid=47718d620ab00b3b96f00052b4dc63e2

The literature cited above comprises primarily investigations on sustainable music instruments and the impact they have upon the logging of timber and deforestation. Although the dissertation at hand lies far from disciplines associated with ecology, the social patterns of the *Hang*/handpan community often display ways in which environmental concerns and the love of nature are common themes embraced by the community.

In 2017, I was having vegan food prepared by handpan maker David Galleher in *HangOut USA*, an event which took place in the scenic intentional community named Highland Lake Cover and Sanctuary in the Pines, within North Carolina. The food was organic and locally sourced,[118] and although the four-day long festival had a relatively middle-class vibe, an ambience which was distinctly different from *HangOut UK*,[119] the combination of veganism and the festive location surrounded by nature, was a feature which such festivals shared as a whole. I often casually ask vegan informants, such as Daisuke Iehara (2018, p.c.), Clemens August Andreas Handschuch (2017, p.c.), Chris Ng (2016, p.c.), and Chor Lai (2018, p.c.), whether they feel that a large proportion of the *Hang*/handpan community practice veganism and inquire into the reason behind this phenomenon. They agreed with my observation, but thus far have failed to articulate what contributes to it.

Veganism is perhaps one of the many lifestyle choices which suggest the community's awareness of environmental concerns. Also, it is not uncommon for relatively popular handpan accessories to market themselves as being natural or eco-friendly. Phoenix Handpan Oil – a rust preventing oil manufactured by handpan players Benny and Alessia – claims that it is made with '99.5% raw vegetal material' which is 'healthy for the environment' (https://www.phxoil.com/); Panji Bags claims the company experimented with natural materials such as jute rope, hemp fibres, mushroom mycelium, and eventually settled with a repurposed paper product to build their eco-friendly handpan cases (San Juan Handpan Lovers 2018);[120] Saraz Handpan, one of the most popular handpan manufacturers, introduced a foundation intending to 'promote, raise funds and sponsor music education, environmental sustainability', and balance 'life on planet Earth' (The Saraz Foundation).[121] *Handpan.org* acknowledged that 'many of us [within the *Hang*/handpan community] are interested in ecology' (Gérald 2012), resulting in the idea of collaborating with Tree Nation in

[118] *Food & Meals,* last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.hangout-usa.com/food-meals/
[119] HOUSA entry fees with four days shared accommodation plus meal cost US$435; HOUK entry fees with four days accommodation without meal costs £55.
[120] San Juan Handpan Lovers 2018*,* last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.Facebook.com/SanJuanHandpanLovers/photos/a.957527880992244/1938387052906317/
[121] *Saraz Foundation,* last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.sarazhandpans.com/about-saraz-handpan-drums/saraz-handpans-foundation/

order to compensate for carbon emission from computer related activities by tree planting projects.[122]

Although we cannot be sure of the reasons why a significant proportion of the *Hang*/handpan community display a certain degree of ecological awareness, evidence suggests that part of this can be attributed to this instrument-centric community being built upon the sharing of 'sustainable' musical instruments. Non-electrified instruments constructed primarily without plastic components are often preferred by participants, and the *Hang*/handpan is a perfect fit for this category. *PANArt's* small-scale business model in many ways reconnects producer and consumer, emphasising the negotiation of ethics and economics in music culture. While the element of the 'environment' has been somewhat absent from the bulk of such producer-consumer negotiations, *PANArt*'s small-scale acoustic music instrument business is perhaps appealing to consumers concerned with environmental issues more broadly. The absence of explicit mention of the environment was crucial in cultivating this image of *PANArt* as an ecologically-friendly business, while allowing them to avoid the critical scrutiny of ecologically-minded consumers concerned with carbon footprints and similar.

Ethical negotiation around the *Hang*, however, has been dominated by the producer-consumer connection in a rather unusual way. Since the *Hang* remained a relatively niche instrument during its thirteen years of production, potential buyers developed a sense of competition in conceiving of the 'most positive ways' to use the instrument, all in order make a case to *PANArt* and to maximise their chances of acquiring one. Kravitz describes emails asking to purchase the *Hang* which would mention religious figures like the Pope or Dalai Lama to compete for the 'highest accolades and goodness' among fellow potential buyers (Paslier 2020). *PANArt*'s withdrawal from distributors resulted in approximately ten enquiry letters per day from global enthusiasts.[123] Although the ways in which *PANArt* eliminate clients from consideration, or whether they would even read all the letters and emails, remain a mystery, it is only logical to assume that buyers would attempt to present the best case that they could in order to procure the *Hang,* while neglecting mundane implementations or purposes which could be perceived as being negative. This was always likely to shape the community's perception of the instrument, and perhaps in some ways influence the development of a community ethos. As stated in Chapter four, the community generally welcomes music amateurs who possess less musical competency. Competing for

[122] *Plant trees with the forum?,* Handpan.org, last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.handpan.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=27&t=4914
[123] *Newsletter by PANArt about the purchase of a Hang,* Michael Paschko 2012, last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.hangblog.org/2012/09/10/newsletter-by-panart-about-the-purchase-of-a-hang/

the instruments themselves is perhaps perceived as being in contradiction with the ethics imagined by *Hang* players.

Handpan makers not only borrowed the *Hang's* morphology, but also endorsed *PANArt's* humanistic business model more generally: a small-scale operation which prioritises producer-consumer connections. When both the *Hang* and its handpan substitutes were scarce, buyers were often required to collect their instruments from workshops in person. Moreover, since the *Hang/*handpan is a delicate instrument which requires regular maintenance, producers often remain in close interaction with consumers on web-based and physical sites. Consequently, not only could the tonal quality of the instrument be maintained, a player's online behaviour is, in some sense, constantly under surveillance. Also, it is not uncommon for *Hang/*handpan producers to claim that they would not retune instruments which are intended to be sold for a profit. Having a good relationship with *Hang/*handpan producers, in some cases, does increase the chances one has of acquiring an instrument. For example, after several in-person meetings, I had the chance to select my favourite handpan physically from the highly sought-after *ESS* workshop, without having to add my name to the customer waiting list. By selling a spare HOUK ticket to Marti Gronmayer, the founder of *Sunpan*, he offered me a chance to order his instrument instantly (2019, p.c.). Clemens Handschuch also explains that visiting handpan workshops in person grants one a relatively good chance of purchasing a handpan on the spot without getting on waiting lists (2018, p.c.). To maximize my chance of purchasing the instrument, or the chance to select the best possible instrument from a producer, I am encouraged to continually present my 'best self' to the community. Perhaps the biggest problem with this sort of producer-consumer connection lies in the inevitable sense of favouritism and unfairness. As a new handpan community participant, informant Giulio Bonazza expressed his resentment regarding the ordeal surrounding the purchase of handpans, which is, to him, like 'buying vegetables' when the 'seller saves the best carrot for a favourite customer' (2017, p.c.).

My perception of the apparently egalitarian, reciprocal, cosmopolitan, and even utopian imagination of the *Hang/*handpan community was developed through the experience of acquiring the instrument. Before physically interacting with *Hang/*handpan producers, a discernible sense of 'positivity' was initiated by email exchanges. In 2016, I highlighted through email a potential rust problem that my recently-acquired handpan might run into. Char, the mother of the handpan builder Manny Guerrero, and the administrative staff of their small company Zen Handpan in California, replied with words such as 'we are here for

you in this life journey' [124] (2016, p.c.). A sense of intimacy was also presented by handpan makers such as Bueraheng, Handschuch, Weglinski, and Wilson, during my research visits to their workshops between 2017 to 2019. These handpan makers not only supported my research on *Hang*/handpan more generally, Handschuch and Weglinski offered me shelter in their workshop and home and introduced me to their family members during my stay. All these handpan makers generously disclosed information about their workshop and tools, sharing knowledge about building the instrument, sometimes with actual demonstrations. These research trips suggest that at least a proportion of handpan makers believe that such an instrument-making culture should remain accessible to all, and they are generally supportive and willing to share the know-how. Such a community ethos among handpan producers is in harmony with the experience of engaging handpan consumers digitally, demonstrating a general helpfulness towards members of the community in need, particularly in assisting new community members in instrument purchase.

The collective virtue of sharing is largely responsible for the acceleration of the emergent affinity group of prosumers (Toffler 1980b), a form of subjectivity that breaks from the dichotomy of a producer-consumer-centric community. In the early phases of the emergence of handpan makers, they often began as dissatisfied consumers who had failed to acquire any, or enough, *Hanghang*. Like Bueraheng or Foulke, these dissatisfied consumers usually approached the DIY production of *Hang*-like instruments out of curiosity and self-satisfaction, and were generally inclined to share their experiences in producing the instruments with fellow prosumers. In some sense, these subjects broke free from the roles of passive consumers in the *Hang* marketplace by prosumption, as 'production for self-use' (Toffler 1980b). Indeed, the growing economic opportunities that this manufacture afforded them encouraged these prosumers to transform their DIY handpan production into a career. Interestingly, however, these newly 'transformed' prosumers often do not consider fellow prosumers as competitors. While the investment in heavy machinery for steel shells is costly, some handpan producers tackle such challenges with a sense of collectivism. A group of European handpan makers formed the Shellopan Cooperative, creating deep-drawing tools for handpan steel shells 'shared among several makers apprentices in Europe' (Tools and Sharing 2015).[125] Informant Handschuch also spent a week in the Shellopan workshop at the beginning of his handpan making career (2018, p.c.) and expressed his gratitude towards Matthieu, one of the creators of Shellopan, for his hospitality and sharing of 'knowledge, skills and wisdom'.[126]

[124] Email: Re: Invoice 0000079 from Manuel Guerrero, 14th October 2016
[125] *Our blog,* 2015, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://shellopan.fr/index.php?option=com_zoo&task=item&item_id=13&Itemid=153&lang=en
[126] *Our blog,* 2016, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://shellopan.fr/index.php?option=com_zoo&task=item&item_id=36&Itemid=153&lang=en

A similar sense of collectivism is not uncommon among handpan prosumers. Bueraheng's displays of communal solidarity towards handpan prosumers has been well documented in Chapter three. Moreover, online sites are often platforms for sharing handpan making knowledge. Sub forums in *Handpan.org* includes topics such as 'Dummy beginner maker', in which relatively experienced handpan makers answer enquiries from a beginner from Barcelona on how to start.[127] 'Exchange of knowledge handpan', a private group on Facebook is still active in 2022, and in the group one finds experienced handpan makers who continue to answer questions regarding handpan-making know-how.[128] The tendency for experienced handpan producers to physically assist the less experienced continues at the time of writing. Argentine handpan company Pandora Pantam claims it assisted 'a lot of people from my country', and also took a trip to Iran to 'help a very devoted friend' to 'craft at the highest levels' (Pandora Pantam - Esculturas Sonoras 2022).[129]

The case of Foulke, which was briefly examined in Chapter three, is perhaps significant in highlighting the community ethos of sharing. Foulke is a classically trained cellist who gradually lost interest in 'institutionalized Western music' at a young age (Paslier 2019).[130] In 2007, Foulke attempted to revive his passion in music by playing didjeridu, and discovered a video showing the *Hang* which was accompanied by two didjeridu players (Paslier 2019). However, it took two years for Foulke to locate a *Hang* owner, following which he had the opportunity to try in person. In April 2012, Foulke travelled to Russia to collect a handpan built by Victor Levinson, and Levinson demonstrated the final process of gluing the handpan while Foulke was present in his workshop. Foulke also learned that Levinson had no previous experience in making Trinidadian steel pan, but was 'a techno DJ in Moscow' (Paslier 2019). This encounter inspired Foulke to imagine the possibility of making handpans by himself (Paslier 2019). He began experimenting with tuning the drum barrels and received advice and encouragement from Cox, the co-founder of Pantheon Steel. In 2013, Foulke visited Bueraheng in Switzerland, where he received 'masterful guidance and mentoring' (Paslier 2019). In 2014, Foulke starting to produce his own brand of handpans under the name CFoulke, a name which changed to Xenith Handpans in 2021. Foulke has

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[127] *Dummy beginner maker,* Handpan.org, last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.handpan.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=23&t=18367

[128] *Exchange of knowledge handpan,* Facebook, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.Facebook.com/groups/415394298532244

[129] *Exchange of knowledge handpan,* Facebook, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://m.facebook.com/groups/415394298532244/permalink/7292770547461217/

[130] *Colin Foulke, Student of Steel - Part 1*, Sylvain Paslier 2019, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.sylvainpasliermusic.com/post/colin-foulke-student-of-steel-part-1

since been highly praised by the community for sharing the design for his hydro-forming machinery in 2016, without monetizing or patent involvement. Such hydro-forming technology is now implemented by 'over 50 handpan builders worldwide' (Paslier 2019).

The producer-consumer connection, which encourages economic negotiation regarding the *Hang,* is also endorsed by handpan makers. The most noticeable economic negotiation is the agreement, whether written or by consent, expressly rejecting and renouncing profit from reselling the instrument. According to Paslier (2020), the most expensive *Hang* sold on eBay is USD 23,000, with astonishing resale prices such as these being the main reason behind *PANArt's* decision to introduce a signed agreement which would 'prevent the instruments being commercialised to the detriment of the maker'. This meant that the buyer has the obligation to 'inform *PANArt* of instrument sale', that all reselling prices 'must not be higher than the original', while *PANArt* would reserve the 'pre-emptive right for re-purchasing at the original price'.[131] Although *Hanghang* resale which violates such an agreement does not lead to legal consequences, such actions are usually openly condemned by the community. In February 2018, Spanish Facebook user Pol Boy Sandiumenge posted an advertisement on the Swap and Sale (only for Handpan) group, listing a *PANArt Hang* for EUR 6,000 (Fig 5.1). This advertisement drew some considerably critical responses from the group. As user Hugo Williame wrote, *Hang* owners are supposed to sign an agreement with *PANArt* to protect the instrument's value from secondary market speculation, and he recognised the advertised *Hang* as being a second-generation handpan with an original value of around EUR 800 to EUR 1000, rather than EUR 6000. Benoît Roussel, previous moderator of the group, clarified that the instrument looked like a first-generation *Hang,* which was sold for less than EUR 300 when it was first introduced to the world. Benoît is quite certain that this particular *Hang* was sold on EBay only three months ago at half of the advertised price. This advertisement was the subject of considerable criticism, leading the group moderator to decide to delete the entire post.

[131] *Agreement/Certificate,* last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.hangblog.org/panart/agreement_english_new.pdf

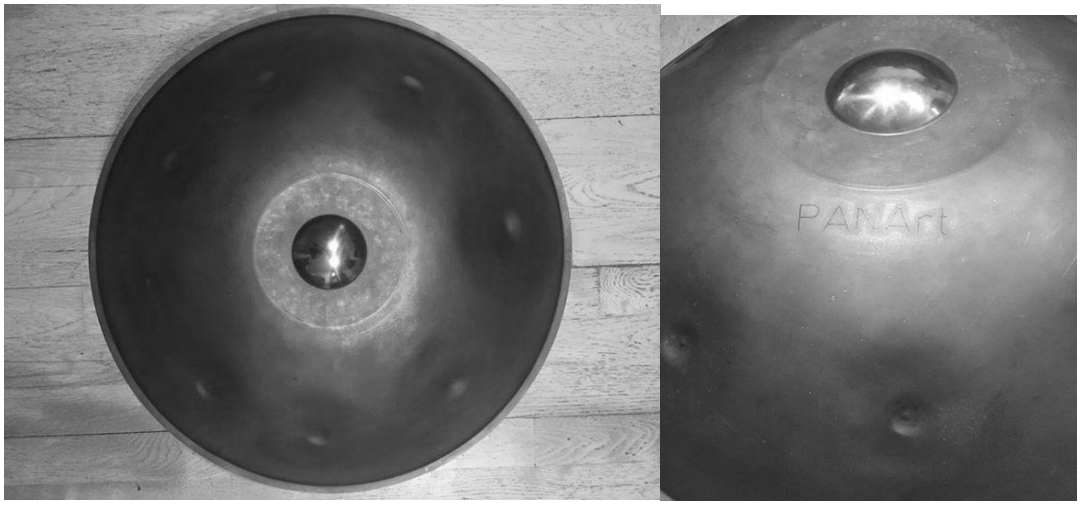
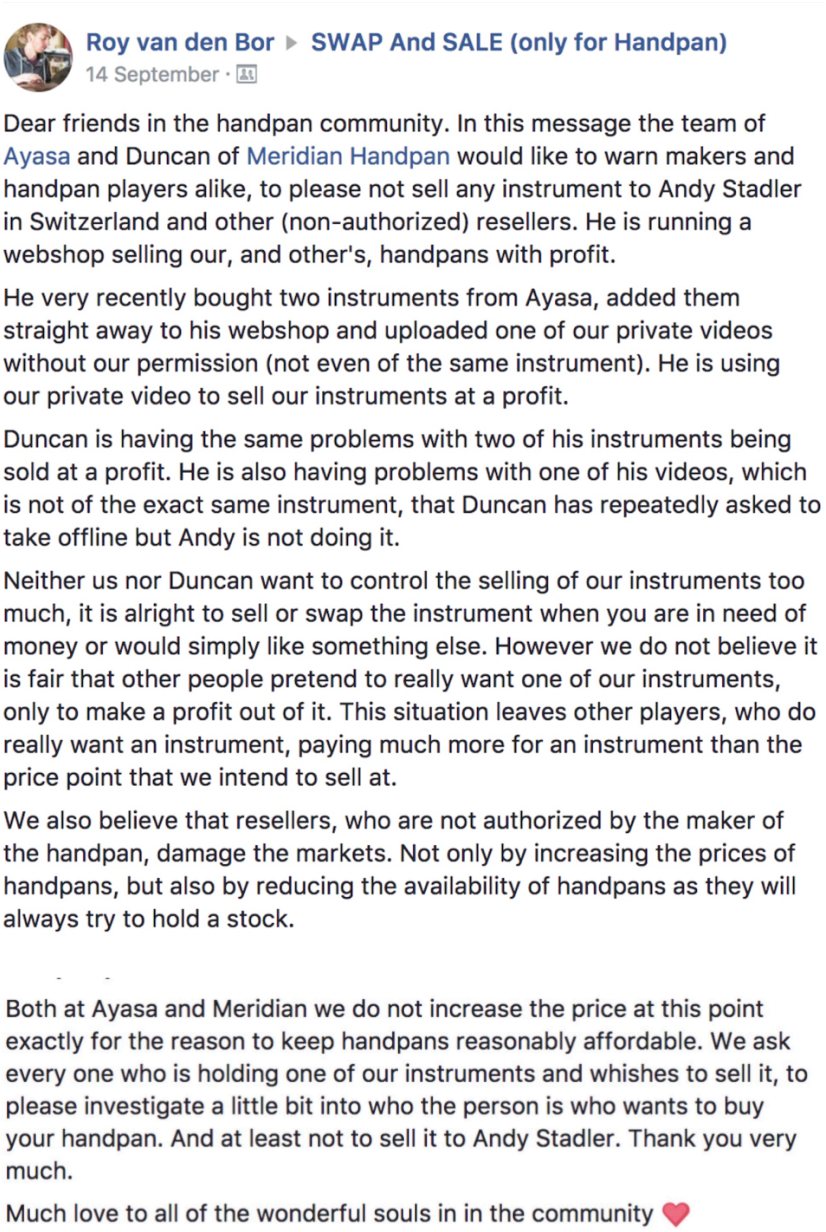


Figure 5.1 Advertisement pictures from Facebook uploaded by Pol Boy Sandiumenge. Screenshot by the author.

While handpan makers are often active participants on websites, the means by which the activities of consumers could be monitored has continued to develop. It is not uncommon for handpan makers to explicitly announce the refusal to retune their own product if it was sold with profit. Additionally, a few handpan makers have openly taken a stand against market speculation as a way to 'protect makers interest' and maintain their instruments' price-point, one which is' relatively affordable to the general public' (Fig. 5.2). This claim was highly convincing at the time when online resellers were able to make considerable profits, sometimes several times over the original price. Although market speculation facilitated by community members, especially for relatively rare *Hang*/handpans, continues to exist, such transactions are generally done discreetly outside of community surveillance. 'Policing' unreasonable offers and trades is not only a common practice online among *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts, active engagement in market regulation also strengthens the bond between community participants, as such actions are generally considered to be a protective measure for the communal good, against the intrusion of the free market. However, around 2019, arguably the period of handpan market saturation, such economic negotiations and monitoring of the handpan trade appeared to decline.



Roy van den Bor ▸ SWAP And SALE (only for Handpan)
14 September ·

Dear friends in the handpan community. In this message the team of Ayasa and Duncan of Meridian Handpan would like to warn makers and handpan players alike, to please not sell any instrument to Andy Stadler in Switzerland and other (non-authorized) resellers. He is running a webshop selling our, and other's, handpans with profit.

He very recently bought two instruments from Ayasa, added them straight away to his webshop and uploaded one of our private videos without our permission (not even of the same instrument). He is using our private video to sell our instruments at a profit.

Duncan is having the same problems with two of his instruments being sold at a profit. He is also having problems with one of his videos, which is not of the exact same instrument, that Duncan has repeatedly asked to take offline but Andy is not doing it.

Neither us nor Duncan want to control the selling of our instruments too much, it is alright to sell or swap the instrument when you are in need of money or would simply like something else. However we do not believe it is fair that other people pretend to really want one of our instruments, only to make a profit out of it. This situation leaves other players, who do really want an instrument, paying much more for an instrument than the price point that we intend to sell at.

We also believe that resellers, who are not authorized by the maker of the handpan, damage the markets. Not only by increasing the prices of handpans, but also by reducing the availability of handpans as they will always try to hold a stock.

Both at Ayasa and Meridian we do not increase the price at this point exactly for the reason to keep handpans reasonably affordable. We ask every one who is holding one of our instruments and whishes to sell it, to please investigate a little bit into who the person is who wants to buy your handpan. And at least not to sell it to Andy Stadler. Thank you very much.

Much love to all of the wonderful souls in in the community ❤️

Figure 5.2 Handpan makers expressing their concern on online reselling activities. Screenshot by the author.

Economic and ethical negotiations within the *Hang*/handpan community are often inseparable. More than once, I have reflected upon the context which led to the formation of a kind of exceptional trust between myself and fellow *Hang*/handpan participants, sometimes resulting in relatively irrational actions, such as trusting a new handpan maker whom I had never met physically, and placing an order with the full payment of USD 2000 upfront, without knowing the exact date of delivery. This unique method of purchasing a music instrument was entirely different from what I had experienced as a guitarist and experimental musician for over twenty years. The scarcity of the *Hang*/handpan was indeed one of the

primary reasons which encouraged me to take such risks. However, perhaps also the ways in which the *Hang*/handpan community actively engages in market control, and the presentation of a community ethos of mutual aid helped to generate a sense of security and intimacy. Perhaps such social behaviour made me feel at home in imagining myself to be an authentic *Hang*/handpan community member: I'm more than an instrument consumer, but part of a community of trust which looks after and protects each other from frauds and scams.

After successfully acquiring my first handpan, my desire to 'give back to the community' grew, and I would adhere to the community ethos in volunteering for roles, conceiving of myself as an 'ambassador of the *Hang*/handpan'. I co-organised HOHK with Ng, and we both participated in media interviews, promoting the 'genuine' culture and collective beliefs of the community, which at the time I perceived as egalitarian and anti-capitalistic in some sense. Ng, the founder of *Handpan Union Hong Kong* (HUHK) and *HandPan Cave,* was perhaps one of the most knowledgeable players in Hong Kong with regard to the history of the *Hang*/handpan, as well as a dedicated 'believer' in the collective ethics of the *Hang*/handpan community. As a new handpan practitioner, Ng was my main informant for enquiries regarding the instrument's history and information on new handpan makers. Ng not only invested long hours into researching the *Hang*/handpan online, and committing the available sound models to memory, he was perhaps the key person who introduced me to the *Hang*/handpan community ethos. As a professional visual designer, Ng made use of his skills to upload *Hang*/handpan-inspired illustrations online on a regular basis, and provided visual artwork for *Hang*/handpan related musical projects for free (Fig. 5.3). As our relationship became closer, he would often express his distaste for *Hang*/handpan collectors, resellers, and the mass production of handpans emerging in China, which he criticised as 'violating the community spirit' (2017, p.c.). As a focal figure in the Hong Kong *Hang*/handpan community, Ng also expressed his concern for the consumerist tendencies among several local community members who he deemed to have been 'lost from the core of the community' he trusted and imagined in the beginning (2017, p.c.). In his view, these consumers are 'the believers of capitalism', which 'amplifies greed rather than love and sharing' (2017, p.c.). Interestingly, Ng had never participated in any physical *Hang*/handpan gatherings nor festivals (2017, p.c.) until 2017, when he attended HOUK. Prior to this festival, Ng's experience and conception of the collective ethics of the community were almost entirely constructed online.



Figure 5.3 Album artwork by Ng, for Portuguese handpan virtuoso Kabeção. Photograph by Kabeção.

Evidence suggests that the ecology surrounding the *Hang*/handpan shares a similarity with other comparable small-scale 'cottage' music industries, in the sense of successfully creating producer-consumer connections, contributing to ethical and economic negotiations. However, in the case of the *Hang*/handpan, consumers – in the age of digital information and hypermobility – transcend such a model on an international scale, and this scale in turn appears to have fewer benefits for local ecologies, a seemingly contradictory phenomenon when compared to other small-scale folk music instrument producers. These negotiations established by the *Hang*/handpan producer-consumer nexus seem to serve one discernible main purpose: the sustainability of a relatively intimate Western-centric community within a global and globalised spectrum. Participants often express concerns regarding global market forces, usually by imagining an emerging mass production handpan manufacturer in Asia (Fig. 5.4), sometimes referred to mockingly as '*Yamahang*', damaging the 'magic' of the tight-knit community that has formed around this product crafted by Western artisans. Perhaps to a certain degree, these negotiations situate the metropolitan West, namely Europe/US, as the ultimate 'locality' which should be protected, with digitalism and hypermobility expanding the material 'local' into an imaginary West, an imagined community nourished and consolidated to a certain degree by a phobia of the Oriental.



Figure 5.4 Cartoon published on Facebook by Atom Handpan Workshop. Screenshot by the author.[132]

Yet, at the same time, at least some community members simultaneously imagine 'the East' as a place for spiritual growth, healing, and source of inspiration, a spiritual wellspring for the development of the community. But 'the East' is also considered a source of industrialisation with a profit-focused mentality which could potentially damage the harmony and 'magic' of the global *Hang*/handpan community.

In different contexts, different aspects of 'the East' are imitated, depicted, or imagined. While the Japanese music instrument company Yamaha is denigrated for its cheap, Asian mass-produced handpans, there is a discernibly casual use of the customary Hindu greeting '*namaste*', followed with corresponding palms-together gesture, among community members (Fig. 5.5). The *Hang*/handpan is often implemented in zen meditation and New Age sound healing sessions, while Chinese-made handpans are generally considered to be inferior and to be avoided (Fig. 5.6). It would seem that 'the East' is seen as a site of fantasy, the heartland of spiritual regeneration and non-Western healing practices, while at the same time being demonised for being profit-oriented and market-driven.

[132] Facebook, last accessed 20 November 2020, https://m.facebook.com/100002218363935/

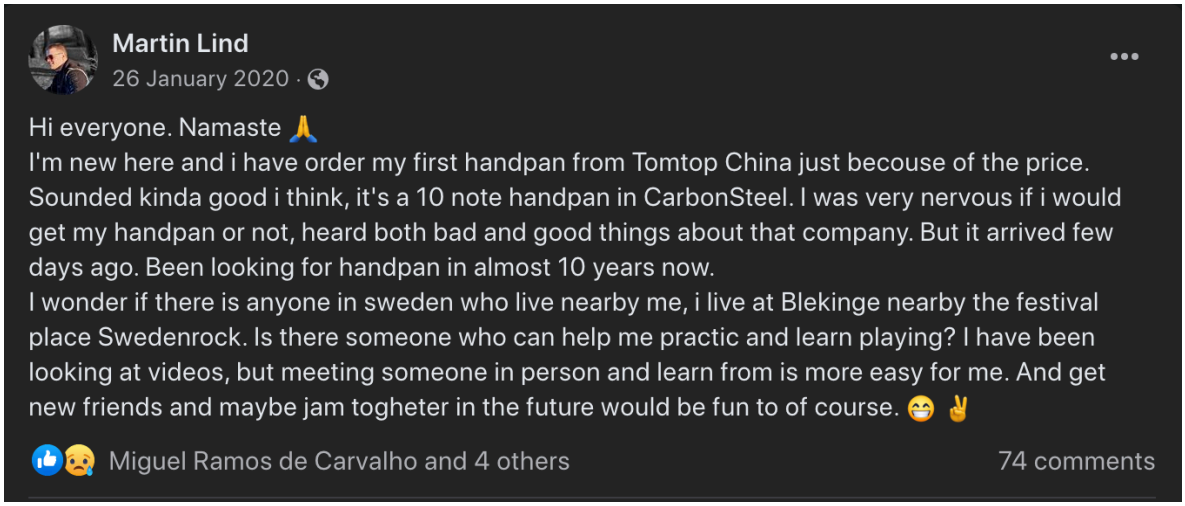


Figure 5.5 New Facebook handpan community member Martin Lind purchased a handpan from China, prefacing his post with the customary *namaste*. Screenshot by the author.



Figure 5.6 Alessio Massi, founder of *Hardcase Technology*, made a statement against the rumour of reselling Chinese-made handpans. Screenshot by the author.

Approaching twenty years after the *Hang* was invented, as the community continued to grow, some producers and consumers began to express alternative views contesting such an ethos. Some community 'elders' gradually became less reluctant to express opinions

concerning the impact of the global free market, widely regarded as a nefarious and ominous force threatening European/US artisans. Waples, arguably the most recognisable handpan player, has expressed a rather neutral attitude towards global competition, perceiving it as almost inevitable. Waples, commenting on a Chinese handpan company promotion on Facebook, states:

> *And to everyone else who is moaning, how do you think some of us 'old timers' felt when you newbies stared [sic] to get out online, busk the markets and under cutting prices on gigs (nah but really, I studied stringed musical instrument technology at Uni in the UK an* [sic] *I ended up never making a guitar again after the course had ended as I realised that there was no way I could compete with a factory in Korea)* (2018)

Rusty James, one of the earliest handpan players as well as a rather maverick community member, publically suggests that global market forces were in fact responsible for the rapid growth of the *Hang*/handpan community. In responding to one of the online discussions regarding reselling price control on Facebook, he remarked:

> '*When the first Hang hit $10,000 on ebay, that alone threw gasoline on the fire of passion for those interested in accomplishing exactly what you asked for in wanting the instrument to be more accessible. Without these extreme prices, we would not have seen the extreme rush worldwide of 300+ people to learn to make them. Passion sparked this rush, but secondary market speculation was the fuel* (…) *Everyone slams "The free market" but it was the extreme capital derived from free market supply and demand imbalance that pushed the evolution so fast. So in reality, we should be thankful that these prices existed'* (2020)

The 'no-resale-for-profit' community ethos has also been criticised by community member Curtor Mar Rolandeson (2020). Rolandeson has stated that there are in fact *Hang* owners who 'didn't post their *Hang* for sale' under the surveillance of the online community, and instead sold the instrument 'in a peaceful way where both sides were happy'. Not without a degree of surprise, Levinson, the Russian handpan maker who had been highly active in monitoring reselling prices online, in 2018 announced that he had given up with market control. Meanwhile, Levinson proceeded to list his handpan on EBay for the first time (Fig. 5.7). Although the community has generally been dubious towards the potential impact of 'the Eastern' way of handpan mass production, there are in fact Western handpan makers

who have embraced the opportunity by teaching and assisting handpan manufacturers in China (Lai 2022, p.c.). Details of such collaborations, however, are generally absent in the public domain of the *Hang*/handpan community.

It is salient here to explore some other challenges that this ethos has sustained over the years, challenges that have permanently impacted the ethos itself, as well as the purportedly 'magical' experience that the community offers. These challenges, not without a certain sense of irony, were incidents caused by European and American handpan makers. In 2015, Werner Egger (Fig. 5.7) planned to set up a handpan workshop in Thailand which promised to deliver affordable instruments, and started a public fundraising campaign. With a profile as a steelpan maker trained under Rohner between 1992 to 1995 (Rohner 2021, p.c.), such a campaign received support from seventy-three investors (Diffey 2017). Tragically, these investors did not receive any instruments or any form of compensation in return, and Egger completely vanished from the community in 2016 (Diffey 2017). In 2019, a new handpan maker in California, Logan Needham, was exposed for failing to deliver instruments to customers who made full or partial payment upfront. Handpan community participant Kyle Zurenko made a public request on Facebook for a refund of USD 1,000 due to health issues he needed to attend to, and claimed that more than ten individuals were victims of fraud in the same way (Zurenko 2019). Zurenko stated that his payment was deposited in December 2017, and he had received neither a response, refund, nor instrument from Needham before he passed away in 2019 from cancer. In the same year, *Zen Handpan*, the 'humanist' company from which I bought my first handpan in 2014, was reported by multiple handpan players for failing to deliver instruments after receiving payments. Production of *Zen Handpan* remains idle in 2022, and its official website has been deleted. Ng is one of the victims of these frauds, since he made full payment to Needham in 2017 (2018, p.c.). While encouraging him to request a refund or take legal action, Ng has refused to do so, and claims Needham might have severe depression, and should not be disturbed (2018, p.c.). It would seem that Ng has been less active in the *Hang*/handpan community after the incident, and did not mention anything about the *Hang*/handpan community ethos to me again since.



Figure 5.7 One of the last appearances of Werner Egger (middle), prior to his disappearance from the *Hang*/handpan community. Screenshot by the author.

5.3 Collective affect and the community

In this section, I will argue that the *Hang*/handpan community is, in some ways, constructed and maintained through the public display of a positive psychology and correspondingly gregarious engagement among members, while negative emotions are more suppressed and reserved exclusively for personal and private exchange between close community participants, digitally or physically.

Perhaps related to the circumstances in which the producer-consumer connection influences the *Hang*/handpan community, an overwhelming amount of data suggests that community members are likely to associate the *Hang*/handpan with 'positive' narratives. Such narratives are often used in describing *Hang*/handpan performances which are deemed to project 'positive energy' (Handschuch 2018, p.c.), bringing 'positive life changing experiences'

(ibid.), or having a 'positive impact for health and wellbeing'.[133] The online survey I conducted in 2018 has produced similar results, suggesting that the *Hang*/handpan provides positive benefits for those suffering from 'autism', for 'mental health' more generally, or that the community shares 'positive values'.[134] 'Positive energy' is also a common keyword associated with *Hang*/handpan music on social media.

As examined in Chapter four, these correlations between the *Hang*/handpan and apparent positive benefits are in many ways influenced by New Age beliefs and healing testimonies circulating within the community. However, such correlations often exceed the realm of New Age sound-healing discourse, and are also promoted by seemingly non-New Age subjects, who hint that the *Hang*/handpan possesses the power to influence human values and decisions with beneficial results across ideologies. *PANArt* themselves have articulated the following:

> *The direct interaction of the hands with the sensitive, sonorous vessel inspired musicians, percussionists, therapists, caretakers for the terminally ill, teenagers, travellers, street musicians, actors, the sick, the stressed, seekers, believers* (…) *Do all these people have something in common? Is it a longing, a hope for something new?* (2013, p28)

With such a magical beneficial power in mind, it is not uncommon for community participants to volunteer for *Hang*/handpan performances in environments such as hospices or jails (Metcalf 2018, p.c.). While it would be challenging, and perhaps unnecessary, to scrutinize every instance and iteration of such overwhelmingly 'positive' testimonies, I would argue that in the context of community building and maintenance, these positive correlations contribute to a particular collective affect which contributes to the formation and consolidation of social bonds in the *Hang*/handpan community.

According to Hutchison and Bleiker (2014), on an individual level emotions establish meanings and ways of interpretation within communities (Fierke 2014, cited by Hutchison & Bleiker 2014) and emotions are shaped through cultural and social processes, at least partially (2014). The impossibility for individuals to perceive precisely how each feels within engenders social representations which shape the ways in which emotions are understood, such representations surpassing the individual level into the collective and political realm

[133] *Pang Orchestra Retreat* https://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/3113482
[134] *What does the Sound Sculpture* mean to you?* https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1I7WLV-eOp8XDKy_kryFRw9434IUvcBTLfyGN3IP6RtE/edit#responses

(2014). Hutchison and Bleiker argue that emotions and affects are, in some sense, fundamentally connected, since our relatively conscious 'emotional evaluations of the social world' are influenced and framed subconsciously by affective states (2014). Hence, the combination of emotion, feeling, and sensations is able to create 'unconscious and unreflective affective dispositions that connect and transcend individuals' (Massumi Reference Massumi 2002, p27–28, 217; Thrift Reference Thrift 2004, p60, cited by Hutchison & Bleiker 2020).

In the case of the *Hang*/handpan community, positive affects such as love, cheerfulness, hopefulness, happiness are commonly felt and expressed, more so in physical gatherings. Although these affects are arguably not uncommon in music festivals across different genres – festivals general involve the transient facilitation of a temporal utopian space – it is perhaps less common to associate a particular sound object with these largely 'positive' affects. Within the realm of positive affect, the display of 'gratitude' in the *Hang*/handpan community often caught my attention. One of the ways in which the affect of gratitude can be identified within the community is perhaps through the examination of how the *Hang*/handpan is described as a 'gift', when it is by and large a musical commodity. Rohner insists that the *Hang* 'belongs to the flow of the gift'[135] (Castan & Pagnon 2006, 55:54) and often emphasises that the inspirational steelpan is a 'gift to the world given by the Trinidadian' (2013; 2016; 2019).[136] *PANArt* claims that the gift by the Trinidadians is 'the understanding of sheet metal instruments',[137] which they honoured by the continuation and contribution of creativity and confronting challenges in the development of sheet metal sound. The patented *Pang* material, as Rohner describes, is the contribution (2018, p.c.) to this legacy. It is likely, that such a line of thinking has contributed to the rationale behind his strong criticisms towards handpan makers: they did not make a contribution to the 'singing steel' culture, but only commercialised superficial aspects of it (2018, p.c.).

Rohner's claim is undoubtedly debatable, as the notion of the gift has been commonly theorised as a social economic object which creates a bond of reciprocity between the giver and receiver, and which compels the receiver to give back in turn (Mauss 2002). In a sense, the key to the gift economy is to create a sense of indebtedness (Graeber 2010, p9). If the

[135] *PANArt Hang documentary HANG - a discreet revolution,* Castan, Thibaut & Pagnon, Véronice, 2006.
[136] *Round the neck - Reithalle Bern 1994. 2016,* last accessed 19 February 2023, https://panart.ch/en/history/round-the-neck-reithalle-bern-1994
[137] *Hang - a new musical instrument - a brand - many misunderstandings,* 2019, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://panart.ch/en/articles/hang-a-new-musical-instrument-a-brand-many-misunderstandings

Hang belongs to 'the flow of the gift' as Rohner suggested, the critical question is whether the Trinidadian steelpan community acknowledges the direct reciprocal bond with the *Hang* makers, and whether *Hang* consumers are under a sense of obligation to give back to *PANArt.* While this dissertation's ethnographic evidence on gift economy activities is relatively weak, I would argue that 'the flow of the gift' and similar discourses associating the *Hang/*handpan with gift-like properties are still relevant to the construction of this community as evidence of an affective and discursive preoccupation with collective gratitude, though this gratitude does not entail mandatory social obligations or a sense of indebtedness towards the giver, as the *Hang/*handpan is generally purchased, not given or bartered for. The gift-like correlation of the *Hang/*handpan, in some sense, is an affect which is packaged and sold along with the commodity.

While it is not uncommon for scholars to identify gratitude and indebtedness as equivalent affects on a fundamental level, by following Watkins et al.'s (2006) argument, at least in the case of *Hang/*handpan community construction, these affects may be best 'viewed as distinct emotional states' (p236). Gratitude and indebtedness could be differentiated, as a sense of indebtedness increases along with increasing expectation from givers, while gratitude decreases. Secondly, gratitude is a type of positive affect while indebtedness is associated with mixed affects; and finally, indebtedness is more associated with the feeling of obligation, and gratitude more so with future altruism (p236). Watkins et al. conclude that if there is a 'debt' of gratitude, it is 'internally generated' and not comparable to 'economic forms of indebtedness' (p239).

It would seem paradoxical for a commodity to be treated like a gift, but in the case of the *Hang/*handpan community, the positing of the handpan as a 'gift' is to some extent understandable. Similar affects can be identified by tracing the trade of *Hang/*handpan. When *PANArt* withdrew all worldwide distribution, Kravitz came to the conclusion that he had been 'gifted' a commercial opportunity (Paslier 2020). Informants who purchased the highly exclusive *Hang* after being selected by *PANArt*, expressed a sense of overwhelming joy upon receiving the invitation letter. Many carefully kept this letter as a kind of affirmation of their luck, and compared it to 'winning the lottery' (Dunn 2018, p.c.). The 'fool-proof' design and the reward of lush musical sound obtainable by a music amateur were likely to further intensify feelings of gratitude upon the *Hang/*handpan. Handpan pioneer Pantheon Steel describes their products as being manufactured with advanced machine engineering, but that the playing is 'remarkably simple', bestowing its users with 'the rarest of gifts: creative

freedom'.[138]These are essentially individual expressions of gratitude associated with the gift-like instrument, and at times, such expressions constitute an effective marketing tool.

Precisely because gratitude can be dissociated from the classic theory of the gift economy, and because it can be a pure cognitive-affective response to the recognition that one has been the beneficiary of someone else's good will (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson 2001), there is little contradiction for a consumer to feel grateful upon obtaining a pure (and relatively expensive) commodity, since one can correlate personal benefits with the good will of another. Although commodities are often positioned as representations of 'economic rationality and commercial gain', while gifts are 'bearers of moral obligations and social concern', Lapavitsas (2004) has argued that the flow of commodities can also be understood as a potential provider of 'new terrain for trust, commitment, custom, and power among exchange participants' (p33). This argument is successfully demonstrated by the case of the commodification of *Hang*/handpan. The seemingly imprecise identification of the *Hang*/handpan as a gift suggests that the community can imagine, or even utilise, a commodity while imbuing it with some of the social functions associated with the gift. To a degree, the 'flow of gift', as claimed by Rohner, is an affective correlation in flux, along with the global flow of the commodity (see Appadurai 1990).

Grateful affects motivate individuals to exhibit prosocial behaviour (Watkins et al 2006, p239). *Hang*/handpan community participants, in many ways, are motivated by gratitude: grateful for the economic opportunities, for acquiring a rare music instrument, the transformational change from a non-musical to a musical being, for the mysterious healing properties, and for the opportunity to reimagine and re-negotiate the social and cultural roles of the self. Although gratitude generally does not lead to direct social obligations, it can assist in social bonding. By sharing collectively understood and widely embraced forms of feeling, the *Hang*/handpan community can be identified as an affective community (Hutchison 2016). By observing the generally shared positive affects, such as gratitude, the *Hang*/handpan community can be regarded as a community constituted, and in some ways unified – at least temporarily – through shared patterns of emotional understanding and meaning associated with the instrument, which 'circulate and help to cohere the community' (Fierke 2013, p90-95; Ross 2014, cited by Hutchison 2018).

[138] *Halo Handpan – Your Soul at Play,* last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.pantheonsteel.com/

The framework of an affective community contributes to our understanding of the formation and maintenance of a community built upon a specific musical genre, or in the case of individuals considered here, a specific instrument. Participants of a music community can be brought together by sets of emotions associated with a particular musician, musical style, or music instrument. If the *Hang*/handpan community can be established as a global affective community, it is likely that various positive emotions, such as gratitude, are constructed and aligned by testimonies and myths oriented around the highly exclusive instrument in both physical and web-based sites. However, sound and music are deeply entwined with emotions and affect in the first place (Juslin 2019), and the sound and music produced by *Hang*/handpan is largely associated with calmness, peacefulness, harmony, all contributing to its therapeutic aura (as discussed in Chapter four).

If collective affect is at least partially responsible for the construction and maintenance of the *Hang*/handpan community, affect theory can contribute to an understanding of the motivations and decisions of the collective in question. While Hutchison (2018) scrutinised affective communities emotionally associated with distress, such as war trauma, terrorism, or humiliation on a national political level, *Hang*/handpan is notably different being an international subcultural assembly largely based upon positive affects generated by one musical instrument. New *Hang*/handpan community participants are often attracted to the positive affect which 'circulates' within such a collective and these affects are perhaps internalised as agency for possible acts of future altruism.

However, as an aside, I often question whether the unique physical construction of the *Hang*/handpan contributes to some extent to the imaginings generated by the community, and whether the architecture of such an instrument could generally hint at the potential and virtual social patterns of specific subjects. Interestingly, Cornel West (2000) correlates the 'blue note' in American blues as a moment of disturbance, dissonance, and defiance, and as a metaphor for how African-Americans respond to a seemingly harmonious and economically blooming society.[139] In contrast to this, the *Hang*/handpan has no 'wrong' (or 'blue') note, and musicking with a *Hang*/handpan does not include a moment in resolving musical dissonance and defiance. Can this instrument without conflict or contradiction reflect some of the characteristics of the *Hang*/handpan community's behaviours? Certainly, on the surface the community espouses positive feelings almost exclusively. As a consequence,

[139] *African American Student Union Conference 2000 - Key Note Address Dr. Cornel West,* last accessed 19 February 2023, https://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/african-american-student-union-conference-2000-key-note-address-dr-cornel-west

the collective, perhaps more so on web-based sites, appears reluctant to respond to criticism, ask critical questions or address complicated incidents.

My very first 'cultural shock' as a new *Hang*/handpan community participant related to a handpan hard case manufactured by *Hardcase Technology*. This was produced by the main manufacturer for *Hang*/handpan accessories whose founder, Alessio Massi, was highly active in the community both digitally and physically, being one of the sponsors behind numerous *Hang*/handpan-centric festivals. The hard case, named *Polycase 2.0*, cost me EUR 350 and broke in less than a week. I wrote a product review on *Handpan.org* regarding the quality of the product,[140] which drew Massi's attention and led him to suggest that I should 'contact him directly to resolve the problem' and not review the product in public (2015). I spoke to Ng and Lai, expressing my concerns over the quality of products by *Hardcase Technology*, and they told me that they had similar problems with the company's products (2017, p.c.). Lai also mentioned his dispute with Satya Sound Sculptures, when the handpan he had ordered was 'badly wrapped and damaged during transportation', the maker refusing to take responsibility for this afterwards (2022, p.c.). Such arguments or disputes are generally invisible in the public domain of the community. This community culture of selective presentation of positive responses has earned Lai's disapproval, which he described as 'quite horrible' (2022, p.c.).

Although the ethical and economic negotiations surrounding the *Hang*/handpan are crucial for the development and maintenance of the community, there are in fact alternative opinions which are largely absent in the public domain. Informant Aversano suggests that the 'anti-capitalism element' in the community was a 'door swung both ways' (2018, p.c.). He states that while the community genuinely attempts to maintain the instrument's accessibility, a company like Pantheon Steel, arguably the biggest handpan manufacturer in the US, sold an instrument for close to USD12,000 with the use of a complex lottery system (2018, p.c.). Pantheon Steel also created a competition in T-shirt design, with the winner of the competition being given the chance to buy an instrument (2018, p.c.). Although Aversano disapproves of these marketing tactics, he did not make his statement publically within the community, which he does not see as a good forum for such comments (2018, p.c.). This was a struggle for him, since he thought the act of selling a handpan with the use of such a lottery system was 'so egregious' (2018, p.c.).

[140] *Some thoughts on Hardcase Technologies' Polycase 2.0,* Handpan.org, last accessed 19 February 2023, http://www.handpan.org/forum/viewtopic.php?f=11&t=14791

While the introduction and public sharing of hydro-forming technology was highly praised in public domain, it was also one of the topics which surfaced most frequently in private communications among informants, often tinged with a sense of disappointment. James, for example, has expressed that he is 'not impressed or happy with' the sound quality of Foulke and Cox's instruments after the implementation of hydro-forming shells, and he is convinced that many people are talking about it, since it's 'obvious' (2018, p.c.). While hydro-forming technology lowers the production costs of a handpan, the actual instruments produced by such technology tends to be sold at the same price, if not higher than the instruments made prior to the advent of this technology. After trying the hydro-formed handpan marketed for more than USD 3500 in HOUSA 2017, James was 'embarrassed' by 'the sound and price' (2018, p.c.). As mentioned in the previous section, he has also been critical regarding the community ethos controlling resale markets, insisting that the *PANArt* ethos 'needs to die' and that supply and demand should 'rule the playing field' (2018, p.c.). He also argues that handpan makers should stop sharing 'intel', as they are giving away secrets which set them apart from other makers (2018, p.c.). In 2021, James decided to leave the *Hang/*handpan community which in many ways he had helped build. The community, he claims, was predominantly a place for people hiding from the 'harsh truths' in the world, and who were unable or unwilling to see outside of the box they had created for themselves (2021, p.c.).

Over the years, I have learnt not to openly criticise the quality or price of handpans or accessories, particularly when they are produced by prominent community members, a taboo which is otherwise a regular subject of private conversation between relatively experienced participants. Following the affective community theory, a brief explanation could perhaps be hypothesised: The *Hang/*handpan community, at least initially, is predominantly constructed by positive affect, and this predisposition renders it incompatible with discourses which correlate to negative or non-positive affects. Criticism towards the community and instruments is largely absent in public but not uncommon outside the public domain. Some of the relatively verbal and critical *Hang/*handpan players are only comfortable expressing 'negative' views outside the community. Perhaps community participants, such as Ng and James, who eventually lost interest in participating in community activities entirely, were casualties of the community's exclusion of 'negative' affects. The 'non-positive', somewhat complex opinions and experiences that they bore perhaps dissolved their identification with the community to a certain degree. If the community is largely constructed and maintained with good vibes, there is, perhaps, no place for bad vibes.

5.3 *Hang/*handpan and cosmopolitanism

Having emerged from influences drawn from multiple cultures, the origin of the *Hang/*handpan remains a complex and debatable question. For those who are convinced that the instrument is not aligned to any tradition or state, it is not rooted in any culture specifically. While the *Hang/*handpan community generally espouses musical cosmopolitanism, however, the *Hang/*handpan festivals in Europe and America remain very white spaces. Although there is evidence of *Hang/*handpan communities in Israel and East-Asia, it is rare to encounter black participants among the global *Hang/*handpan communities. The non-rootedness of the *Hang/*handpan is indeed not an understanding that is shared universally, as there are opinions outside the community suggesting that the *Hang/*handpan is an adaptation, or even exploitation, of the Trinidadian steelpan culture. I begin this section on cosmopolitanism in the *Hang/*handpan community by sharing the following ethnographic vignette of my first time participating in a *Hang/*handpan festival in the UK.

On the Saturday afternoon of *HangOut UK* 2016, Barry Mason and Linda Lotto took the Chameleon Stage as the *Hanghang Duo*, supported by Nikhil Patel on conga and didjeridu, and Lara Conley on Bodhran (Fig. 5.8). Before the performance, Mason mentioned his involvement with Patel's father in a fourteen-piece band named *The Raga Babas*. He described the band's ethnic composition with a clear sense of pride, stating that 'there's couple of Hindus, there's a couple of Buddhists, there's a Jew, couple of Pagans, oh and some Christians'. To an extent, this introduction captures the overall atmosphere, and perhaps predicament, of the festival. While *Hang/*handpan festival-goers generally welcome cultural diversity, participants were mostly European/American whites. The camp site was occupied by tents and caravans mostly brought by participants from the UK or nearby European cities. The one-storey building I stayed in - practically a renovated chicken shed packed with sleeping bags - however, was seemingly more diverse. In the chicken shed, I met Taiwanese Angus Lee, a first time HOUK goer like myself, and Vietnamese-American Vyvy Lewis from London, who collects most of the instruments produced by *PANArt*. Trinidadian Mark Wilson, perhaps the only black participant in the entirety of the festival, visited shortly afterwards. He was a steelpan maker, but now his workshop in Cornwall produces only handpans. The festival-goers generally demonstrated a sense of cultural openness, curiosity and perhaps even longing for a gathering attended by global participants from diverse backgrounds. It seemed as though the broader the participants' cultural and ethnical backgrounds, the better, with the eclecticism of cultures being drawn together by an appreciation and celebration of the unique music instrument. However, in reality, the festival is largely a weekend gathering of Euro-American Caucasian attendees, and as an East-Asian *Hang/*handpan enthusiast, out of the two hundred festival-goers, I found myself regularly talking to the two other Asian faces.



Figure 5.8 Barry Mason (left) giving a speech on the Chameleon Stage, *HangOut UK*, 2016. Photograph by the author.

This ethnographic vignette can to a certain degree be considered as the archetypal model of music cosmopolitanism, revealing an affinity for diverse global cultures through a specific musical practice (see, e.g., Feld; Turino; Stokes; Järvenpää). Following Stokes' (2007) suggestions on musical cosmopolitanism, with its invitation to examine particular collectives embracing the music of others in specific times and places, as well as the particular ways in which musicians, music styles, musical styles, and instruments circulate across borders, this section highlights instances of cosmopolitanism in the *Hang*/handpan community which are significant in the process of community building. The *Hang*/handpan does not simply disseminate itself successfully across the world, the community formed by *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts can be identified as a type of translocal cultural formation and constitution of habitus realised in a specific time and space (Turino 2000, p7). Music festivals are sites for learning, exchange, conversations, and community building generally. Gatherings such as *HangOut UK*, with their participation of festival-goers from diverse cultural, social, and ethnical backgrounds, encourage participants to enjoy the experience of cultural pluralism, transcending local belongings (Lalioti 2013).

However, my impression of the seemingly cosmopolitan nature of *Hang*/handpan community was constructed virtually long before my first *HangOut* experience. From 2013 onwards, I

spent countless hours researching everything there was to know about the *Hang*/handpan, going through as much related material as possible, on online forums, and later in social media. Although the *Hang* originated from Switzerland, the 'top-shelf' handpans at the time were built by international handpan makers. The most desirable handpans to me were built by Russian (*SPB*), Thai (*ESS*), and American (*Cfoulke*) handpan makers. After receiving my first handpan from an emerging maker in California (*Zen Handpan*), I began teaching myself how to play the instrument, largely by watching *Hang*/handpan performances on YouTube. Waples from the UK, Davide Swarup from Italy and Yuki Koshimoto from Japan were among the most popular players at the time. They were all street performers who frequently traversed borders as buskers or stage musicians, and all sported dreadlocks. But as a middle-age guitarist with thinning hair and who enjoys relatively technically advanced musical performances, I spent many hours studying *Hang*/handpan techniques demonstrated by the community virtuosi, such as Siberian percussionist Nadishana, David Kuckhermann from Germany, and my personal favourite *Hang*/handpan musician Kabeção from Portugal. These virtuosi, as examined in Chapter four, are often experienced world percussionists, recognised as pioneers in applying various percussion techniques onto *Hang*/handpan, and they do not have dreadlocks. Additionally, these mentioned *Hang*/handpan international icons, are often regular online forum and social media users with whom I can interact directly. To me, these seemingly egalitarian online communications, in many ways amplifies my impression of a cosmopolitan musical community.

These interactions on social media, which create a sense of collective identity and communal solidarity, encourage users to engage with one another in offline circumstances (Harlow 2010). Web-based social interactions between *Hang*/handpan global producers, consumers or enquirers generally take place within online forums and social media pages initiated voluntarily by enthusiasts. Virtual interaction remains a popular choice of engagement, especially for participants with less mobility, or in between physical gatherings which are infrequently held. By generating topics, comments, or responding with 'likes' when the option is available, these small moments of connection with global participants within web-based sites create space for greater cosmopolitan community building by shifting the 'unknown' into the 'known', which leads to a sense of reflective loyalty between strangers (Harlow 2010). With a single purpose of interaction generally, these web-based sites function as virtual communal spaces which promote community building across differences. Social media dedicated to the *Hang*/handpan promotes a global–local orientation to the world, which facilitates virtual community building and permits trans-territorial communications among global participants (Sobré-Denton 2016). In this sense, cosmopolitanism in the *Hang*/handpan community can be partially identified as a sort of

virtual cosmopolitanism which is specifically facilitated by mediated social spaces, allowing the transmission of social and cultural capital within the networks of social media, since ideas can be disseminated transnationally and likely surpass the reach of corporeal cosmopolitanism (McEwan & Sobré-Denton 2011, p252–253).

It is essential to understand that the *Hang*/handpan community, with its strong sense of global citizenship, comprises of participants who have little to no instrument-centric festival experience.[141] At the same time, some festival-goers are able to conceive of and imagine a cosmopolitan-like identity with limited or no social media interaction with fellow *Hang*/handpan participants. Although virtual and physical sites reinforce this cosmopolitan identity construction, the collective identity of cosmopolitanism in the *Hang*/handpan community, however, is not solely dependent on physical festivals and gatherings, nor virtual activity nurtured by social life in online forums and social media, but is a consequence of both aspects of this community (sometimes with one being chosen without any involvement of the other), affording its participants a variety of avenues through which to participate in its development. For instance, Ng from Hong Kong and Iwao Mano from Japan were geographically remote from *Hang*/handpan festivals, commonly hosted in Europe and the US, and did not participate in such festivals for that reason. Yet they developed a sense of musical cosmopolitanism at least partially from their regular activity on web-based sites, and their interaction with like-minded global community members on these websites might have impelled them to travel to the West to attend such festivals for the 'authentic' experience. Meanwhile, handpan makers such as Wilson and Bueraheng are seemingly reluctant to engage with the community on social media on a daily basis, but they are regular festival-goers who enthusiastically embrace physical gatherings with participants from multicultural backgrounds (Wilson; Bueraheng, pc, 2017).

Music festivals and web-based sites are essential for cosmopolitan identity construction among *Hang*/handpan participants. However, another variety of cosmopolitanism is at least partially embedded in the community, and this undergirds and exerts an influence upon the identities and cultures established around the instrument, a consequence of its complicated entanglements with multicultural histories and influences. I would argue the seemingly ambiguous identity of the instrument constitutes a sense of 'non-national' (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt 2018) musical cosmopolitan identity. The anonymous online questionnaire

[141] *What does the Sound Sculpture* mean to you?,* last accessed 19 February 2023, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1I7WLV-eOp8XDKy_kryFRw9434IUvcBTLfyGN3IP6RtE/edit#responses

conducted in 2019 suggests that respondents have mixed cultural correlations with the *Hang/*handpan, while it is not uncommon for community participants to resist associating *Hang/*handpan with either Trinidadian or Swiss culture. In responding to 'the cultural roots' of the *Hang/*handpan, a variety of intriguing responses indicate that the instrument is perceived as being rooted in 'the world', 'multicultural', 'universal', 'white people and the new age', 'the internet', or simply that it has 'no cultural roots'.

With the *Hang/*handpan as a focal point, the community is able to collectively neutralize cultural differences and national affiliations. The instrument can be seen as a relatively empty vessel which welcomes imaginary projections on the part of the community's multicultural participants, inviting them to take part in a shared imaginary of a global music community with no roots – inhabitants of the nebulous 'world'. However, the concept of cosmopolitanism should essentially be understood as a way of dealing with national or cultural differences within a particular space, time, and populace. Individual markers of national identity and 'cultural features' (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt 2018) of a particular *Hang/*handpan community participant are not overlooked, but remain as differences which the collective can embrace comfortably. 'Non-nationality' as far as the protagonists in this dissertation are concerned, is a crucial idea around which collective identity in the community is being constructed. Musical cosmopolitanism in the *Hang/*handpan community, therefore, can be understood as a type of 'cultural resource' (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt 2018, p147) which enables an imagination of a 'non-national' collective identity through specific practices of musicking. Meanwhile, cultural and national differences are deprioritised and perceived through a relatively softer lens as individual features which do not serve to divide people or demarcate boundaries.

Musical cosmopolitanism 'circulates' in this particular community in a fashion that differs from cosmopolitan discourses oriented around diasporic identity construction and trans-nationalism. Rather, the musical cosmopolitanism which takes shape within this community challenges the essentialism which underpins many discussions of cosmopolitanism more generally: it is a 'non-national' form of cosmopolitanism (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt 2018). While musical cosmopolitanism remains a growing interest in music studies across genres and cultures, my own experience provides a unique case in which a new music instrument with ambiguous historical and cultural trails not only invites individuals with general multicultural interests, but also in some ways encourages socio-cultural exchange and integration between diverse cultures, generating an imagination of a new collective identity seemingly without corresponding concerns over cultural exploitation, appropriation and contestation. If the *Hang* can be seen as an offspring of cosmopolitan steelpan culture, then

the fact that the handpan is being simultaneously produced by a host of makers around the world at once further complicates the historical and cultural entanglements in which the instrument is enmeshed and imbricated.

That being said, concerns regarding 'non-national' cosmopolitan imagination in *Hang*/handpan community can be raised. The critical argument concerning the potentially problematic nature of the *Hang*/handpan*'s* cultural lineage and its appropriation of Trinidadian culture with its paradoxical blend of 'respect and rip-off' (Feld 1988) tend to be downplayed by cosmopolitical producers and consumers, obfuscated instead by the affect of gratefulness, as examined above. These complex issues concerning matters of cultural imperialism, exploitation, and critiques of the *Hang*/handpan*'s* genealogical roots in the European Enlightenment and coloniality are often elided through obscure invocations of gratitude and cosmopolitanism, sidestepping the anxiety that they might generate (see, e.g., Miller 2002; Hall & Werbner 2008; Wiener 2014).

PANArt's cultural cosmopolitan identity, arguably a product of its participation in the European steelpan milieu, is in some ways responsible for the *Hang*'s ambiguous cultural affiliation. The Trinidadian steelpan has been identified in scholarly accounts as a music instrument responsible for both diasporic national and cosmopolitan identity construction (Ramnarine 2007, 2019; Olsen 2016). As European steelpan makers and performers, Rohner and Schärer were, in many ways, dedicated participants of the transnational steelpan movement. This is especially true of Rohner, who has been widely mentioned as one of the key figures behind 1980s steelpan phenomena in Switzerland.[142] It is likely that participation in the European steelpan movement has provided them with a strong empirical experience of musical cosmopolitanism, which influenced Rohner and Schärer's cultural imagination and informing, in direct and indirect ways, the direction and philosophy of *PANArt* itself. The complex cultural correlations between the steelpan and the *Hang*, and the inspirations the instrument has drawn from music instruments from a variety of cultures (gong, gamelan, udu, etc), arguably further complicates the cultural origin of the later invention, which perhaps places *PANArt* in a difficult position as far as claiming a singular national identity for the *Hang*.

When handpan makers began to emerge all over the world in the late 2000s, it further complicated the task of grounding the instrument in a specific point of origin. The DIY

[142] *History of the Steelpan in Switzerland,* last accessed 20 November 2020, https://www.pan-jumbie.com/history-of-the-steelpan-in-switzerland/

handpan production model in some ways marked a significant turn of the *Hang*/handpan community towards cosmopolitanism by decentralising production from one single producer to a global network of handpan makers. International makers at the time generally acknowledged their handpans to be adaptations of the innovative *Hang* from Switzerland, but with distinctive changes, simultaneously arguing that the *Hang* is intrinsically a concept borrowed from the Trinidadian steelpan. In some ways, the messiness of the *Hang*/handpan's cultural identity can be perceived by producers and consumers as an invitation for the ascription of identity away from single historical and cultural roots. If the originality of the *Hang* is debatable, then perhaps its adaptations, the multinational handpans which further dilute the instrument's cultural roots, generate an even more profound sense of ambiguity.

Interestingly, besides *PANArt*, Cox - the co-founder of Pantheon Steel, former steelpan maker and the person responsible for creating the terminology 'handpan' – has also emphasised the influence of the Trinidadian steelpan upon the making of the *Hang*/handpan. However, the ways in which the *Hang*/handpan has been implemented (see Chapter four) establishes a distance between the *Hang* from the steelpan culture, and participatory-observation of the *Hang*/handpan community reveals a distinctively different way of musicking, which is hardly comparable with the Trinidadian Carnivals. Rohner often expresses that establishing distance from the carnival culture is a conscious decision. For him, as well as *PANArt* at large, the 'Central European' way of developing the 'singing steel' music culture 'does not lead in the direction of loud, grandiose performing', but towards 'silence and an inner revolution' (PANArt 2013). The undeniable technical influence that the Trinidadian steelpan has had upon the *Hang*/handpan, has seemingly had little to no influence upon the social and cultural patterns, as well as the processes of identity formation that have formed around the *Hang*/handpan. Rather than referencing Trinidadian culture and history, *Hang*/handpan culture is built upon the new instrument and 'mysticism attached to it' specifically (Sorensen 2021, p.c.). Although with the turn towards the production of Pang Instruments *PANArt* has arguably reintroduced an inclination towards collectivism through the referencing the carnival culture, this was reintroduced only after the termination of the *Hang*.

The seemingly open, 'anti-essentialistic' *Hang*/handpan cultural imagination is not unchallenged. The nebulousness of the origins of the handpan is often questioned or challenged by steelpan makers. The steelpan company Karib Pan has posted numerous blog articles on its official website criticising the *Hang*/handpan. Karib Pan claims that the handpan is a 'direct descendant of the traditional steelpan' and therefore the handpan

culture can be situated within 'a direct lineage to negro slavery, genocide, and colonization at the hands of a white supremacist, global regime' (2016).[143] However, one of the most influential opinions to have emerged from the steelpan world has come from Trinidadian steelpan scholar Anthony Achong (2020). Achong's seminal publication 'Secrets of the Steelpan: Unlocking the Secrets of the Science, Technology, Tuning of the Steelpan' (2013) has been highly praised by *Hang* and various handpan makers as the crucial reference point for understanding the principle of tuning sheet steel and rendering it into a musical instrument. Handschuch has gone so far as to claim that it is the 'steelpan bible' (2016),[144] while it is on a recommended reading list created by Saraz Handpans.[145] Rohner also published a book review on *PANArt's* official website suggesting that the publication 'can contribute a lot to young tuners' (2014).[146] Interestingly, in 2020, Achong published a signed statement on 'The Hang Music Instrument' (see appendix 9), claiming that the principle in creating sound in the *Hang* 'does not differ from the steelpan' with the main difference lying in the fact that playing the handpan relies on striking 'with bare fingers as opposed to the rubber tipped sticks' (2020).

Although the *Hang*/handpan community generally espouses musical cosmopolitanism, and the arguable 'non-rootedness' of the community's imagined identity in some sense welcomes a cosmopolitan imagination, it remains largely a white, Euro-American music community. By contrast, the global steelpan community, which is deeply rooted in the history and culture of Trinidad and Tobago, has successfully evolved into a truly diverse global music community. Although on the surface the *Hang*/handpan community is generally inclusive and cosmopolitical, major *Hang*/handpan festivals in the UK and US which I attended suggest otherwise. The festival-goers in attendance are predominantly white, with occasional Asian participants, and with little to no involvement of black people. Similar festival demographics can be identified across numerous *Hang*/handpan festivals and gatherings of different sizes across Europe and US (Fig. 5.9), while there is simply no perceptible trace at all of a black *Hang*/handpan community.

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[143] *The Handpan + a Digeridoo = Cultural Appropriation x 2,* last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.karibpan.com/blogs/news/the-handpan-digeridoo-cultural-misappropriation-x-2

[144] *Shellopan blog,* last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.shellopan.fr/index.php/en/home/our-blog/item/fablab-what-is-possible-to-do-in-one-week

[145] *More Hand Pan Building Links,* last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.sarazhandpans.com/handpan-construction/handpan-building-links/

[146] *Anthony Achong: "The Secrets of the Steelpan",* Felix Rohner 2014, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://panart.ch/en/articles/anthony-achong-the-secrets-of-the-steelpan



Figure 5.9 *Hang*/handpan festivals. *Pan Oz Festival*, Sugarloaf, Australia (top left); *Griasdi Gathering*, Böllerbauer, Austria (top right); *HandPan Festival*, France (bottom left); *HangOut USA*, North Carolina, US (bottom right). Screenshots by the author.

While discussion regarding racial diversity in the community is largely absent on online forums and social media, London-based handpan player/maker Hannah Aiyanah is one of the few non-white community members to have attempted to raise such a sensitive question. In 2020, Aiyanah commented on *The Handpan Community* Facebook page on her aspirations towards a 'post racialized society' and calling for community members to 'create an online event' dedicated to 'self-care and hope' (2020). Surprisingly, this comment received a warning from one of the page facilitators, who announced that 'the admin team declined' Aiyana's last post featuring similar content 'based on the no drama group rule', adding that 'they will keep a close eye' on the recent comment (2020). In a voice message between Aiyanah and myself, she bluntly called them as 'racist' (2020, p.c.). In the same year, Aiyanah employed the black female model Moniasse as the face of her handpan brand *Atlas Calypso Handpan* (Fig. 5.10), honouring the West African 'Kaiso' in Trinidad and Tobago 'who have paved the way' (2020). This marked the first time a black figure had been featured as the center of a *Hang*/handpan brand's promotional material, while rather 'problematic' cases in using black people for the promotion of white *Hang*/handpan makers or players, are not uncommon (Fig. 5.11 & 5.12).



Figure 5.10 Face of *Atlas Calypso Handpan*, Moniasse. Photograph by Atlas Handpan.[147]



Fig. 5.11 *Playing handpan for Himba people in the remote part of Namibia.* Screenshot by the author.[148]

[147] *Face of Atlas Calypso Handpan, Moniasse*, Facebook, https://www.Facebook.com/atlashandpans/photos/a.226315034703465 7/4118138608202479/

[148] *Playing handpan for Himba people in the remote part of Namibia,* MYSTICAL DUET - Ivo Sedlacek & Pavel Sedlacek, YouTube, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38fKVRUrWCw



Figure 5.12 Handpan maker Steven Morris. Photograph by Steven Morris.

These pictures illustrate the stark contrast between how black figures are associated, envisioned, and implemented in the making of *Hang*/handpan identity. Aiyana's portrayal of a black female at the center of a handpan brand promotion symbolises the acknowledgment of blackness (and feminism) in the identity representation of the musical instrument. This likely reflects a 'rooted cosmopolitanism' (Beck 2002, p19), which combines 'roots' (black, Kaiso) and 'wings' (new instrument, music). In contrast, in different images and settings, bare-breasted black women and children are depicted as the exotic 'Other', while modern, white male figures present the handpan as a new musical invention fascinated by the uniformed blacks. This stark portrayal of black figures exhibits multiple problematic tropes of white cosmopolitanism built upon Euro-American colonial entitlement.

If musical cosmopolitanism calls for an examination of a particular collective embracing the music of others in specific times and places (Stokes 2007), the pivotal question in examining ‘non-national’ cosmopolitanism in *Hang*/handpan is perhaps not only how it is imagined and constructed, but who the ‘Others’ are. If ‘non-nationality’ can be understood as a type of

'cultural resource' (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt 2018, p147) that enables the imagination of a 'non-national' collective identity which removes the accent on exclusory cultural and national differences, the tricky case of musical cosmopolitanism in the *Hang*/handpan community highlights a series of problems with such a discourse, particularly when it comes into conflict with material cultural histories and legacies of exploitation and racialised inequality. As the current *Hang*/handpan community demography remains largely white, the potential danger in the openness of such 'non-national' cosmopolitan identity lies in the excursion into the boundless sea of non-white cultural symbols without a rational counter-argument within such a collective.

Not only black figures can be mis-implemented, but also those from the East. It is not uncommon for community participants from the West to embrace a certain form of cosmopolitan identity by amalgamating Hang/Handpan musicking with a hodge-podge of Eastern symbols. As an East-Asian, my cosmopolitan identity constructed as a Hang/Handpan community participant often conflicts with a sense of cultural essentialism when witnessing such cultural misappropriation. An outstanding example of such a problem is the YouTube video uploaded by Erik Nicollet (Fig. 5.13), which shows a white man performing handpan while dressed in a typical Chinese silk top. Sitting on the floor, the white man is accompanied by a sensual East Asian woman dressed in a short Chinese qipao,[149] kneeling down and playing a notably smaller tongue drum. Such a performance is decorated with artificial lotus, a Buddhist statue, a singing bowl, and a symbol of the Taoist Yin-Yang. Intrigued by the calibre of the hodge-podge of borrowed Eastern symbols, I shared the video on my private Facebook account (separate from my *Hang*/Handpan research). Eric Ng Man Kei, a Hong Kong-based community music facilitator, describes the video as 'extreme' and 'textbook material in teaching orientalism' (pc, 2016).[150] Often, in similar encounters of Eastern symbols within the *Hang*/handpan community (though usually less intensive), my anti-essential cultural openness and the downplaying of my own cultural background fail, in which I find myself waking up from a 'non-national' music cosmopolitan dream.

[149] Traditional Chinese banner gown worn by women
[150] Author translation. Original text in Chinese: 極致。這片是用來做東方主義教材吧



Figure 5.13 Oriental symbols implemented in a handpan performance. Screenshot by the author.[151]

The aforementioned notion of 'non-nationality' has at least partially enabled this community, composed of participants drawn from dramatically different cultural backgrounds. Intriguingly, Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt (2018) conclude their paper on 'imagining non-nationality' by citing a statement made by former British Prime Minister Theresa May over debates on leaving the European Union: 'If you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere' (Conservative party conference, 5 October 2016, cited by Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt 2018, p148). Such a statement precisely articulates the converse of the idea not uncommonly expressed in the *Hang*/handpan community in answering 'what race or ethnicity best describes you?'. Seemingly, in this case, one is able to reimagine the self as a citizen of the world, a citizen of nowhere, where there is 'no race, only mankind'.[152] While such a statement is seemingly progressive and noble, I would argue that the problem within the *Hang*/handpan community perhaps lies not in the cosmopolitan mentality, but in the lack of participant diversity. Constructing a collective identity that transcends national boundaries requires a strong sense of commonality and mutual understanding, with participants consciously downplaying national affiliations and cultural differences in order to create a neutral and flexible environment. This dual sense of commonality in difference is essential

[151] *HANG ASIA MUSIC 432 HZ*, Erik Nicollet, YouTube, last accessed 19 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UAt2Md91EA&t=29s

[152] *What does the Sound Sculpture* mean to you?,* last accessed 19 February 2023, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1I7WLV-eOp8XDKy_kryFRw9434IUvcBTLfyGN3IP6RtE/edit#responses

for any collective to build an identity that is both inclusive and non-national (Skovgaard-Smith & Poulfelt 2018, p130). However, at the time of writing, the *Hang*/handpan community, in both physical and virtual sites, is largely led and monitored by European whites, and the demographic makeup of the community is no closer to achieving true diversity.

This European, white-dominated *Hang*/handpan community creates a sense of a white cosmopolitan bubble, in which participants generate an unchallenged global openness. Arguably, the customisable *Hang*/handpan scale mode amplifies the sense of multicultural participation, without the actual engagement of such ethnicities. Dunn describes his feelings towards owning multiple *Hanghang* as a sense of being between cultures. For him, and perhaps this is not uncommon within the *Hang*/handpan community, to make use of an instrument with a specific scale model borrowed from non-Western cultures is to feel like one is engaging with other cultures. Switching between *Hanghang* with different scale models is similar to 'changing vinyl records from different countries', where the players can 'have a whole different culture on the lap' (Dunn 2018, p.c.). Perhaps such an experience is especially significant for a music community which is largely composed of music amateurs, beginners who tend to find learning scale systems associated with a specific ethnic origin relatively challenging. The distinctive sound of *Hang*/handpan in some sense further enables the multicultural imagination by estranging players from the familiar repertoire of sounds that they've been habituated to. Arguably, performing 'exotic' scales on, for example, the piano or guitar, may not generate such a level of immersion in the cultural Other, as performers might be too conscious of the cultural and historical continuum of the chosen instrument.

While Dunn's analogy is fitting in some ways, focussing upon the embodied experience of the *Hang*/handpan community member contributes to an understanding of musical cosmopolitanism away from consumer-centric connotations. As such, it can be said that musical cosmopolitanism in the *Hang*/handpan community differs somewhat from the consumption of 'world music' recordings, as the *Hang*/handpan community often not only consumes a range of musical commodities and commodified experiences, but are musical cosmopolitans with agency who travel across borders and learn how to perform (see Stokes 2007; Järvenpää, 2017). Thus, the crucial question is whether such musical cosmopolitanism extends beyond white European bubbles. If *Hang*/handpan cosmopolitan travels and learns solely within Euro-American *Hang*/handpan satellite groups, then such a narrative of 'non-national' cosmopolitanism is arguably a manifestation of a self-comforting feedback loop of white cosmopolitanism. Critique from other ethnic groups, such as potential exploitation of the Trinidad steelpan, or the hodge-podge borrowing of cultural symbols for identity construction, are likely to be positioned by *Hang*/handpan community participants as

outsider opinions. That being said, various global *Hang*/handpan affinity groups outside Europe-America tend to imagine and mobilise cosmopolitanism in a rather different way. For example, for the East-Asian *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts Ng and Iwao, their imagined cosmopolitanism is refracted through an Occidental prism: both imagined the European *Hang*/handpan festivals to be the ultimate utopian destinations for pilgrims in the community. Perhaps precisely because the *Hang*/handpan is seen by many as a relatively 'non-rooted' empty vessel, the ways in which new identities can be imagined and constructed become a double-edged sword. Such a claim of multicultural-influenced invention is indeed not immune to potential multicultural contestation. In such a context, the 'non-national' imagination of the *Hang*/handpan is a rare and difficult case in which one specific instrument culture is responsible for answering criticisms of orientalism, occidentalism, and black exploitation.

5.4 Conclusion

PANArt's relatively unusual and selective marketing decisions at the outset laid the foundation for the *Hang*/handpan community ethos. Generally identified as an example of cottage music instrument-making which emphasises the bond between producer and consumer, the global dissemination of the *Hang* demonstrates how a cottage music instrument company was able to traverse national borders during the age of digitalism and hypermobility. The small-scale yet globally successful *PANArt* was able to stimulate negotiations that reached beyond common global mainstream marketing strategies. *Hang* consumers became prosumers, often adapting *PANArt's* marketing decisions, refraining from employing mainstream advertisements to sell their merchandise or displaying products in instrument shops. This wave of handpan makers continues to emphasise person-to-person trade and interactions with growing global enthusiasts. In demonstrating a general openness in sharing and assisting new fellow producers, a sense of communal solidarity was constructed among international handpan makers.

Despite the rapid growth in international handpan producers, the *Hang*/handpan remains relatively niche, as makers often resist mass production. A sense of community is a significant motivation for *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts to continue to gather at online and virtual sites. Today, while mass produced handpans exist in major online music stores, the community generally discourages these products and trading methods, and continues to emphasise hand-crafted, small-scale instruments produced by handpan makers who are generally active participants of the community themselves.

Virtual sites are often spaces in which *Hang*/handpan producers effectively monitor instrument trades. Sharing the common goal of regulating prices of the instrument for collective good, producers and consumers often publically condemn resellers seeking for profit. Interestingly, *Hang*/handpan consumers may in fact have purchased instruments for staggering reselling prices in private. Although the global free market, in some ways, is the ultimate Other of the *Hang*/handpan community, such a fear is often racialized, with the metaphor for this free market being the profit-driven and unscrupulous 'East', such as China. Paradoxically, ‘the East’ remains a significant inspiration in the spiritual and cultural realm, a wellspring for the fantasmatic base of the community's identity. While it is not uncommon for Western handpan makers to seek opportunity in Asia, and there have been instances of unfortunate ‘scams’ involving reputable Western handpan makers, the stereotypical dichotomy of the principled ‘West’ and the avaricious ‘East’ remains largely intact.

Arguably, the community is a product of collective affect. The *Hang*/handpan and the community surrounding the instrument are often associated with ‘positive’ affects. Hope, gratitude, inspiration, positive changes, healing properties, egalitarianism, anti-capitalism-like marketing strategies and a gift-like mentality are usually identified in public discourse. Criticism or ‘non-positive’ comments on prominent handpan makers and core community members are largely absent from public exchanges in the community. Evidence suggests that ‘negative’ comments and sentiments are regarded as inappropriate and tacitly taboo in the public domain. Informants often express genuine consternation and reluctance to making ‘negative’ statements publically, and reserve such opinions for private communications among trusted *Hang*/handpan community participants. It is not uncommon for those who have experienced the ‘negative’ aspect of the community to eventually distance themselves from it.

The *Hang*/handpan community can also be scrutinised through the lens of musical cosmopolitanism. The messiness and ambiguity of this ‘new’ instrument not only invites the imagination of ‘non-national’ cosmopolitanism, it also paves the way for a brand of cosmopolitanism tinged with a degree of orientalism and occidentalism. Despite the efforts of several makers to emphasis the roots of the instrument in the Trinidadian steelpan, the *Hang*/handpan community has detached itself from the history and culture of the Trinidadians and built a sense of culturally-abstracted, ‘non-rooted’ musical cosmopolitanism around the relatively empty vessel. However, tensions remain between the *Hang*/handpan and steelpan culture, and at the time of writing there is simply no black *Hang*/handpan community in sight. Although the *Hang*/handpan community implies that it welcomes cultural diversity, it remains largely a Euro-American music community.

While the *Hang*/handpan community can be examined from the perspectives of producer-consumer connection, affective community, and music cosmopolitanism, there are often individual propositions and subjectivities that elude the grids of these grand narratives. The *Hang*/handpan, being a successful social object which invites communal engagement, also encourages individuals to interpret this collective ethos on their own terms. It is not uncommon for *Hang*/handpan community participants to display a certain sense of ambivalence, or even challenge the community ethos. If this chapter illustrates the under-current of individualism that operates within the formation of collective identities and communal solidarity, then the next chapter is certainly the opposite: this segment of the dissertation examines the individual identities of *Hang*/handpan makers and players themselves.

Chapter 6: The *Hang*/handpan and a Collective of Individuals

6.1 Introduction

After having examined the ways in which the *Hang*/handpan community is formed and maintained and how collective identities are constructed along with the instrument, this chapter scrutinises the construction of individual identities. It begins with a deeper examination of New Ageism and its relationship to the *Hang*/handpan, a discussion which is heavily entwined with identity construction and subjectivity in the community. This section scrutinises how the *Hang*/handpan invites being framed in New Age terms and the role of New Age capitalist thought within the *Hang*/handpan community. The next section examines neo-nomadism and how identities are constructed through physical displacement. Finally, the visual identity of the *Hang*/handpan is examined. The intriguing appearance of the instrument, which visually bears a striking resemblance to a flying-saucer, invites and solicits a certain set of imaginary associations, contributing to its imagined identity among enthusiasts.

6.2 *Hang*/handpan and New Ageism

New Age subjectivity is formed by a hodge-podge borrowing of ideas from assorted, and at times conflicting, belief systems. Not only do the multicultural influences borrowed for the creation of *Hang* not contradict with New Age subjectivity, the relatively new *Hang*/handpan lends itself to the New Age imagination, with the discourse on its mythical sound healing properties discussed in Chapter four being especially compatible; and the global interest in *Hang*/handpan is often entwined with a rapidly growing New Age market fuelled by digital culture. Although there is literature suggesting that New Ageism is a highly individualistic lifestyle which generally emphasises the self, counter-arguments on the communal solidarity of New Ageism appear to be growing.

Notwithstanding the vague description and understanding of New Age, itself a wide-reaching and obscure subject for study, certain commonalities do appear across existing literature. The New Age movement places primary emphasis upon the self, promoting autonomous techniques for rediscovering ‘self-spirituality’ (Heelas 1996), self-actualisation (Woodhead & Heelas 2000) and the reinvention of self-identity (Rindfleish 2005). Self-proclaimed New Age spiritual thinkers make heavy use of ‘self-care’ concepts which proliferate in consumer society, which encourage domination or action upon the individual self (Rindfleish 2005). The *Hang*/handpan fits in perfectly in the self-exploration and self-transcending motif, and

invites autonomous musical and spiritual practices of exploration. With myths and beliefs that the instrument is infused with healing properties and spiritual power, the *Hang*/handpan is not only highly appealing to New Age consumers, it in some ways functions as an effective invitation and gateway into the New Age, self-improvement mentality.

New Ageism and the *Hang*/handpan are correlated in many ways. Not only do *Hang*/handpan players often actively make use of the *Hang*/handpan in New Age practices (see Chapter four), community participants who are less enthusiastic towards the New Age worldview are likely to receive invitations to New Age-like gatherings. Additionally, the socio-economic patterns exhibited by relatively accomplished *Hang*/handpan musicians are often inseparable from the New Age marketplace. Lee, a Taiwanese handpan virtuoso and founder of Soul Days studio which dedicates itself to the teaching and selling of handpans, has been invited to perform in many events with the spiritual and healing motif, and notes that he would dress in a 'more bohemian fashion' for the events 'because the audiences like it' (2018, p.c.). Lai, full-time busker and one of the best-known Hong Kong musicians to have performed regularly with the handpan, West African frame drum, and jew's harp, has been critical about how the increasingly popular sound healing practices 'do not respect the music instrument with random and poor touches', at times 'incorporating instruments which are badly out of tune' (2022, p.c.). Lai often rejects economic opportunities which involve a 'non-musical' application of the handpan (ibid.). He has also cast aspersions on some of his handpan students, some of whom are professional yoga instructors, who stopped attending his lessons after 'barely making sounds' out of the instrument (ibid.). The instructors informed Lai that their main objective to attend his lessons was to incorporate the handpan in yoga classes, given that this was the new promotional strategy of their company: Pure Yoga (ibid.). Despite his apparent rejection of modern New Ageism, Lai is a frequent *Hang*/handpan festival-goer, these festivals generally being sites with a profusion of New Age-like elements on display.

The modern variant of New Ageism, a phenomenon which has expanded following the progress of secularisation, has been compared to 'traditional' religious groups. In a critical publication which attempted to 'measure' the degree of individualism in New Age lifestyle practitioners, Farias and Lalljee (2008) suggested that the self-proclaimed spirituality of New Age tendencies explicitly emphasises the dimension of self-enhancement, differentiating itself from other traditionally-oriented forms of religion (p.287). Religious groups in the traditional sense (Farias and Lalliee make use of the example of Catholicism), generally place more emphasis upon social and collective cohesion, due to the fact that such practices tend to place altruism at the center of their teachings, religious praxis being oriented around

the charitable performance of duties for the benefit of the collective (ibid.). However, New Age groups differ from atheism because the New Age subject often places a similar value upon the self and universalism at once (the latter tending towards an affirmation of egalitarianism and values of harmony). While emphasising the self, a New Age subject sets herself at odds against inequality and hierarchy (ibid.). This tension and interplay between individualism and collectivism is evident in the *Hang*/handpan community, where New Age spirituality is rife.

Again, in the case of New Age implementation of the didjeridu, many who learnt about the instrument on the internet were also exposed to and affected by an array of 'ecological agendas around a Western pick-and-mix philosophy of pan-Indigenous spirituality' (Magowan 2005, p.96). Music festivals in general provide total submersion in an alternative lifestyle through escaping from the everyday environment of work and life. Immersed in this microcosm and insulated from workaday reality, participants have the potential to experience rewarding situations, activities, or interpersonal contact which can develop a sense of belonging (Anderton 2018). Outdoor music festivals or similar gatherings which emphasise spirituality, reconnecting with Mother Earth and egalitarianism across race and ethnicity attract New Age lifestyle devotees looking for freedom from everyday life; they are searching for authentic New Age communal experiences, and the association and socialisation of the group and self-transcendence, which are the main themes for attendees of such festivals (Anderton 2018, p135).

Similar to non-aboriginal didjeridu gatherings, *Hang*/handpan festivals largely attract hippie, New Age, or middle class white participants, a phenomenon which HOUK co-founder Hutchison cannot comprehend (2018, p.c.). He also claims that he is not a hippie or 'new-agey' in any sense (2018, p.c.). However, it is likely that Hutchison's experience in attending didjeridu gatherings, themselves infused with New Age-like elements, influenced him to some degree when he began imagining and curating HOUK. The egalitarian, relatively anarchic atmosphere one finds in HOUK and various *Hang*/handpan festivals which it inspired have drawn considerable interest from the New Age community. *HangOut* festivals in the UK, U.S., and Hong Kong (which I personally participated in), are all relatively compact and intimate, with minimum restrictions upon participation. All festivals have been situated in rural areas, emphasising reconnection to Nature as a mythical hearth. Occasionally, yoga, tai-chi, qi-gong workshops, sound healing sessions, or similar activities which promote health and wellness benefits are embedded in the festivals. Although these additional workshops might seem non-essential to the instrument-centric festivals, to New Agers these are all vital properties, crucial facets of an 'authentic' new age experience which

requires the imitation of traditions and practices from foreign cultures for self-transformation, health and wellness benefits (Lau 2015, p3). The rural festival background, soundtracked by musical activities provided by acoustic instruments, are all in harmony with the New Age imagination of remedying social and environmental illnesses (Lau 2015, p4).

The first HOUK happened in 2007 and continued to thrive until the recent COVID-19 lockdown. Like didjeridu gatherings, each *Hang*/handpan is performed separately, because the nature of the instrument means that they could potentially interrupt each other if played simultaneously, causing sonic chaos (Hutchison 2018, p.c.). Although *Hang/*handpan players have invented ways to engage in musical collaborations, most social and musical interactions within *Hang/*handpan festivals occur in small groups, with the exception of staged performances and prize-drawing competitions. This aligns with Coats and Murchison's (2015) ethnographic data collected from a New Age festival at the end of the Mayan calendar in December 2012, the *Synthesis 2012* festival. Coats and Murchison were not greeted by any organised, collective ritual conducted in unison, but instead witnessed 'pockets of people congregated around leaders who performed their own specific rituals' (p173).

Bringing one's own musical instrument is essential for the re-production and re-performance of the carnivalesque atmosphere. A participant in festivals such as these is no longer an uninvolved, passive audience member looking up at the entertainer on stage, but often a performer on one's own terms, and an active member in the production of the sonic atmosphere. Intriguingly, the size of both the didjeridu and *Hang/*handpan is problematic for travelling musicians, given that they are relatively bulky and challenging to carry. Participants often struggle to fit the instrument on plane overhead compartments. The average *Hang/*handpan with a case can easily weigh over 20 pounds and reaches over 60cm in length. However, the importance of the size and weight of these instruments, I would argue, is that they are precisely situated in the sweet-spot of being only demanding, but not impossible, to travel with. The challenge in mobility is perhaps necessary for an 'authentic' spiritual experience, with festival participants having 'self-sacrificed' for the pilgrimage of self-transformation. By making such a formidable effort and taking on risks and challenges, they differentiate themselves from festival tourists who merely consume commodified forms of experience that fail to offer experiences of self-transcendence such as these (Anderton 2018). Such commitment strengthens their satisfaction in pursuit of an alternative lifestyle.

The *Hang/*handpan has successfully integrated itself into the New Age marketplace, not only through belief in its mystical sound-healing properties, but also because of the prestige of its

small-scale artisanal ‘cottage’ instrument manufacture, as well as its futuristic-primitive construction. In Lau's (2015) examination of the commodification of aromatherapy, macrobiotic eating, yoga, and t'ai chi, she identifies the commodified discourses of alternative health which ‘integrates a critique of the public sphere, the global marketplace, modernity, and the transformative potential of traditionalized and commodified bodily practices’ as New Age capitalism (p131). Parallel to Lau’s investigations, *Hang/*handpan online sites and physical gatherings often act as platforms for sound healing discourses, while the ideology of the ‘alternative’ and endorsement of 'Eastern' holistic practices which promote bodily and social transformations are often discussed and disseminated. For instance, after facilitating a handpan residence programme in Loural Eco Village, Portugal, Kabeção has suggested that the location has a ‘healing nature’ which nurtures deep listening ‘not only with our ears but with our entire being’, so the participants can open themselves ‘to be vulnerable and honest with the directions to take, what to say and express’ (2022). The catering service provided by Ta Ra & Juliette Abitbol, meanwhile, opened ‘a door inside to feel our sacred temples releasing what is not necessary and honoring our inner voices’ (2022). Discourses such as these have contributed to the circulation of relevant products and practices, reinforcing inclinations towards certain beliefs (Lau 2015, p10).

There is plenty of literature examining how New Ageism has become entwined with consumerism. New Age has been identified as a modern phenomenon systematized around religious consumerism (York 1996, cited by Redden 2002), with the New Age movement having ‘much to do with the marketplace of religious and quasi-religious elements focused on self and choice’ (Lyon 1993, p117, cited by Redden 2005), and has been likened elsewhere to a ‘spiritual supermarket’ (Redden 2005, p235). Rindfleish (2005) claims that the ascent of modern New Ageism has accompanied the escalation of secularisation, with which the individual conflates spirituality with continuous self-development. The process seemingly contributes to the continual imperative for New Age subjects to ‘reinvent’ their self-identities, by consuming ever-changing social products introduced by New Age spiritual thinkers. Due to experiences of post-traditional and post-identitarian uncertainty, New Age subjects continuously seek new ways in which to understand and define themselves through the continuous consumption of commodified signifiers. After a new self-identity is formed, such identity is ‘immediately appropriated, eventually consumed, and a different form of self-identity must be reconstructed’ (Rindfleish 2005, p358).

In this light, it is interesting to consider the fact that the *Hang/*handpan is a rare and customisable musical item, infused with Eastern symbols and a mythical capacity to enhance one's sense of wellness, but constructed under a system produced by Western

modernity. Unlike, for example, gongs or the singing-bowl, which are also sound objects often favoured by New Agers, the *Hang*/handpan allows participants who are conditioned under the Western equal temperament system to express and explore the self somewhat autonomously and effortlessly, while simultaneously imagining that such expressions and attempts at exploration are liberated from the presuppositions of Western modernity. In this sense, New Agers are not only able to utilise the *Hang*/handpan for the purposes of alternative health benefits, the reinvention of self-identity and the pursuit of self-transcending experiences, but also the instrument in some ways functions as a convenient musical tool by which one can reconcile the familiar and the unfamiliar. As such, the *Hang*/handpan can be consumed as a customized artificial sonic theme park of the East, or a vessel transporting one through the culture of the Other, territory which New Agers are given the self-authorised liberty to navigate and explore freely.

The unique limitations of a single *Hang*/handpan are also in keeping with the narrative of New Age subjectivity construction within consumer society, which has the need to 'constantly regenerate new social products' for the 'satisfaction of consumer needs in a never-ending cycle' (Rindfleish 2005, p358). Subjects who rely upon the *Hang*/handpan as a way of constructing a novel cultural identity often find the instrument less stimulating over a period of ownership. Unlike *PANArt*, which gradually reduced the scale choices of their *Hanghang,* handpan makers often expand scale options, offering sound models with novel musical note combinations and generally new 'exotic' names (Fig 6.1). It is not uncommon among *Hang*/handpan players to develop collector habits, in a continual search for new *Hang*/handpans in different scales that 'speak to them' (Barlett 2017, p.c.).

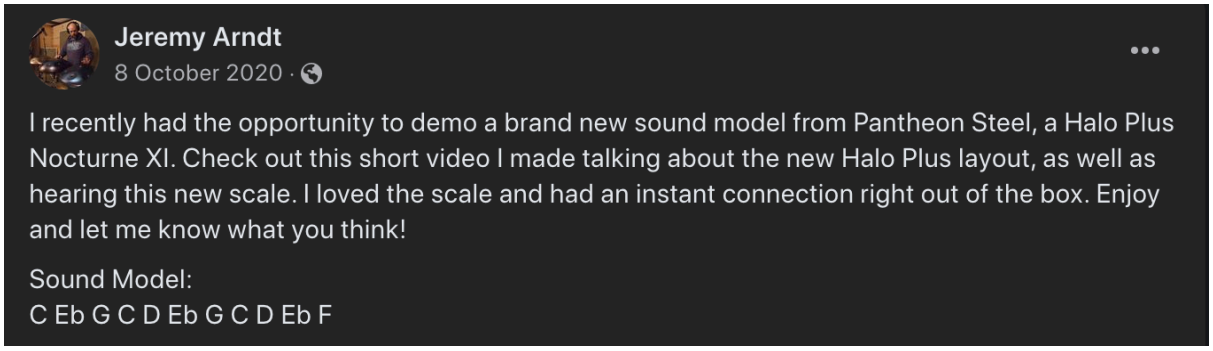


Figure 6.1 New sound model, *Nocturne XI*, by *Pantheon Steel*. Screenshot by the author.[153]

[153] Facebook, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/arndtj

The ‘anti-consumer-market’ decision made by *PANArt,* which limits the choice in musical notes on their products, could be examined with reference to a critique of post-Fordist individualism, post-Fordism being the industrial paradigm centered around providing unlimited, tailor-made choices encouraging individualism and self-orientated modes of behaviour (Hopper 2003). Although New Age lifestyle advocates champion a sense of connectivity across different cultures, the ever-growing customized choices of handpan sound models demonstrate how personalised choices simply lead to increasingly commodified and individualized forms of musicking. Contrary to how New Age or alternative gatherings and events emphasise community building among practitioners, New Age spiritualism and its accompanying practices are in fact in harmony with modern individualism (Farias & Lalljee 2008). If we consider that the *Hang*/handpan is a consumable distillation of New Age beliefs under ‘principles of the replication of the modern epistemology of capitalism and individualism’ (Bruce 2000), perhaps we can understand the ways in which *PANArt* and international handpan makers respond to such demand as demonstrating a rather polarised approach to the global New Age marketplace.

The history of the New Age movement following the growing secularisation of the post-industrial world intriguingly coincides with the rise of consumer society in late modernity.[154] The New Age movement is in some ways inseparable from modern consumer culture (Moberg & Granholm 2017), both with tendencies being impelled by reciprocal interpretive habits and inclinations to adapt to a secularized society (Miller 2008, cited by Moberg & Granholm 2017). However, not all New Age self-proclaimed spirituality consists of consumption activities, and the trend of *Hang*/handpan players picking up the hammer and becoming handpan producers themselves, as well as their openness in sharing the know-how of building the instruments, shows how some consumers continue to embody and exercise agency in countering New Age consumer culture. Although the *Hang*/handpan is without question a successful globalised commodity that renders itself compatible with New Age discourse, it would be more useful to understand the handpan as a crystallization of the latent tensions and contradictions that exist between New Age and consumerism, rather than simply claiming that the handpan is a symptom of New Age consumer culture.

New Ageism, which emphasises the self and ways of self-improvement (often entwined with consumerism), also often includes a desire and aspiration for communal solidarity. This urge for social connection sometimes comes into conflict with the commodification of the

[154] Begins around the end of WW2.

instrument. I met German handpan maker Handschuch in HOUK 2016, and he would go on to collaborate with Polish maker Zbyszek Weglinski for the fascinating project *The Travelling Handpan* (Fig 6.2). They conceived the idea of the project while 'tripping with psilocybin mushrooms' (Handschuch 2017, p.c.). The project involved building a handpan and then sending it away for free. Since both makers had to stay close to home due to family commitments, their 'desire to travel the world' could not be fulfilled (Handschuch 2017, p.c.). By sending the instrument away, which they considered 'a piece of' the makers themselves (2017, p.c.), the Travelling Handpan would travel for the makers instead. Taking into consideration the relatively high cost of *Hang*/handpan, the *Travelling Handpan* was conceived as a project which seeks temporary custodians 'across the community', and those who cannot afford to buy a *Hang*/handpan can still encounter the magic of the instrument. It is a handpan which 'nobody owns, but everybody can play' (2017, p.c.). The instrument does not bear any brand logos, but engraved on the bottom we find the following words explaining the initial idea:

> *This handpan was born out of the idea of wanting to send an instrument out on a journey, a journey of discovery, sharing, community, trust, and love - a travelling handpan that would pass between people around the world*



Figure 6.2 Words engraved on the Travelling Handpan, HOUK 2016. Photograph by the author.

I revisited Handschuch the next year in his workshop in Nuremberg and stayed for a few days, lodging in the space which he intentionally prepared for guests from the *Hang/*handpan community. The workshop is an extension of the main building, in which Handschuch's family and several artists share communal lives. During the stay, Handschuch shared a story of an incident which happened not long after the launch of his own handpan brand, *Soulshine-Sounds*. Handschuch recalled that when he attended a gathering in a farm on the outskirts of Nuremberg – a site for '68 generation'[155] activities – he played handpan in the attic for everyone before bed. Handschuch tried to 'project laughter and calmness' to the crowd, but a sudden 'darkness', which was 'aggressive and dangerous', came from outside and 'turned the place cold' (2017, p.c.). He had the feeling that 'something bad was going to happen' if he stopped playing the handpan (2017, p.c.). He started to realise how powerful these instruments are, which 'can reach into a dimension of energy that usually is hidden' (2017, p.c.). Since the incident, Handschuch often writes the following hidden passage inside the handpans that he builds: 'White light, please surround the player'. He explains that this invocation of 'white light' is something written to 'address the divine', and the hidden passage is his wish for 'the player to be protected' (2017, p.c.).

Handschuch's story and his caring nature reveal another dimension of New Age practice within the *Hang/*handpan community which does not seem to fit into notions of individualism. *Hang/*handpan players often actively engage in and experiment with communal living, exhibit considerable generosity in sharing and care for fellow *Hang/*handpan makers and players. The existence of the current thesis, in many ways, is a direct result of the invaluable assistance and encouragement provided by numerous informants who might correspond to the description of a 'New Ager', all of whom supported the research with genuine enthusiasm towards the documentation and examination of the instrument's history and the community surrounding it. There was simply no monetary exchange between myself and most of the informants, with one exception: Bueraheng, who sold me a unique prototype *Asachan* handpan before my busking trip to New York City, 2018. This prototype handpan was not made available for purchase to the public, and I could always bring the prototype back to exchange for other handpans if I were to find myself disappointed with it (2018, p.c.).

These seemingly dichotomous and contradictory social patterns, which often demonstrate simultaneously degrees of individualism and collectivism, have been identified by recent

[155] According to Handschuch, the '68 generation' in Germany, is similar to the 'hippies' in the US, but more political.

ethnographic researches on New Age movements and Neopaganism tendencies (see e.g., Ivakhiv 2001; Pike 2001; Tavory & Goodman 2009). Consonant with Tavory & Goodman's (2009) highlighting of the contradictory practices that feature in these tendencies, as well as the negotiations between individual expressions and communal belonging within New Age festivals, ethnographic research on the *Hang*/handpan gatherings reveals complex social patterns which form between New Age-like subjects who generally identify as *Hang*/handpan community participants. Although *Hang*/handpan centric-festivals often include New Age activities - such as sound healing sessions, self-developed qigong[156] workshops, storytelling and conversations which are heavily driven by a New Age mentality drawing upon a hodge-podge of beliefs and ideas - and while some handpan makers perhaps identify such gatherings as economic activities to some extent, these festivals and gatherings generally emphasise egalitarian communal solidarity while discouraging individual competitiveness. The New Age-like workshops within *Hang*/handpan festivals are often free of charge for festival-goers.

The tricky contradictions revealed by ethnographic study of New Age subjects are often left unexplained. However, through their participation in *The Rainbow Gathering*[157], Tavory & Goodman (2009) hinted at why New Age subjects who emphasise individualism often simultaneously seek opportunities to surround themselves with people who are construed as 'mirrors', with whom they can engage in activities in celebration of togetherness (p280). Interestingly, *PANArt* describes the *Hang* as having 'mirror'-like properties in several official announcements and personal emails. As an example, we can refer to pronouncements such as 'like a mirror, the *Hang* gives the player an immediate answer',[158] and 'we always warned our customers: It is a mirror'.[159] The conducted questionnaire on how participants 'feel about' the instrument also includes responses likening the handpan to 'my personal mirror', and a mirror which 'reflects your innermost being'.[160] These metaphorical statements are not coincidences, since the community often associates musicking with the *Hang*/handpan with

[156] Qigong is an ancient Chinese practice that combines meditation, controlled breathing, and movement exercises in order to promote physical and mental health, reduce stress, and improve mental clarity.
[157] The Rainbow Gathering is an annual event held in a remote forest location by a group of people from across the world. It is designed to promote peace and harmony, and includes activities such as music, dancing, storytelling, and workshops. It typically lasts for one week and is held in different locations each year.
[158] *The Sound of Sheet Metal – A Challenge,* last accessed 20 February 2023, https://panart.ch/en/articles/the-sound-of-sheet-metal-a-challenge
[159] Rohner, email: re: thanks, 25 January 2022
[160] *What does the Sound Sculpture* mean to you?,* last accessed 20 February 2023, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1I7WLV-eOp8XDKy_kryFRw9434IUvcBTLfyGN3IP6RtE/edit#responses

self-reflexivity and the reconstitution of the self more generally. As such, they might be more likely to experience interactions with community participants, encounters which often generate strong affective responses, as ways to resist 'unresolved conflicts within the self' (Tavory & Goodman 2009, p271). In this light, it can be seen that *Hang*/handpan makers and players make use of the instrument as a tool for self-discovery and self-development, while subconsciously 'making mirrors of' fellow community participants.

Successful *Hang*/handpan festivals are in fact the construction of a relatively stable meta-sociality. These gatherings consolidate and perpetuate the repetition of the festival by creating a recognisable, sought-after and anticipated atmosphere that will be re-produced and re-performed by attendees each year. In this sense, meta-sociality is a crucial component of a cyclical place, as well as an important contributory factor in the ongoing development and perpetuation of social and cultural understandings of *Hang*/handpan festivals (Anderton 2018). Perhaps influenced by the egalitarian nature of the community, music amateurs and professionals are conditioned within festivals to behave rather unusually: community members with different levels of musicality or reasons to attend the gatherings are all treated as equals. This enforced equality manifests itself in the opportunity for music amateurs to perform to the crowd in HOUSA 2017, as well as in the fact that relatively proficient performers receive no artist fees nor compensation for travel expenses, but only free entry tickets in HOUK. Event sites afford no special accessibility rights to artists and a large proportion of participants sleep and jam under the same roof in the Mellow Farm chicken shed. All this illustrates how event organisers can be the wardens of equality and the enforcers of communal bonds.

6.3 The neo-nomad incorporation of the *Hang*/handpan

Hypermobility and modern life entwined with digitalism create a type of subjectivity, one which is especially visible among certain modern countercultures. D'Andrea (2006) coins this subjectivity as neo-nomadism, and argues that it is distinct from general discourses of cosmopolitanism. Neo-nomads show detachment toward their home cultures, at least to a degree. While it is, in some ways, a highly individualistic type of subjectivity formation, neo-nomads see physical displacements as economic opportunities, and chances to bond with their 'own kind'. Threads of neo-nomadism can be identified within the *Hang*/handpan community, and seen from this vantage point an argument can be made that this community engenders a culture of mutual aid which has formed among neo-nomads.

Although Skovgaard-Smith and Poulfelt's (2018) argument proposes that 'non-nationality' modes of cosmopolitanism in the *Hang*/handpan community can be seen as forms of

collective belonging shared by participants with varied national and cultural backgrounds, there is a particular mode of transnational identity within the community which the lens of musical cosmopolitanism might fail to capture. Cosmopolitanism can be understood as the rejection of cultural belonging in favour of humanity as a whole (Nussbaum 1994), and has been articulated as a sentiment of 'willingness to engage with the Other' (Hannerz 1996, p103). I was intrigued by the ways in which identities can be constructed by similar descriptions of cosmopolitanism but with distinctive ideals and ways of living, which such a grand narrative of cosmopolitanism fails to identify precisely. The following section illustrates the case of a handpan player located in Hong Kong, and demonstrates the complexity of such an identity, a complexity which is shared by a certain proportion of *Hang*/handpan community participants.

Sasha Frolov (Fig 6.3) was one of the handpan players invited to perform in *HangOut* Hong Kong, which I co-curated in 2016. Now based in Hong Kong, Frolov grew up in the small town Avdeevka in Ukraine, and developed a passion for the West African djembe. He was touring through ten cities in Ukraine with fellow musicians when the Russo-Ukrainian War broke out in 2014, making it unsafe to return home. At the end of the tour, Frolov ended up in Crimea with a 'little bit of money and a djembe' (2022, p.c.), where he met Russian Vetya, a busker who had been traveling in Asia, including Hong Kong. Vetya's story inspired Frolov to pursue life as a full-time busker in Asia, following which he began performing the djembe in the streets of Hong Kong and other Asian cities. In 2016, Frolov saved enough money to acquire a handpan, which would attract 'twenty to thirty audiences making enquiries each day', asking about the mysterious looking instrument (ibid.). Frolov would also prioritise playing the handpan over the djembe, not only due to the attention it attracted, but because the melodic handpan allowed him 'to perform alone', while the djembe is usually 'accompanied by other instruments' (ibid.). Frolov now busks less and has successfully diversified his income by teaching and reselling handpans, as well as being hired for yoga classes and similar functions which have use for the 'calming vibe' of a handpan (ibid.). Besides this, he performs with his band *Tarboosh: A Quartet*, comprising of piano, woodwinds, handpan, and percussions, with four musicians from four different countries, including Frolov's wife and handpan player, Maggie Tan.



Figure 6.3 Sasha Frolov busking in Hong Kong, 2020. Photograph by Sasha Frolov.

Perhaps due to the relatively expensive price of the *Hang*/handpan, middle-class/bourgeois consumers who have the financial power to purchase the instrument and travel with it are not uncommon among the community. There has been a tendency for critics, then, to denigrate this form of cosmopolitanism as the privilege of cultural and economic elites, sharply distanced from 'poor migrants who require to fit into the worlds of others', as 'cosmopolitans want more of the world to be theirs' (Tsing 2002, p469). This is largely based on associations between the capacity to undertake business, mobility, or migration across borders, and the consumption power of the liberal elites. However, recent research has revised and expanded such discussions on cosmopolitanism, by scrutinising the openness and willingness to engage with and include others outside of upper middle-class or elite socio-cultural groups (see, e.g., Ingram 2016; Beck & Sznaider 2006; Lamont & Aksartova 2002).

Participant-observation has revealed that a significant proportion of the *Hang*/handpan community which shares financial profiles similar to Frolov does not correspond to any description of an 'elite' class. This particular affinity group is, in some senses, a valuable case of grass-root musical cosmopolitanism, underlining the challenges in dealing with transnational differences in a given cultural and economic background, and how musicking with the *Hang*/handpan empowers practitioners to take on such challenges. Indeed, Frolov

shares some ‘cosmopolitan features’, such as travel experience and relative openness to cultural experimentation. However, D’Andrea (2006) further argues that existing discussions of cosmopolitanism are not capable of precisely capturing the socio-cultural patterns found in some self-marginalised countercultural groups which ‘adopt mobility as a prime tactic’, and the theoretical framework fails to examine how hypermobility and digitalisation contributes to new forms of subjectivity and identity within countercultures (p97).

Following D’Andrea (2006, 2007), I argue that *Hang/*handpan players sharing a similar social profile with Frolov can be categorised as expressive expatriates, global nomads, or neo-nomads more generally, subjects who successfully integrate hypermobility into economic strategies and lifestyles (2006, p97). D’Andrea developed his ‘open-ended hypothesis’ on postidentitarian mobility (2006, p97) by scrutinising global circuits of transnational countercultural lifestyles, specifically Techno and New Age practices in Ibiza and Goa (2006, 2007). These sites are essential for the economic opportunities of such hypermobile neo-nomads, and are the sites of self-shaping practices that emerge from experiences of spatial displacement, taking advantage of ‘labour precariousness in flexible capitalist contexts’, and ‘fluidness in identity formation within a globalised postmodern world’ (2007, p144).

By examining subjects such as Frolov, the iconic *Hang/*handpan player Waples, and a large number of informants who have developed a global nomadic lifestyle by busking, at least temporarily, the power of the *Hang/*handpan in enabling music amateurs to discover ways to integrate artistic economies and hypermobility is made evident. By busking, staging musical performances, teaching, and exploring various other ways of monetising the *Hang/*handpan, neo-nomads have deployed mobility as a crucial economic strategy, locating themselves in global cities or tourist resorts situated within relatively wealthy parts of the world, areas which are comparatively welcoming and generous towards such artistic encounters. However, *Hang/*handpan festivals are often organised outside of these cosmopolitan nodes. Arguably, these gatherings attract *Hang/*handpan neo-nomads not for instant economic reward, but in anticipation of future opportunities. They provide sites for transformative practices of self-formation where ‘their life strategies and wider contexts are dramatized’, to create an ‘index of nomadic spirituality’ which demonstrates and amplifies ‘flexible subjectivities navigating neoliberal environments’ (D’Andrea 2007, p143).

Although Frolov did not revisit Avdeevka after leaving in 2014, he now expresses a certain detachment when questioned about his home town.

> *I don't miss my home town, it is not very interesting, many people just drink alcohol way too much. I don't have strong connection with my birth place. The whole planet is just one place you know, leaving Avdeevka doesn't change much inside me. I would rather travel to other places where my music makes people happy, and to meet other handpan performers and makers. They are my people. (2022, p.c.)*

In a sense, Frolov demonstrates a unique subjectivity which can be identified as 'negative diaspora' (D'Andrea 2006, p102), in which the subject sees himself as part of a 'diasporic formation based on fellowship of counter-hegemonic practice and lifestyles' (D'Andrea 2006). Contrary to protagonists in diaspora studies, neo-nomads generally do not embrace nationalistic nostalgia, and are averse to homeland-centered identities. The ideal 'homeland' for neo-nomads is the imaginary utopia fostered by 'pragmatic individualism' (D'Andrea 2006, p102).

Before his nomadic experiences, however, it might be fair to say that Frolov has been subjected to a deterritorialised 'urban, media, and techno-scientific apparatus' of a global scale (D'Andrea, 2006 p103). Under such modern conditions, Frolov is part of a growing tendency for *Hang/*handpan players to combine neo-nomadism with the *Hang/*handpan, though this segment of players is likely to have embraced a global nomadic identity prior to acquiring the instrument. The 'non-nationality' association with the *Hang/*handpan (see Chapter five), and the relatively accessible opportunities opened up by the instrument (see Chapter four) appeal to the neo-nomadic imagination. It can be argued that the *Hang/*handpan is fundamentally a product of a global epoch, which has the power of 'unfixing' the moorings which tie identities to national belongings. Thus, it is not uncommon for *Hang/*handpan players to claim that their global nomadic lifestyles and modes of subjectivity are, at least partially, constituted by their encounter with the instrument physically, or from online representations.

During the research that I conducted on *the Travelling Handpan*, I met Japanese handpan player Iwao Mano, also known by the artist name *Kashiwa Hang*, in Taiwan in 2018. Before becoming a full-time busker in 2016, Iwao worked in an architectural company, and as a typical Japanese white-collar worker, he often exhausted himself by working excessively long hours. When he was diagnosed with arrhythmia and suffered from irregular pulse, Iwao started questioning his way of life and his goal to become an architect.

> *I wanted to be an architect, so I worked hard, staying in the architecture firm until the last train left almost every day. Then I developed a heart condition, causing me to question this lifestyle. I was worried that continuing this way might lead to an early death. I want to change. (2018, p.c.)*

During this time of confusion, he encountered a music event outside the Kashiwa train station, and was struck by how musicians were able to 'change the air and turn it into a nice space', and he felt instantly 'lighter' in his heart (2018, p.c.). It provoked him to consider how he might make music for a living, without having had any prior experience with musical instruments. Iwao remembered seeing a mysterious instrument in Spain, and after having done some research online, he learnt it was a *Hang/*handpan, and also that there was an upcoming show by one of the pioneers in combining *Hang/*handpan with a global nomadic lifestyle: Yuki Koshimoto, an iconic dreadlocked bohemian-looking Japanese handpan player. Being touched by her performance and lifestyle which he thought was very different than his own, Iwao decided he too wanted to be a full-time street musician with a handpan. When Iwao and I met, it was not the first time that he had performed in the street of Taiwan, but this time he carried the Travelling Handpan with him. He was the custodian when it landed in Japan after 'travelling' in the UK for a full year. Now, Iwao is not only a busker (often performing outside Kashiwa station), he also scores for films with the handpan. He has also released his first album, teaches handpan, and is endorsed by the Chinese handpan manufacturer, *Black Umbrella*.

Generally, *Hang/*handpan neo-nomads cannot be considered to be conventional tourists, who typically consume exotic places within tight schedules of labour and leisure patterns. Rather, they are experienced travellers, and often perceive 'exotic' locations as temporal homes. For neo-nomads, displacement provides new sites for the development and deployment of economic-strategies, sites for the fulfilment of spiritual experiences, and leisure. Additionally, they are likely to be less motivated to blend into local cultures, but instead focus on participating in local alternative countercultural groups which share similar 'post-national' and 'post-identitarian' forms of subjectivity. Neo-nomads have, in some sense, acquired the 'romantic, sceptical, and elitist gaze of the post-tourist' (Urry 2002, cited by D'Andrea 2007, p144).

Geographic movement is essential for the development of neo-nomadism among *Hang/*handpan community participants. While mobility is crucial for economic strategies, and travelling to gatherings and festivals is essential for nurturing collective identity, *Hang/*handpan players are often drawn to perform in remote locations, away from

metropolitan nodes and tourists, which seems paradoxical to the purpose of busking and at times challenging, since the *Hang*/handpan is relatively fragile sounding in terms of volume, and bulky in build (Fig 6.4). However, visiting natural, religious, or historical sites, can be considered as being coextensive with 'self-shaping/shattering practices' among neo-nomads (D'Andrea 2006, p106). Indeed, such visuals are appealing to audiences who often correlate the calming sound of the *Hang*/handpan with nature and Mother Earth, and the reproduction of these performances generally yield higher online view counts from audiences who are drawn to 'exotic lands'. Thus, it is not uncommon among relatively popular *Hang*/handpan players to incorporate such elements into their music videos. However, I would argue that performing in nature and 'exotic' locations, with or without audiences, is potentially self-transformative for *Hang*/handpan players.



Figure 6.4. Lebanese-American handpan player Adam Maalouf performs near a waterfall, 2020. Screenshot by the author.[161]

Neo-nomads often combine practices of horizontal (spatial) displacement with experiences of vertical (self-identity) displacement (D'Andrea 2006, p106). Performing the *Hang*/handpan in natural and 'exotic' locations can be identified as a practice of self-overcoming, an extension of 'spiritual experiences touching their inner selves', and 'more powerful' than usual performance settings (D'Andrea 2006, p106). *Hang*/handpan neo-nomads are also likely to be familiar with other means of self-transcending practices, such as meditation

[161] *"Haven" - Handpan at Waterfall - Adam Maalouf - D Kurd by Yishama Pantam*, Adam Maalouf, YouTube, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVQ9Q8eAtgY

retreats, the taking of hallucinogenic drugs in festivals, or various forms of gatherings for spiritual transformation. It is not uncommon among the research protagonists for them to liken *Hang*/handpan playing to 'musical journeys'[162], 'trips'[163], or 'losing the self'[164]. The stimulating sound of the *Hang*/handpan perhaps plays a significant role in producing this transcendent experience, yet it is also precisely one of the reasons why *PANArt* discontinued the production of *Hang,* as the long sustaining high frequency was deemed to be 'drug-like', making the player high (see Chapter four). Dragging the relatively bulky and heavy, but not immobile, instrument to distant, romantic locations is in some ways similar to the act of bearing religious tokens to holy lands, adding to the mystique and spiritual significance of the performance (see Chapter five). Combined with the 'non-nationality' vector which traverses the *Hang*/handpan community, performing *Hang*/handpan with such a neo-nomadic mentality in mind can be a practice of self-transcendence, and such a transcendent power is amplified when performed in 'exotic' locations.

Although neo-nomadism, similar to New Ageism, emphasises the self, the *Hang*/handpan community has developed a strong sense of camaraderie towards and among handpan neo-nomads. When I was staying in Lee and Handschuch's studio, they both indicated that they are accustomed to the idea of providing temporary accommodation for fellow travelling *Hang*/handpan players (2017, p.c.). Paul Bartlett, a *Hang*/handpan player living in Wales, comments that he has been 'sheltering and feeding' *Hang*/handpan players (2016, p.c.). Japanese handpan player Nagasawa Takahiro stayed in Lai's home for more than two years in order to busk in Hong Kong (Lai 2021, p.c.). Lai claims that since he received an 'enormous amount of help' while he was travelling and busking in Europe, he felt that he should be 'providing for *Hang*/handpan players' in Hong Kong when they are in need (2022, p.c.). Perhaps influenced by this communal reciprocity, I have been providing temporary accommodation for *Hang*/handpan players travelling through London, such as Daisuke Iehara, Mia Lev, and Lee, as well as bringing them to my favourite locations for busking (Fig 6.5).

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[162] See for example: *My Musical journey with Handpan: A divine connect | Sumit Kutani | TEDxBistupur,* TEDx Talk, YouTube, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKFN_nI1R5g; *Handpan For Peace | Alexander Mercks | Meditation Sound Journey*, Yatao Music, YouTube, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEMIZ560bEk

[163] See for example: *Trip On Hang,* Jaron Tripp, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://jarontripp.bandcamp.com/album/trip-on-hang; Description on Tom Vaylo using handpan to take 'the audience with him on a musical trip', last accessed 20 February 2023, https://kitapantam.com/top-20-handpan-players/

[164] *Malte Marten | Loosing Myself | Meditation Sound Journey*, Yatao Music, YouTube, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YA2eACP3Ibk



Figure 6.5 Lev, Iehara, and Lee. Busking in Greenwich, London, 2017. Photograph by the author.

All this suggests that the *Hang*/handpan community ethos has offered infrastructural support for musicians who incorporate hypermobility into the development of their economic strategies. In the case of the *Hang*/handpan community, the seemingly individualistic neo-nomadic lifestyle is supported by a sense of communal solidarity. Similar to the proliferation of New Ageism in the *Hang*/handpan community, neo-nomadism in the community challenges the fixed binary of individualism and collectivism, perhaps offering a challenge to the supposition that the late modernity/post-modern era represents the 'corrosion of social ties and the rise of the individual' (Tavory & Goodman 2009, p262). Neo-nomadism in the *Hang*/handpan community is in some ways conditioned by the collective identities scrutinised in Chapter five. The community ethos constituted by the producer-consumer connection, collective affect and cosmopolitanism are seemingly embedded in neo-nomadic behaviour in the community, demonstrating the complexity between the interplay of individualism and collectivism. Despite the fact that neo-nomadism is a highly individualistic endeavour, the *Hang*/handpan neo-nomads demonstrate a certain degree of collectivism, a strategic response to the uncertainty of global displacement.

6.4 The visual identity of the *Hang*/handpan

The attention-grabbing appearance of the *Hang* has undoubtedly contributed to its global dissemination. Resembling the mythical Unidentified Flying Object (UFO), the visual identity of the *Hang*/handpan invites and arouses certain associations almost immediately. At times, the *Hang*/handpan invites imaginings of the East, particularly since it is meant to be played sitting on the floor. These visual signifiers of the *Hang*/handpan have contributed to the ways in which community members have constructed their own identities. Pictures of the unmistakable *Hang*/handpan allow fellow enthusiasts to identify each other on social media as fellow members of the community and adherents to an alternative lifestyle.

Often, people are intrigued by the distinctive appearance of the *Hang*/handpan, before even hearing the sound of the instrument. There is perhaps no other instrument that has come closer to resembling what is commonly known as the flying-saucer. The association between the modern UFO with the shape of a saucer arguably came from Kenneth Arnold, a civilian American pilot who reported the sighting of a UFO in 1947, with the description of 'a saucer [which] skipped across water' (Ellwood 1995, p393). The UFO is now undoubtedly a highly established global symbol, infused with mysticism and imaginations of extra-terrestrial intelligence. In the West, the modern history of the UFO subculture is perhaps more significant, evocative, obsessive, and sometimes extreme. In the USA for example, millions view UFOs with remarkably less scepticism than do academia or the government (Barkun 2013, p81); myths of flying-saucers have merged with political conspiracy theories such as that of the 'New World Order', which posits the existence of a secret totalitarian world government which is closely intertwined with millennialism (Barkun 2013, p219). The seed of similar conspiracy theories was already present in ufology legends, suggesting governmental underground facilities capturing aliens and developing advanced technologies with the study of extra-terrestrial instruments. Tales of 'men in black' emerged several years after the initial claim of UFO sightings, theorising ambiguous figures in dark suits who would actively apprehend those who came too close in uncovering the 'truth' of these UFO myths (Barkun 2013, p83).

The outlandish, spherical appearance of the *Hang*/handpan frequently evokes associations these mythical UFOs. When acclaimed percussionist Evenly Glennie demonstrated the *Hang* on BBC Radio Four in 2015, she described the shape of the instrument as being 'almost like a flying-saucer'.[165] The community certainly does not shy away from the correlation, with the first online forum dedicated to the *Hang, Hang-music.com,* introducing

[165] *The Hang Drum Phenomenon*, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02x4b3j

the instrument with title '*The Hang - The Musical Flying Saucer*'.[166] Facebook pages and festivals dedicated to the *Hang*/handpan often display graphics incorporating the idea of hovering instruments with the bottom opening being represented as portals presumingly projecting or absorbing magical energies (Fig. 6.6), or similar images ambiguously resembling both UFOs and *Hang*/handpan (Fig. 6.7). Online memes depicting the *Hang*/handpan also explore the idea of the interplay between the flying-saucer and the *Hang*/handpan (Fig. 6.8). Such imagery can be taken to be fascinating cases in which the *Hang*/handpan has been utilised as a direct substitution of the UFO, or images which suggest that a UFO has been seamlessly replaced by an actual music instrument. What all these images have in common is a preoccupation with self-transcendence and escapism, common motifs in *Hang* and handpan festivals.



Figure 6.6 Left: Poster for *HangOut UK* 2020; Right: Key art of Facebook page *Handpan Instruments.* Screenshot by the author.

[166] *The Hang - The Musical Flying Saucer,* last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.hang-music.com/hang.php



Figure 6.7 Key art of Facebook page *Swap and Sale For Handpan*. Screenshot by the author.



Figure 6.8 Meme demonstrating the interplay between the flying-saucer and the *Hang*/handpan. Screenshot by the author.

The close resemblance between the *Hang*/handpan and the UFO suggests the possibility that perception of the handpan and the creation of meaning around it have been partially preconditioned by ufology worldviews. Intriguingly, myths and discourses concerning change, wellness benefits, transformation, healing, gifting, environmental issues, individuals being chosen, are all present in both ufology and *Hang*/handpan communities (see Chapter five). The *Hang*/handpan community also shows traces of ambivalence towards authority, as music theories and musical competency are often underplayed. Instead, the *Hang*/handpan

community generally emphasises musicking infused with mythology, magical abilities, and aspirations towards alternative economic and social structures.

Beyond the resemblance of the instrument to the UFO, representations of the *Hang*/handpan often display a degree of orientalism. As discussed previously, *PANArt* has stated that the invention of the *Hang* drew inspiration from udu, gongs, and gamelan,[167] with various geometrical features of each adapted for the *Hang.* As such, part of the cultural identity embedded in traditional Eastern music instruments was channelled and transposed into the new Western-made sound object. Perhaps the seemingly yonic symbolism of the acoustic *Hang*/handpan is also particularly inviting to the orientalist gaze, since the Orient is conceptualised as exotic, feminine, and savage (Said 1978). These oriental fantasies are also further enforced by the adaptation of 'Eastern' scale models in the *Hang*/handpan, as argued in Chapter two.

The common posture of *Hang*/handpan playing involves the instrument being positioned on the player's lap while he/she is sat down cross-legged. Combined with interrelated concepts of meditation, New Age sound healing, and mind elevation with sound, *Hang*/handpan practice is often perceived as being Zen-like. It is notable that Western musical instruments have rarely been designed for performance while seated on the floor. This is quite unlike, for example, the Indonesian gamelan (Fig 6.9), which the architecture and material of the handpan perhaps alludes to. Floor-sitting also invites associations with Eastern meditation practices. Imagery drawing an explicit allusion towards zen meditation are not uncommon (Fig 6.10), since such imaginary connections are rife, inviting the player to think of meditation postures such as the 'lotus' and the 'Burmese'.

[167] *The History of PANArt,* PANArt 2020, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://panart.ch/en/history/the-history-of-panart



Figure 6.9 Indonesian gamelan ensemble. ID 172534286 © Ravindran John Smith | Dreamstime.com



Figure 6.10 Examples of handpan illustrations associated with zen meditation. Screenshot by the author.

These Eastern fantasies are not only visually represented in the illustrative graphic arts, symbols from Buddhism and Hinduism have been implemented as ornamental displays for brand identity construction (Fig. 6.11). Although the commodification of the *Hang*/handpan has not directly appropriated 'Eastern' culture and bodily practices, the instrument illustrates that even Western-produced objects have the capacity become vessels for Oriental

fantasies, with the 'non-national' vacuum at the heart of the *Hang*/handpan becoming a void into which fantasies of the exotic East can be injected.



Figure 6.11. PanAmor handpan. Screenshot by the author.

Correlating UFO myths and Eastern iconography is common in the community at large. Such correlation of symbols and signifiers from entirely different systems of reference often appeals to post-modern and post-identitarian subjects, who have at their disposal a panoply of significative elements for pastiche and recombination.

When the *Hang*/handpan community gradually decreased its engagements with the online forum *handpan.org* and 'migrated' to the new and much more visually-driven Facebook groups, the visual identity of individual users became of much greater consequence. Since acquiring my first handpan in 2014, I have been regularly switching my social media profile pictures, consciously placing the instrument front and centre in my profiles. Immediately, social media users who had similar ideas, but with whom I had no prior connection, began to send me 'friend requests'. By 2018, I decided to open a new social media account dedicated to my thesis research, featuring portraits of myself with handpans as well as content directly

related to this research, while the profile pictures on my original account no longer featured the handpan.

As one might expect, there are no more *Hang*/handpan players or makers sending requests to my original account, whilst the latter continues to draw attention from fellow community members, and I have successfully established connections with approximately three-hundred users to date (Fig. 6.12). In many cases, connections established online develop a sense of solidarity which can carry over into physical sites. Despite my inactivity on Instagram, search engines indicate that my observations of Facebook are also largely applicable here. In retrospect, my experience as a handpan player, and the construction of my identity as a participant in this instrument-centric community, has largely been articulated in the digital world. It is reasonable to suppose that fellow global community members have shared a similar experience, with online participation and interaction being major factors in the construction of identity among *Hang*/handpan community practitioners.

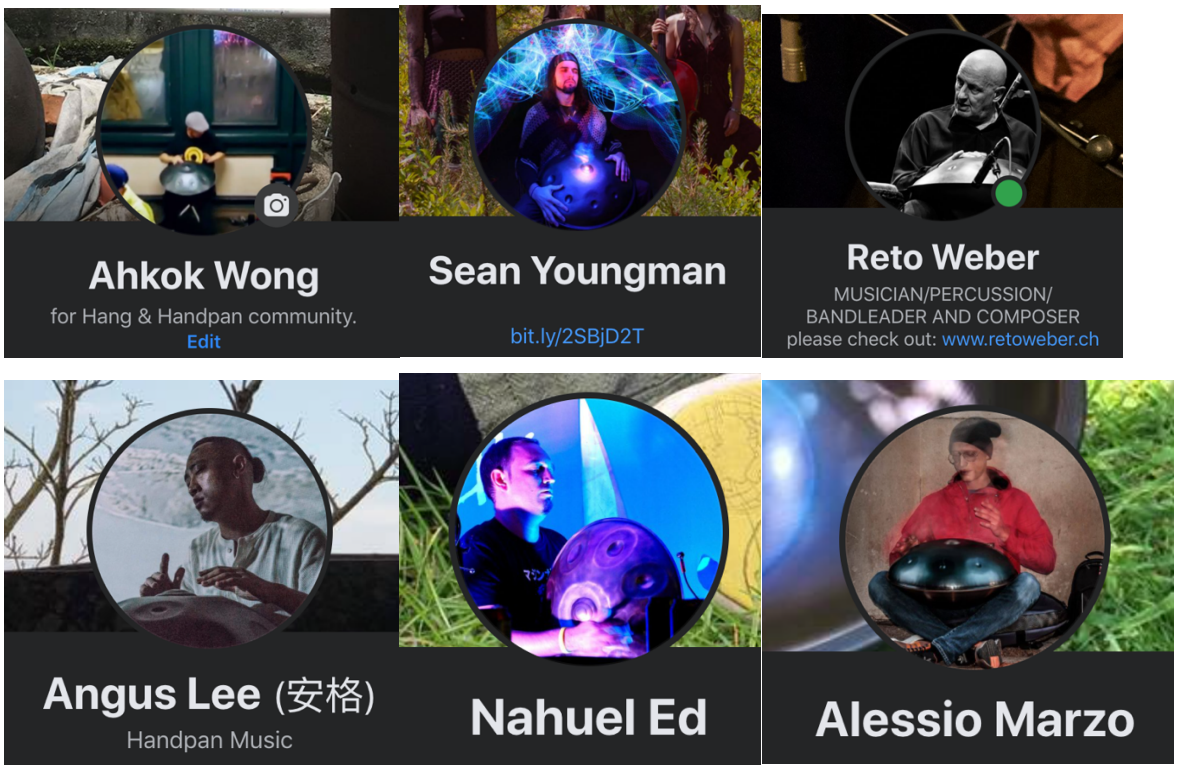


Figure 6.12 Collection of profile pictures on Facebook, 2021. Screenshot by the author.

6.5 The *Hang*/handpan on social media

According to Louis Leung (2013), social media is an umbrella term describing internet-based applications allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content (UGC) (O'Reilly

2005, cited by Leung 2013), providing services which emphasise user control, participation, emergent behaviour, and often include ways of micro-content generation which facilitates social connections between users (Alexander 2008, cited by Leung 2013). While online forums were generally dedicated to the public sharing of information, the explosion of online social networking sites (oSNSs) by the end of the last millennium has allowed users to have substantial control over self-presentation, as well as the capacity to establish sizable social network bases of superficial relationships (Leung 2013). The current most successful social networking sites (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram)[168] are all digital platforms which have been launched after the millennium, coinciding precisely with the development of *Hang*/handpan community.[169]

The significant difference between *Hang*/handpan online forums and social media interactions for members of the community lies in the liberation from subject orientated engagement, which is then replaced with a user-orientated network of digital self-presentations and expressions (Ozansoy & Sağkaya 2019). That is to say, on social media the *Hang*/handpan maker or player now becomes the subject. Applications such as photo sharing and ways of content generation for self-expression construct forms of conscious self-promotion (Van Dijck 2013, cited by Ozansoy & Sağkaya 2019). In the case of the *Hang*/handpan community, following digital 'migration' from subject-oriented digital platforms to online social networking domains, users have to develop a new way of connecting with a sea of wanderers with a multitude of interests. In an era in which mobile electronic communication technology has become ubiquitous, spontaneous self-curated digital self-images (selfies) become one of the simplest ways to publicise oneself to the world (Belk 2014b, cited by Ozansoy & Sağkaya 2019).

On social media, posting selfies with the *Hang*/handpan is perhaps the most effective way to signal one's identity a practitioner, and assist in identifying and connecting one with those who share a similar interest in the instrument. Nevertheless, a few more well-recognised *Hang*/handpan community practitioners eschew the idea of displaying the instrument in profile pictures on social media – for them it seems less of a priority (Fig. 6.13). It is likely that many community members can identify such individuals as part of the collective, with or without the visible presence of the *Hang*/handpan.

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[168] *Most popular social networks worldwide as of July 2021, ranked by number of active users (in millions)* | *statista,* last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/

[169] Launch year: Facebook in 2004; YouTube in 2005; Instagram in 2010



Figure 6.13 Facebook profile pictures of prominent *Hang*/handpan community figures. Screenshot by the author.

As noted previously, New Age subjects often perceive community engagement as ‘mirroring’ opportunities essential for the construction of subjectivity. Yet the idea of a mirroring property is not only evident in New Age discourse, but also presents itself in oSNSs studies, with users of such platforms regarding applications as an extension of the self, contributing to the externalisation and performance of this self: a 'mirror' by which the self can be known (Karahanna, Xu & Zhang 2015, cited by Ozansoy & Sağkaya 2019). In a sense, the ‘ego’, as mirrored by selfie-driven oSNSs, can be driven towards constant attention-seeking and narcissistic behaviour, succumbing to the pressure of increasing social appeal through the continuous production of self-enhancing or attention-grabbing content (Hawk, van den Eijnden, Regina, van Lissa, Casper, ter Bogt & Tom 2019). In the context of the *Hang*/handpan community, selfies serve several functions: they identify the user as an enthusiast of the instrument, establishing connections between individuals with common interests and assisting in the formation of an instrument-centric community. For some, such images can also function as advertisements opening up potential opportunities for monetising the instrument, whether through trading, performance, music selling, instrument repairs, sound healing sessions and so forth.

OSNSs culture encourages users to manipulate their social environments to create opportunities for self-enhancement which draw online positive feedback, and to attain ways of self-presentation which declare one’s supposed specialness (Hawk, van den Eijnden, Regina, van Lissa, Casper, ter Bogt & Tom 2019, p66). In this light, the current oSNSs era contributes to the demand for visually distinctive objects which attract attention. The relatively niche and ‘exotic’ looking *Hang*/handpan is ideal for this purpose. Informant Aversano claims that the *Hang*/handpan is ‘the perfect selfie instrument’ (2018, p.c.), because the image of the relatively rare, unfamiliar, UFO-looking music instrument

instantaneously arouses curiosity. The need for self-promotion, attention, and marketing of the self can be fulfilled by a simple selfie with the *Hang*/handpan.

The monetisation of the *Hang*/handpan in the age of oSNSs can be examined through the theoretical framework of the attention economy. The classical theory of the attention economy suggests that in a world rich in information, there is a scarcity of attention, from which the abundance of information occupies and distracts (Simon, 1969, cited by Hinz, van der Aalst, Weinhardt 2020). While the original theory proposes a way to re-evaluate attention and information within an economic model, scholars have elaborated upon such a theory by examining the ways in which attention on social media can be monetised, mainly through advertisements, entertainment (Goldhaber 1997; Davenport & Beck 2002; Nelson-Field 2020) and 'bottom-up' branding largely outside of the commercial imperatives of corporate media, such as the online fame of microcelebrities (Senft 2008; 2013; Gamson 2011; Markwick 2013, cited by Usher 2020).

The *Hang*/handpan 'microcelebrity', then, should not only be considered as a description of an individual, but also as representing a processual mind-set and set of performance practices constructing and defining the authenticity of a brand across online social platforms (Usher 2020). The 'microcelebrity' type deviates from the analysis of classic parasocial relationships, which often describes one-way emotional constructs in fandom towards television or cinema celebrities. The process of the *Hang*/handpan microcelebrity involves at the very least the illusion of a two-way relationship (Usher 2015, p308), in which a sense of obligation is formed to avoid the loss of in-group solidarity among the micropublic built upon the self-brand display. Prominent *Hang*/handpan microcelebrities, including players and makers, often actively engage in online community interactions outside the music realm (Fig. 6.14). Thus, the boundaries between microcelebrities and their followers are blurred, between which social media contents circulate alongside updates from family and friends (Senft 2008; 2013; Smith 2014, cited by Usher 2020). Followers are to generate a sense of continuous intimacy from being enmeshed in social media content and its 'temporality of permanent updating, of immediacy, and of instantaneity' (Jerslev 2016, p5239, cited by Usher 2020). In this light, *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts generally form what can be termed as a micropublic. Intimacy between *Hang*/handpan microcelebrities and *Hang*/handpan micropublics, and between members of the micropublics themselves, are likely to experience a sense of community. Such forms of self-branding work as instances of repressive ambience, and microcelebrities deliberately nurture parasociality among their followers (Usher 2020). As Goldhaber (1997) describes, money now flows along with attention. In this sense, consumer culture is ever-present within the *Hang*/handpan community in a slightly

opressive atmosphere, with microcelebrities putting on display a 'life best lived' aided by the instrument, which followers are encouraged to emulate (Usher 2020, p183).

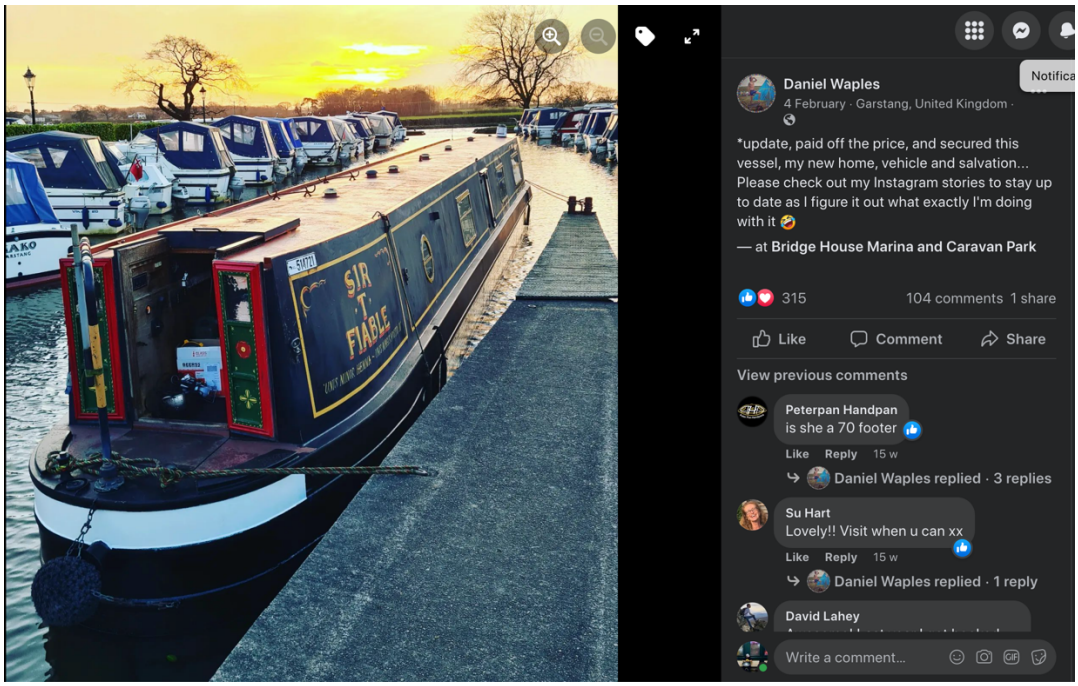


Figure 6.14 Waples updates followers on his purchase of a boat, 2022. Screenshot by the author.[170]

Whilst the history of the global dissemination of the *Hang*/handpan is, to some extent, absent from the corporate media and global marketplace, the mystique surrounding the instrument has granted certain individuals considerable attention and influence. In ostentatiously exhibiting all the markers of neo-nomadism, multiculturalism, New Age and shamanism on their profiles alongside the iconic and mysterious *Hang*/handpan, individuals have translated attention into likes, comments, shares, and ultimately, the purchase of commodities (Usher 2020, p184). The apparent authenticity of the most successful *Hang*/handpan microcelebrities has largely been constructed by early social media representations of musicking emphasised by visual representations of hypermobility and cultural symbols signifying spirituality, while to a certain degree removing emphasis upon musical virtuosity. As one of the most successful microcelebrities the community has ever produced, Waples often receives questions on why he is 'always smiling'.[171] Following Usher's new approach in microcelebrity theory, Waples' active social media representations and interactions as a

[170]Facebook post by Daniel Waples, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=3196081743952934&set=a.1546049068956218
[171]*The Hang Drum phenomenon,* last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02x4b3j

Hang/handpan player, are in fact professionalised performances of 'everydayness' and 'authenticity' (2020, p175). Waples, among other microcelebrities empowered by the *Hang*/handpan, has in a sense established the ultimate commodity in online social media for global *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts to consume. The ultimate commodity in this context, I argue, is not the *Hang*/handpan, but a life 'best' lived, (Usher 2020), a life in which the *Hang*/handpan plays a crucial role. Thus, microcelebrities of the *Hang*/handpan community present an alternative and relatively convenient fantasy which appears to be within reach of the average follower.

In the context of busking with the *Hang*/handpan, theorisations of the attention economy translate into both physical and digital domains. In order to gain and maintain attention which maximises the possibility of tipping by spectators, most buskers would commonly perform covers of highly popular main stream compositions (see e.g. Hanáková 2014; Parsons 2015; Kaul 2019; Horlor 2019a; 2019b; Ho, Au-Young & Au 2020). However, the curious appearance and significant sound of *Hang*/handpan excels in attracting the attention of passers-by, often leading to a rare situation in which the musical content of *Hang*/handpan music performances could be largely unfamiliar or improvised. At least for a period of time, unfamiliarity plays a significant role in generating a sense of spectacle in *Hang*/handpan performances. Waples claims that the *Hang*/handpan is 'captivating [in] the way it looks', and 'encourages people to share with friends' as a new discovery (2014).[172] From my own experience busking between 2015 to 2018, spectators would gather and anticipate breaks between performances in order to ask about the musical flying saucer and occasionally, inquire as to how they might acquire one themselves (Fig. 6.15).

[172] *DPT: Daniel Waples - Interview [Hand Pan/Hang Drum],* DPT, YouTube, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yxs-MB7eW1I&t=220s



Figure 6.15 Pedestrian making enquiries regarding *Hang*/handpan. New York, 2017. Photograph by the author.

Whilst busking with the *Hang*/handpan is indeed a musical activity, the early *Hang*/handpan microcelebrities would often amplify the exoticism of the instrument by deliberately rendering their own ethnicity ambiguous or cultivate a New Age appearance. Including Waples, these microcelebrities are often non-black individuals with dreadlock hairstyles and clothing which fits the image of a member of a 'non-national' tribe. Although such performances are often basic in technical competence, they are compensated by the curiosity generated by the ambiguous identities of both musician and music instrument, as well as the lack of a standard by which to adjudge and evaluate competence in this specific instrument. In this sense, street performances with the *Hang*/handpan are not only musical, but arguably, a way of alienating the performer by utilising mystical objects and signifiers of identity, creating a temporal spectacle of the Other which fascinates spectators (Hall 2001). Interestingly, this stereotypical representation of the *Hang*/handpan player, in some ways constructed by the early microcelebrities and a product of social media repressive ambience, has more recently been subject to mockery by community members. The classic example of such a lampooned stereotype is perhaps the male dreadlocked Caucasian *Hang*/handpan player (Fig 6.16), which often featured in some of the most popular memes on the Facebook *Handpan Memes! Page*.[173]

[173] *HandpanMemes,* Facebook, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/groups/HandpanMemes/media



Figure 6.16 Memes on the stereotypical representation of the *Hang*/handpan player. Illustration created by Xavier Tes.

6.6 Busking and the *Hang*/handpan

Scholarly interest on musical street performance (e.g. Hanáková 2014; Parsons 2015; Quilter & McNamara 2015; Breyley 2016; Williams 2016; Marina 2018; Kaul 2019; Horlor 2019a; 2019b; Ho, Au-Young & Au 2020) has illustrated that busking is relevant to understanding modern musical life and social life more generally. Busking with the use of the *Hang*/handpan can be described as a form of 'bottom-up' music performance (Hanáková 2014; Quilter & McNamara 2015; Marina 2018; Horlor 2019a), often accompanied with narratives of anti-authoritarianism (Breyley 2016), multiculturalism (Kaul 2019) and musical performances intertwined with the concept of gift economy (Horlor 2019b).

However, *Hang*/handpan ethnographic data suggests a crucial gap in understanding the nature of street performance, particularly following the advent of online social media technology. One of my key informants, Lai, terminated his full-time occupation in late 2015 to pursue a new musical career as a street performer with the handpan. Besides the common setup comprising of a musical instrument, portable stool, and basic amplification, Lai brings

along an advertising board displaying details of his Instagram, Facebook, and email (Fig. 6.17). This information is not only for the spectators physically present during the performance but also an essential preparation for future digital representations generated by spectators. Following the proposed notion of online social networking as a network which pressures users to constantly produce and display attention-grabbing content to increase social appeal (Hawk et al, 2019), passers-by are relentlessly searching for 'instahappy' situations.



Figure 6.17 Lai busking in Causeway Bay, Hong Kong, 2017. Photograph by the author.

The spectacles of busking, then, attract forms of attention encompassing appreciative audiences and pedestrians who have little to no interest in the performance but are rather in perpetual pursuit of material to create attention-grabbing content. As such, pedestrians are all potential online promoters of the musician in the era of online social networking. When busking in New York City subways in 2017, I quickly discovered that the local busking community had established a 'rule', in which tipping is required for the exchange of a photo opportunity. Passers-by snapping images of a busker without paying at least one US dollar, were considered to be in violation of busking protocol. Although *Hang*/handpan buskers in London and Hong Kong do not share such a practice, however, they are conscious of the attention value of such spectacles for online social media. Although busking, in many ways, aligns with Turino's (2008) idea of presentational performance – in which the role of

performer and spectator are clearly divided – the boundaries of sound producer and listeners in a busking setting are more complicated (Horlor 2019a): patterns of reciprocity often develop between the two roles (Horlor 2019b).

For example, enjoying a street performance may be free in monetary terms, but all spectators, tipping or not, have 'paid' attention. Regardless of whether the attention is monetised, buskers anticipate future 'rewards', and by 'slipping in' an advertisement of the branded self, they hope to profit from the performance in other ways. Returning to the significant case of Waples, in many ways this microcelebrity demonstrates the symbolic meaning of the gift economy in the context of busking, which can potentially be manipulated in oSNSs. By uploading his musical compositions and videos online for free while accepting donations, a practice which he claims 'honours the busking culture', he can lay claim to statements such as 'the internet is busking for him' (2015).[174] Informant Aversano has also commented upon this complex interrelation between busking and online social media culture, sharing his observations of when he witnessed Waples street performance in Bath before the microcelebrity of *Hang*/handpan had achieved global recognition. Waples would carefully position himself within tourist-filled streets, performing the same compositions repeatedly over an extended time, often for days. Aversano claims that Waples' primary audience was in fact the internet, and he implored passers-by to publish images or videos online (2018, p.c.). Following such a claim, one might suggest that Waples not only allows the internet to 'busk' for him, he is also physically busking for the internet.

Not only can the symbolic and agentive power of the *Hang*/handpan be identified in Waples' success, the development of his musical career further blurs the boundaries of the 'bottom-up' nature often identified within scholarly accounts of busking and online social media. This is because Waples and some of the most iconic microcelebrities found fame by busking with *Hang*/handpan, following which they made a swift transition to performing in relatively established music venues or global stadiums. With the new-found fame, *Hang*/handpan microcelebrities often receive brand endorsement,[175] or collaborate with professional video production companies to generate online content of a professional standard. To construe online social media microcelebrity-making as a 'bottom-up' process independent of mainstream corporate media practices is now recognized as a misconception (Usher 2020, p185), and perhaps the process of how individuals become celebrities by busking in the age

[174] *Handpan - Amplification of Vibration | Daniel Waples | TEDxCharlottesville*, TEDx Talks, YouTube, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuaGV7M1qeI&t=394s
[175] Daniel Waples was periodically endorsed by Terratonz which offers The Daniel Waples Signature Series

of online social media, and the complex power relations that inhere in such a process, need to be reconsidered.

If the *Hang/*handpan is perceived as holding the power to transforms one's personal brand into that of a microcelebrity (Senft 2013), then perhaps busking can be perceived as an excellent means by which one can promote this brand. Perhaps in the age of oSNSs technology, the practice of becoming a microcelebrity through the use of the *Hang/*handpan, which is essentially 'commitment to deploying and maintaining one's online identity as a branded good' (Senft 2013, p347), can be considered to constitute the basis for the development of micro communities and the identities they construct. In a sense, the *Hang/*handpan community is partially composed of a network of microcelebrities who position and situate themselves as subjects under consistent surveillance, while their micropublics constantly assess the subject's 'likes' and updates. Although the notion of self-branding is indeed an individual endeavour, only the branded self which successfully represents the general *Hang/*handpan collective identity is rewarded with attention and adulation. Successful *Hang/*handpan microcelebrities such as Waples, Kabeção, and Yuki Koshimoto, are all in some ways substantial representations of cosmopolitanism, positive affects and neo-nomadism, while espousing a certain degree of consonance with New Age narratives. All of them are highly fluent in the implementation of oSNSs technology, and have busked internationally, at least in their early careers. These are perhaps not coincidental components, but are fundamental to the community's identity and values.

6.5 Conclusion

The relationship between the *Hang/*handpan and New Ageism is suggested visually by the flying-saucer appearance of the instrument. Although *Hang/*handpan community participants are generally reluctant to describe themselves as New Agers, the ways in which assorted concepts have been borrowed from different worldviews and cultures align with New Age characteristics. Generally, New Age culture has been identified as being heavily contingent upon emphasising the self and a concomitant removal of ideas about collectivism. However, a cursory examination of the *Hang/*handpan community suggests that individualism and collectivism can be nurtured and reconciled simultaneously.

Hypermobility and digitalism are crucial factors in the emergence of neo-nomadism, a tendency which is not uncommon within the community. The *Hang/*handpan has in many ways empowered neo-nomads to develop economic strategies within situations of displacement. Such identity construction becomes ever more feasible in the age of oSNSs,

when neo-nomadic lifestyles can be broadcast on social media, potentially leading to further economic opportunities.

The *Hang/*handpan excels in drawing attention online and at physical sites. The relative newness of the instrument, with its distinctive and unmistakable appearance, encourages *Hang/*handpan amateurs to organize street performances for themselves. With the latest oSNSs technology, *Hang/*handpan buskers have found a new way to capitalise upon such performances. By drawing the attention of spectators when performing with the *Hang/*handpan, street performances are likely to become social media content for pedestrians constantly searching for materials to share online. Besides receiving tips from passers-by, *Hang/*handpan players can incorporate and monetise the attention received in other ways. Successful microcelebrities in the *Hang*/handpan community can be amateurs at a musical level, but they can attain considerable levels of success by receiving the attention of micropublics who recognize themselves in them.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This dissertation has set out the invention, development, distribution and implementation of the *Hang*/handpan, as well as the culture which has evolved around the instrument. Being perhaps the only instrument to have been invented thus far within the 21st century which has attracted a global following, the story of the *Hang*/handpan's success is deeply imbricated in questions and debates surrounding cultural imagination, hypermobility, and digitalism. As such, the ethnographic study of the dissemination of the *Hang*/handpan is a worthwhile endeavour, as the research highlights some of the key properties of our epoch. Chapter one laid out the following research questions: how did this innovative design, made by a small independent musical instrument workshop in Switzerland, become a worldwide phenomenon? What were the circumstances which led to the global adaptation of the *Hang* with the emergence of generic handpans around 2008? Who made initial use of the *Hang*/handpan, and in what musical and social contexts was it used? How did global communities and identities form around this musical instrument, and what are the specific qualities of these individuals and collectives?

This chapter summarises the research findings which directly answer these overriding research questions. These findings highlight some of the challenges and complications concerning musical instrument invention, globalisation, cultural rights, intellectual properties, and the construction of collective identity. The following sections provide the answers to these question, and thus the original contribution to knowledge made by this dissertation.

7.2 The global dissemination of the *Hang*/handpan

When the Trinidadian steelpan phenomenon reached Switzerland in the 1970s, it gradually inspired a wave of local participants to build, tune, and perform on such instruments. Among them were Felix Rohner, who became one of the founders of *PANArt Steelpan-Manufaktur AG* established in 1993, which would later rename itself as *PANArt.* In addition to steelpan manufacturing, *PANArt* experimented on both material and musical instrument development, and discovered musical properties in gas-nitrided steel, a material which they would later dub *Pang*, which would then receive patent protection. In 1999, world music percussionist Reto Weber visited *PANArt* and raised the idea of a metallic ghatam with musical notes. Rohner and Sabina Schärer, the sole instrument makers of *PANArt* at the time, attached two *Pang* material experiments together into a spherical instrument prototype. With this prototype as its base, the hand-struck, flying-saucer looking instrument was born. Rohner

and Schärer named it with the word for 'hand' in the Bernese dialect: *Hang (*plural: *Hanghang*).

Hanghang were sold via independent music shops and independent resellers worldwide until 2007, when *PANArt* decided that they would sell *Hanghang* exclusively and directly to customers who made enquiries by email. Later, they would only accept actual letters from interested parties. In the age of hypermobility, global *Hang* enthusiasts travelled, often internationally or even inter-continentally, to Bern in order to purchase the instrument. Despite the rapid growth in demand, *PANArt* gradually transformed from an institutionalised instrument manufacturer to a 'cottage' music instrument manufacturer, with Rohner and Schärer as the sole makers and developers of the *Hang.* This relatively unorthodox marketing approach for an outlandish-looking and highly niche instrument contributed greatly to the instrument's mystique as well as the excessive resale prices asked of *Hanghang. PANArt* began to introduce measures to control market speculation, mainly by requesting customers to sign an agreement not to resell the instrument for profit. The ways in which *Hang* was manufactured and sold arguably laid the foundation for the ethos of the community which would form around it, a collectivity which emphasises human interaction as a form of market control, at least superficially.

The unsatisfied *Hang* market and the high resale prices which the instrument commanded encouraged global DIY adaptations of the *Hang*, commonly referred to as handpans. Generally, handpan makers espouse a degree of mutual aid in assisting each other in the process of instrument and brand development, and in many ways exhibit the discernible influence of *PANArt's* marketing and trading strategies, which largely emphasise small-scale production, producer-customer interaction and proactive intervention in market speculation. While some handpan makers were once steelpan makers themselves, those without experience in steelpan making often began by studying the concept of steelpan construction. Handpan makers often purposefully introduce their own design quirks into their instruments so that they markedly differ from the *PANArt Hang.* However, some handpans came too close to the original, arguably leading to the escalation in tension between *PANArt* and handpan makers, which eventually culminated in legal disputes.

PANArt terminated the production of *Hang* in 2013 and developed and marketed new instruments built from their patented material *Pang.* These Pang Instruments generally produce relatively short sustains, and are only available in a specific musical scale. Meanwhile, the global handpan makers grew rapidly. In less than 20 years, some speculate that there are now more than 300 handpan makers worldwide, a range of producers which

provides substantial choices in material, number of notes, music scale, instrument sizes, and various technical and ornamental designs. Arguably, the global handpan maker explosion, together with the emergence of mass-produced handpans, has changed the handpan market and the associated community ethos. From approximately 2017, the community became less active in monitoring resale prices, since profiting by reselling became more difficult unless a particular *Hang/*handpan was considered rare. Acquiring a handpan became easier, and the phenomenon of customers having to join long waiting lists for a handpan became less common.

Despite the association with the Trinidadian steelpan, the implementation of the *Hang/*handpan has little to no linkage with the long and rich history of the Trinidadian carnival culture. The relatively new and 'fool-proof' *Hang/*handpan invites players to explore ways in which the instrument can be played, and create new musical contexts in which the *Hang/*handpan can be implemented. Not only does the diatonic design enable one to reach a certain level of music competency relatively quickly, amateur players feel less anxious in playing the new *Hang/*handpan because of the lack of fixed musical expectations associated with the instrument. It is not uncommon for *Hang/*handpan players to generate musical sounds by randomly striking notes on the instrument. Some amateur players would further their development by composing, recording, busking, and engaging in other forms of music performance which were previously considered unattainable during their encounters with other more demanding instruments.

Within the short history of the *Hang/*handpan, the instrument has been utilised in an extensive variety of musical and even non-musical applications. Bithell's notion of the 'natural voice movement' (2014) can be identified in some of these applications, where amateur *Hang/*handpan players implement both the instrument and their untrained voices in popular song adaptations, folk style music compositions, or chanting along to the sound of the instrument. More advanced vocal techniques drawn from different cultures, namely yodelling, *Khoomei*, *Konnakol* and beatboxing, have also been documented. It is also worth mentioning here that other instruments considered, alongside the handpan, to be 'icons' of world music, namely the didjeridu, cajón, asalato, are often found alongside the *Hang/*handpan in performance.

The use of the *Hang/*handpan has been appropriated for the purposes of 'sound healing', something which sets it apart from most other instruments. The belief that sound has healing properties is largely influenced by the New Age worldview, which seeks alternative ideas outside of Western modernity for therapeutic use. Generally, the sound produced by

instruments such as the singing bowl, didjeridu, gong, and *Hang*/handpan are believed to carry healing properties. New Age subjects draw connections between these instruments and often employ them in tandem with other purportedly beneficial practices for the care of the self, such as meditation and yoga.

Although the *Hang*/handpan largely attracts music amateurs, there is a growing hierarchy between amateurs and professionals within the community. Skilled players boasting a relatively developed level of musical proficiency have begun to explore ways to capitalise upon the instrument and monetise their activity. They are not only regular performers internationally, but some are also often involved in training workshops, production of tutorial DVDs and online lessons teaching the instrument; some have even begun to develop new notation systems targeting students with little to no training in reading sheet music. These *Hang*/handpan educators are often virtuosi themselves in other areas, perhaps with a background as drummers or percussionists; thus it is not uncommon for them to borrow pedagogic ideas and techniques taken from percussion teaching. Naturally, music amateurs within the community are the crucial target audience in this developing education system. In some ways, such a system shows the maturity of the *Hang*/handpan as a music instrument overall. It also establishes expectations of how the instrument should be performed musically. Hence, the advantages that *Hang*/handpan amateurs enjoy, tinkering with the instrument with relatively little anxiety about received expectations, may gradually change over time.

Online social platforms and instrument-centric festivals are largely responsible for the construction and maintenance of the collective identity of the international *Hang*/handpan community. *PANArt*'s highly selective marketing choices and the lack of information regarding the *Hang* more generally have in many ways enforced an exchange culture. The online *Hang*/handpan community 'elders' (an 'official' title used on the message board *Handpan.org*) often play a significant role in explaining the history of the instrument, assisting new members in acquiring it, as well as being central to the circulation and maintenance of the community ethos. They are especially active in monitoring the secondary *Hang*/handpan market and overseeing the exchange of *Hang*/handpan-making knowledge between prosumers, ensuring that a certain sense of egalitarianism is generated within the community. While mass-produced handpans sold without emphasising producer-consumer connections have gradually emerged, the community often discourages consumption of such products, and handpan makers who remain loyal to hand-crafted, small-scale production are more likely to be endorsed by the community.

*Hang/*handpan festivals serve multiple essential functions for the community. In the early years of HOUK, international *Hang* enthusiasts gathered for the appreciation of this niche instrument. It was not uncommon for participants without a *Hang* to attend and to experience the instrument in person. Gradually, along with the development of handpan, similar festivals became important sites for instrument exchange, promotion, and repair. Because these instruments are often tuned to a specific musical scale, musical ensembles are relatively difficult to facilitate in general. Often, festival practitioners would abandon their instrument entirely and interact with each other through the pursuit of other social activities. HOUK and HOUSA demonstrate a sense of egalitarianism in which organisers, internationally-recognised virtuosi and amateur players interact socially, and when possible, musically. But performance opportunities are not restricted to relatively accomplished players and it is not uncommon for amateur players to perform in these festivals. Activities aligning with ideas around self-healing – for example, sound bath sessions and *qigong* workshops – are often seen within the festival programmes.

7.3 The formation of the global *Hang/*handpan community

Festivals and online platforms are also sites in which collective identities are in part constructed and maintained. Here I have identified three important aspects of the *Hang/*handpan community identity: first, the community is constituted through the producer-consumer connection. *PANArt'*s relatively unconventional instrument trading protocol in the age of hypermobility reconnects producer and consumer, which contributes to negotiations often absent in the global consumer market. This leads to a community ethos influenced by negotiations of economy and ethics. International handpan makers, largely prosumers of the *Hang,* generally endorse such humanistic interactions in the trade of instruments. While there are *Hang/*handpan resellers who appear to violate the community ethos, these activities generally occur outside community surveillance.

Secondly, the *Hang/*handpan community is an affective community which places great emphasis upon 'positive' affects, while generally avoiding interactions which are deemed 'negative'. Public discourses regarding the *Hang/*handpan and its community are often associated with gratitude, inspiration, egalitarianism, various 'positive' life changing testimonies, and affirmations of its healing properties. Although the instrument has been successfully monetized, and often fetches a relatively high value, the community often associates the *Hang/*handpan with a type of gift economy, an insistence which is even tinged with a certain degree of anti-capitalist sentiments. Criticism towards relatively prominent handpan makers or community members is largely absent from public forums frequented by

the community. These criticisms or seemingly ‘negative’ affects are generally reserved for personal conversations, where individuals are less reluctant to express critical positions towards the community’s ethos, lack of diversity, or the quality of some overpriced instruments.

Thirdly, the *Hang/*handpan community can also be evaluated through the use of a framework offered by music cosmopolitanism. The community largely welcomes cultural diversity, and the highly niche instrument has drawn a crowd of multicultural, border-crossing followers from an early stage. I suggest that at the heart of this musical cosmopolitanism is the nebulous cultural identity of the instrument itself, with its 'non-national' and deterritorialised nature. Despite the continuing efforts of *Hang/*handpan makers to emphasise the influence of the Trinidadian steelpan upon their own productions, the *Hang/*handpan is arguably caught in the paradoxical position of not being accepted by Trinidadian culture while being unable to disassociate itself from its Trinidadian cultural heritage. This complex dilemma surrounding the ambiguity of its cultural identity creates a vacuum for which community participants compensate largely by imagining the association between *Hang/*handpan and ‘world’ cultures, while the perplexing questions over whether the handpan is an homage to or a rip-off of Trinidadian steelpan culture is quietly avoided.

If the musical cosmopolitanism framework generally identifies the ways in which a particular collective embraces the music of ‘others’, then musical cosmopolitanism in the case of the *Hang/*handpan community often actively creates and imagines the ‘other’ that it defines its identity against. I argue that there are three main outcomes of such a ‘non-rooted’ imagination of identity. First, the *Hang/*handpan community from the West is largely a European/American Caucasian-centric form of cosmopolitanism which often situates the *Hang/*handpan within a fantasmatic frame coloured by a certain degree of Orientalism, with the ‘East’ serving as a source of both cultural and spiritual inspiration, while at the same time posing a threat to the ‘Western’ artisanal *Hang/*handpan culture. Next, in the East, the *Hang/*handpan is conversely often associated with fantasies of the West, where the ‘West’ is imagined as the origin of a utopian community ethos, with the mystical *PANArt* and white community participants as the main factors behind such a phenomenon. Finally, and perhaps owing to the community's complex entanglements with the Trinidadian steelpan culture, black community participants are generally rare, and at the time of writing there have been no notable examples of *Hang/*handpan communities which feature a majority of black participants of which I am aware. Such phenomena undermine the idea of ethnic diversity which *Hang/*handpan musical cosmopolitanism generally celebrates. To complete the ‘non-national’ cosmopolitan imagination, the obvious lack of black participants is sometimes

remedied by images in which the *Hang/*handpan and black figures are present together. However, these images might in fact evidence a problematic white cosmopolitanism of which many participants appear unaware.

The global reception of the *Hang/*handpan is in many ways entwined with the global New Age phenomenon. Not only do New Age subjects affirm that the *Hang/*handpan has healing properties, but also the nebulous cultural identity of the instrument lends itself to the tendency of New Age practitioners to construct subjectivity in a haphazard bricolage fashion, piecing together a pastiche of elements drawn from disparate cultures and systems of reference. The dissemination of the *Hang/*handpan also corresponds to the development of New Age capitalist markets and entrepreneurship, tendencies which compel New Age subjects to seek self-enhancement and identity construction through conspicuous consumption.

In many ways, the attention-grabbing appearance of the handpan, its 'mysterious' and obscure cultural identity, the relative ease with which it can be learnt as well as the fact that one can musick with the instrument free from the anxiety one might face studying instruments with a steeper learning curve and inherited standards of performance and competence, have all contributed to the instrument becoming an attractive choice for amateurs eager to monetize their musical activity. I suggest that – combined with the inherent sonic properties of the instrument – the reciprocity and networks of mutual aid cultivated by the community encourage participants to adopt neo-nomadic social patterns. The community generally displays a certain degree of mutual support for *Hang/*handpan buskers who transform situations of physical displacement into economic strategies. Unlike classical diaspora, the *Hang/*handpan neo-nomad is relatively reluctant to associate the self with national belonging. Instead, physical displacement, reinforced by the playing of a deterritorialised, spaceship-shaped musical instrument, is treated as an opportunity for the deconstruction and rediscovery of the self, with explorations such as these being the conduit by which participants of this relatively niche community bond with one another.

Identity construction among *Hang/*handpan community participants is largely inseparable from emergent trends in the social media landscape. Such trends create narcissistic user behaviour, compelling subjects to constantly search for attention-grabbing online content. Representations of the *Hang/*handpan regularly index counter-cultural iconography which can be recycled and re-cited online for drawing attention, and for sculpting one's online 'self-brand', and the spectacle of performing the *Hang/*handpan in public spaces provides promotional material which can be reused *ad infinitum* in the digital era.

Again, social media reveals the complex interplay of individual subjectivity and collective identity that *Hang*/handpan participants negotiate on a daily basis. Although social media behaviour emphasises the formation and articulation of the self, the relatively niche community of global *Hang*/handpan participants are often in active pursuit of communal bonds in the sea of social media users. Some of the pioneers in forging the connection between their *Hang*/handpan performances, signifiers of identity and the ethos which the community espouses have drawn large online followings among fellow community participants and social media users attracted to the instrument more generally. This online content arguably contributed a great deal to generating consumer desire for the instrument and the lifestyle it appeared to connote despite, at least in the beginning, producers investing very little in promotional advertising and the relatively rare instrument often not being available in music stores.

7.4 Research limitations

This research has been partly disrupted by the COVID pandemic in 2020. Lockdown protocols disrupted my work when university facilities such as the postgraduate centres and libraries were no longer accessible. The writing of the thesis was also made a good deal more challenging by the physical and mental impact that the pandemic had on me personally level. When my thesis was left in limbo and I and found myself drastically falling behind the research project schedule that I had set myself, I relocated to Hong Kong and gradually resumed a regular writing pattern. In 2020, when *Hang*/handpan festivals, gatherings, busking, and international travelling were restricted or completely cancelled, my collection of ethnographic data, by necessity, shifted entirely online. Fortunately, the thesis benefited from the extensive data collected physically before the lockdown. At least half of the research period was not dependent upon digital sources, and it was during this period that I established bonds of trust with key informants. These informants, whom I interacted with physically before the lockdown, continued to support and contribute the dissertation through online personal conversations and by providing digital copies of evidence in support of my arguments.

At times, some of these informants disclosed valuable insights into the inner life of a community participant, providing accounts that were significantly more critical than those they might have shared in public encounters. Some online personal conversations from informants located in the UK and US have suggested that the *Hang*/handpan community has perhaps reached a critical stage, with some long-time participants beginning to express

complicated feelings towards the community, which I have argued here is premised almost exclusively upon positive affects. These contributors to the construction of the *Hang*/handpan community have professed to losing a certain degree of passion towards such utopian ideals, with relative newcomers now taking up important roles, such as serving as moderators of social media pages. My experience in engaging *Hang*/handpan informants suggests they are generally more expressive in festivals, handpan workshops, or locations where they feel relatively at ease. However, with the institution of COVID lockdowns and my decision to reposition myself in Hong Kong at this crucial stage of community development, it is no longer possible to engage with these informants physically in Europe or the US. The dissertation can only speculate that if the *Hang*/handpan community is reaching a significant point of transition, the signs of such a transformation would be relatively easy to identify in a co-located setting such as HOUK or HOUSA.

Although the online questionnaire conducted in 2019 was primarily designed for supplementary reference, the tremendous amount of responses that it generated prompted me to rethink the ways in which the open-ended questions could have been improved. The significance of these questions became even more evident to me when the research was affected by the global pandemic and physical ethnographic fieldwork became increasingly challenging, meaning the questionnaire took on a more significant role than I had originally expected. Questions which were designed to shed light upon how the *Hang*/handpan is imagined, the ethos of the community which has formed around it, as well as the collective and individual forms of identity construction which it has occasioned, have altered the direction of the dissertation to some degree. During lockdown, when physical participatory-observation was not feasible, I was made to rethink how the questionnaire might have been designed differently, if I had known that it would play a greater role in the thesis.

In some sense, my ethnographic and auto-ethnographic study of the *Hang*/handpan community began in 2013, and has stretched across a duration of almost 10 years, concluding with the completion of the dissertation in 2023. It was indeed a long participatory-observation period, but at times, even this protracted dedication to ethnographic research felt limited and brief. Although much of the instrument's history and evidence of the social history of its community are available in digital sites, and informants with many years of experience often generously share stories of social events which happened prior to my participation, I continued to feel a profound lack in terms of actual physical engagement with the community. This was exacerbated by the fact that the year I began participatory-observation of the community was also the year when *PANArt* terminated the production of *Hang*. Thus, to me, some of the most exciting developments surrounding the *Hang*

phenomenon took place almost entirely prior to my own direct involvement. I was able to acquire a handpan due to the growing supply of the instrument, and the first time I attended HOUK in 2016, *Hang/*handpans were scattered around the festival. This was very different from the first HOUK, where several festival-goers had to play the same *Hang,* given that there was no other choice. Seemingly, long-time participants have countless stories to tell regarding the 'good old days' of the community, and it is challenging, if not impossible, for me to get inside the affinity group of these experienced *Hang/*handpan community members for a holistic understanding of the community in this 'golden age'.

As a global phenomenon, the geographical specificity of the dissertation has been largely determined by the logistical limitations of multi-sited fieldwork. While there has been no previous ethnographic study of the *Hang/*handpan, positioning myself mainly in London offered distinct advantages in terms of capturing thick descriptions of *Hang/*handpan culture. Not only was it fairly feasible to travel to Farnham, Surrey for the 'authentic' HOUK experience annually, there was an almost constant slew of *Hang/*handpan gatherings, workshops, or busking activities taking place in London. When the ethnographic work for the dissertation came to its conclusion, subsidiary physical fieldwork for the examination of the *Hang/*handpan reached Bristol, Cornwall, Manchester, Leeds and Wales within the UK. Outside the UK, fieldwork has been conducted in Nuremberg, Warsaw, New York City, Montréal, North Carolina, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

Although the dissertation covers a number of far-reaching case studies across ethnographic sites, there are locations which I simply could not find the resources and time in which to participate. Bueraheng kept me well-informed regarding the highly exclusive (45 participants only) *PanSiam Thailand Handpan Gathering* which took place in a dream-like tree house located in Chiang Mai in early 2019. I should also note here that around the end of 2018 my mobility was largely restricted by my financial burden. While there are seemingly a growing number of gatherings and festivals happening internationally (at least 35 were reported before the global pandemic), maintaining a highly active and mobile community of *Hang/*handpan enthusiasts does indeed require a certain amount of capital.

The ominous threat of mass-produced Chinese handpans, which was subject to so much paranoiac speculation in the past, has now become a reality. Not only are handpans now manufactured in Chinese factories, there are increasing opportunities for European handpan makers on the mainland as employed tuners and trainers, with pan players also being invited to perform and teach. There are now handpan institutions targeting children, where the instruments are taught in a relatively systematic fashion. While there are DIY artisan

handpan makers in China who are clearly influenced by European-American handpan culture, a cursory glance at the Chinese handpan milieu reveals that there are cases in which handpans are manufactured, sold, and taught in ways which are very different from those animated by the communal ethos of the 'West' as I have laid it out here. Although the Chinese handpan culture is apparently complex, unique and influential upon the international *Hang*/handpan community, the ethnographic work of this thesis unfortunately does not encompass the fortunes of the instrument in this new landscape.

The ethnographic limitations of the dissertation restrict its understanding of the *Hang*/handpan community to the sociality of English-speaking European-American participants. Chris Ng has mentioned that there are online communities dedicated to the discussion of the *Hang*/handpan in Russian and Hebrew entirely (2017, p.c.). *Pantam*, rather than handpan, is the term which is popularly used within these regions, and this fact perhaps signifies or suggests a musicking culture rather different than that of the protagonist of this dissertation.

7.5 Further investigation of the *Hang*/handpan

Having acknowledged the limitations of this research, I suggest several directions for possible future research. We are now situated on the precipice of a drastic transformation after only 22 years since the birth of the *PANArt Hang.* Not only is the handpan currently mass produced in several factories in China, but it is also sold by mega digital outlets such as Amazon. The handpan is now a trendy product available among some of the largest music instrument manufacturer in the world, such as *Pearl*, and interestingly, *Yamaha Singapore*. Advertisements of the branded handpans are increasingly common. Given all of these developments, we can raise a number of corresponding questions. How is the handpan currently advertised? How is it different than the promotion of the instrument through the activity of social media microcelebrities? How does the new wave of mass-produced handpans and the global distribution network responsible for their circulation affect the *Hang*/handpan community? Is the *Hang*/handpan's emphasis upon direct connections between producers and consumers currently at stake? How does the *Hang*/handpan community respond to this global market force? Is a different instrument-centric community emerging from the mass production of the handpan?

Bewilderingly, after having ceased production for almost 10 years, the *PANArt Hang* has made a discreet return, and is now described as 'still built by *PANArt* tuners'.[176] Seemingly, this '5th generation' *Hang* comes in only one sound model. What is the reason behind the return of the *Hang?* How has the *Hang*/handpan community responded to this new generation *Hang?* How does the corporate philosophy of the company account for this latest *Hang?* How have previously-expressed concerns over the 'elevating sound' of the *Hang* and the narcotic effects it can have on its users reflected on the new design? Can the latest *Hang* be played in an ensemble setting with other Pang Instruments?

Since the German court ruling which ratified and enforced the protection of *PANArt's* intellectual copyright in 2020 and the *Ayasa Instruments* incident of 2021, the tension between *PANArt* and handpan makers continues to grow. According to the *Handpan Community United* newsletter released in July 2022,[177] these copyright and patent protections are now being reviewed and challenged by legal representatives. As a result of the re-examination of the US patent claims on the nitrided materials, *PANArt* abandoned the U.S. patent in October of 2021. These legal contestations between *PANArt* and handpan makers are indeed critical for the general development of the instrument and community, which beg further scholarly examination.

While the *Hang*/handpan community identity is largely premised upon a diffusion of 'positive' affects at the expense of negative ones, such a focus can lead to disappointment, as some of my informants have suggested. Two such informants, Rusty James and Chris Ng, were both highly active *Hang*/handpan enthusiasts and relatively important community contributors in the past, but have now begun to withdraw themselves from the community, digitally and physically. While James is now seemingly detached from the entire *Hang*/handpan community, Ng only interacts with a very selective group of community members and does not speak of his 'anti-capitalism' and egalitarian leanings with the community. It is not uncommon for relatively experienced community participants to opine that the myth and magic of the instrument has been fading away for a while. Perhaps this is particularly salient and true now that the *Hang*/handpan community ethos and structure appear to be undergoing significant changes, though this is purely speculation on my part without sufficient evidence. The mentioned changes in corporate direction, escalating legal disputes, shifting production and distribution trends and the disillusionment and

[176] *Hang® Sculpture,* last accessed 20 February 2023, https://panart.ch/en/instruments/sound-sculpture-hang
[177] Handpan Community United newsletter, last accessed 20 February 2023, https://hcu.global/newsletter-july-2022/

disenchantment exhibited by various longstanding community members are all deserving of further investigation.

7.6 Coda

We have arguably entered into a global shift of interest towards 'foreign', non-Western acoustic instruments in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. If we consider the cases of the revival of the Edo period jinashi shakuhachi, the increasing culturally significance of the jew's harp in international contexts, the soaring global interest in the didjeridu which has inspired numerous modern applications and instrument designs, all of these examples reflect the growing demand in the West for sound objects which symbolise primitivism, post-modernism or anti-modernism. In order to investigate this Western cultural turn and the possible anxiety that lies behind it, one possible way of conducting such a study is to make sense of the distinctive social and ideological features which defined the millennium as it approached its close, and how it is still impacting the current social conditions.

Anxieties regarding subjectivity, fear of impending loss, and even apocalyptic aspirations in anticipation of a new beginning were all observed at the threshold of the New Millennium. The post-millennium subject, then, can be said to have been born in the wake of disappointment, having suffered the realisation of the fact that the threshold was relatively insignificant, with there being but more of the same following the advent of the millennium. However, one might argue that this disappointment and sadness, instead of proving to be debilitating, could spark the urgency to seek or even create changes on the part of certain individuals. Can millennial tensions such as these partially contribute to the modern post-identitarian predicament? How significant is it that the demand for the flying-saucer-like *Hang* appeared precisely after the millennium? Whilst the *Hang*/handpan community is rife with New Agers and their proliferation of narratives of self-discovery and self-transformation, my research did not gather direct ethnographic evidence linking the desire for the *Hang* with millennial tension. Given that the *Hang* is the only acoustic instrument to have been invented and to have successfully engendered a global demand during the early phase of this millennium, having been described in some quarters as the 'new instrument of the millennium',[178] the historical and social frame of the millennium might prove to be a fruitful one to work with for future research endeavours.

[178] *Welcome on Hang-Music.Com,* last accessed 20 February 2023, https://www.hang-music.com/index.php

The case of the dissemination of the *Hang/*handpan demonstrates the complexity of examining the 'global flow' of a cultural commodity in our time. Similar to how Knowles describes the material biography of the flip-flop, the notion of 'global flow' to some degree simplifies the essential circumstances, individual desires and singular material human efforts which culminate in the dissemination of the *Hang/*handpan. In the case of *PANArt's Hang* and the global marketplace*,* there is indeed a multiplicity of negotiations, tensions, contestations and even 'anti-flow' measures at play, while the circumstances, desires and efforts of the Trinidadian steelpan community and global handpan community often interacts with the *Hang* phenomenon in curious and unique ways. While the tension between *PANArt* and the handpan community continues to escalate, I often contemplate the role of *PANArt* in the globalisation of the handpan. It is not possible to ignore the Trinidadian influence upon the invention of the *Hang,* but it remains imperative and productive to recognise that the implementation of the instrument and the culture constructed around it are distinctly different than the carnival culture from which it derives. That is, the *Hang/*handpan precipitated a unique and unprecedented instrument-centric culture. The cultural imagination that *PANArt* pioneered should be respected, and perhaps, to a certain degree, protected.

Ultimately, I argue here that because of the ambiguity (both deliberate and unintended) of the instrument's cultural identity, its ease of learning and the forms of subjectivity and social activity that it appears to encourage. In some ways, the *Hang* succeeded in creating a sense of indigeneity with its back-to-basics architecture, raw material, 'pure' sonic properties and organic means of distribution which places an accent upon direct producer-consumer connections, as well as the appropriation of foreign scale systems and the imaginations of rich 'world' cultures that correspond to and accompany these exotic tunings. These are all essential features provided by the *Hang* in harmony with the fashion for pre-and-post-modern world views. Yet, paradoxically, the *Hang* is a product of Western modernism. The 'fool-proof' design, the integration of musical systems from foreign cultures into a singular Western equal temperament frame, the scientific research into the material *Pang*, the 'golden' 1:2:3 ratio of frequency in tuning notes, instrument and material copyrights and patent protection, the utilisation of foreign instrument construction ideas, are all consonant with discourses of modernity. In this sense, the *Hang* is concomitantly primitive and progressive, melancholic and futuristic, pre-modern and modern, an object in between time and cultures.

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Appendices

1. First generation *Hang* sound models

No.	Name	Ding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Aeolian	A3	D4	E4	F4	G4	A4	Bb4	C5	D5
2	Ake Bono	G3	C4	D4	Eb4	G4	Ab4	C5	D5	Eb5
3	Yue-Diao /Banshiki-Cho	F3	C4	Eb4	F4	Ab4	Bb4	C5	Eb5	F5
4	Bayati	A3	D4	E*4	F4	G4	A4	Bb4	C5	D5
5	Dorian	G3	C4	D4	Eb4	F4	G4	A4	Bb4	C5
6	Harmonic minor	A3	D4	E4	F4	G4	A4	Bb4	C#5	D5
7	Hijaz	A3	D4	Eb4	F#4	G4	A4	Bb4	C5	D5
8	Hijaz kar	A3	D4	Eb4	F#4	G4	A4	Bb4	C#5	D5
9	Hungarian major	A3	C4	D4	F4	Eb4	Gb4	Ab4	A4	C5

10	Huzam	A3	D4	F4	F#4	G4	A4	B4	C#5	D5
11	Ionian	F3	Bb3	C4	D4	Eb4	F4	G4	A4	Bb4
12	Kokin-Choshi	G3	C4	Db4	F4	G4	Bb4	C5	Db5	F5
13	Kourd-Atar /Todi	A3	D4	Eb4	F4	G#4	A4	Bb4	C#5	D5
14	Lydian	F3	Bb3	C4	D4	E4	F4	G4	A4	Bb4
15	Yu-Diao /Minor Pentatonic	G3	C4	Eb4	F4	G4	Bb4	C5	Eb5	F5
16	Neveseri	A3	D4	Eb4	F4	Gb4	A4	Bb4	C5	Db5
17	Niavent	A3	D4	E4	F4	G#4	A4	Bb4	C#5	D5
18	Nirz Rast	G3	C4	D4	E*4	F4	G4	A*4	Bb4	C5
19	Gong-Diao /Pentatonic C	G3	C4	D4	E4	G4	A4	C5	D5	E5
20	Zhi-Diao /Pentatonic F	F3	C4	D4	F4	G4	A4	C5	D5	F5
21	Pelog	G3	C4	+125 Cts	+266 Cts	+563 Cts	+676 Cts	+800 Cts	+965 Cts	+1220 Cts
22	Purvi	A3	D4	Eb4	F#4	G#4	A4	Bb4	C#5	D5
23	Pygmy	G3	C4	D4	Eb4	G4	Bb4	C5	D5	Eb5

24	Rast	G3	C4	D4	E*4	F4	G4	A4	B*4	C5
25	Rumanikos	G3	C4	D4	Eb4	F#4	G4	A4	Bb4	C5
26	Sabah	A3	D4	E4	F4	Gb4	A4	Bb4	C5	C#5
27	Sadjagrama	G3 +9Cts	C4	D4 -36Cts	Eb4 -27Cts	F4 -9Cts	G4 +9Cts	A4 -27Cts	Bb4 -18Cts	C5
28	Segiah	A3	D4	F4	F#4	G4	A4	Bb4	C#5	D5
29	Sho	G3	C4	D4	Eb4	F4	G4	A4	C5	D5
30	Slendro	G3	C4	+218 Cts	+473 Cts	+721 Cts	+954 Cts	+1213 Cts	+1458 Cts	+1695 Cts
31	Blues	G3	C4	Eb4	F4	F#4	G4	Bb4	C5	Eb5
32	Goonkali	G3	C4	Db4	F4	G4	A4b	C5	Db5	F5
33	Iwato	F3	C4	Db4	F4	Gb4	Bb4	C5	Db5	F5
34	Kumoi	G3	C4	D4	Eb4	G4	A4	C5	D5	Eb5
35	Locrian	F3	C4	Db4	Eb4	F4	Gb4	Ab4	Bb4	C5
36	Madhyama-grama	F3	C4	D4 -36Cts	Eb4 -27Cts	F4 -9Cts	G4 -45Cts	A4 -27Cts	Bb4 -18Cts	C5
37	Magen Abot	Bb3	D4	Eb4	F4	Gb4	Ab4	Bb4	C#5	D5

38	Melog /Selisir	F3	A3	Bb3	C4	E4	F4	A4	Bb4	C5
39	Mixolydian	G3	C4	D4	E4	F4	G4	A4	Bb4	C5
40	Overtone Scale	G3	C4	E4 - 14Cts	G4 +2Cts	Bb4 - 31Cts	C5	D5 +4Cts	E5 - 14Cts	F5 +51Cts
41	Noh	F3	Bb3	C4	Eb4	F4	F#4	G4	A4	Bb4
42	Phrygian	G3	C4	Db4	Eb4	F4	G4	Ab4	Bb4	C5
43	Pyeong Jo	F3	C4	D4	F4	A4	Bb4	C5	D5	F5
44	Shang-Diao	F3	Bb3	C4	Eb4	F4	Ab4	Bb4	C5	Eb5
45	Zokuso	F3	C4	Db4	F4	Gb4	Ab4	C5	Db5	F5

* = 1 quarter tone lower

Cts = Cents (1200 Cts = 1 octace, 100 Cts = 1 semitone)

2. *Low Hang* sound models

Name	Ding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
High Voice (8 tone fields in the circle)									
Gong-Diao	F3	Bb3	C4	D4	F4	G4	Bb4	C5	D5
Shang-Diao	F3	Bb3	C4	Eb4	F4	Ab4	Bb4	C5	Eb5
Yue-Diao	F3	C4	Eb4	F4	Ab4	Bb4	C5	Eb5	F5

Zhi-Diao	F3	C4	D4	F4	G4	A4	C5	D5	F5
Yu-Diao	F3	Bb3	Db4	Eb4	F4	Ab4	Bb4	Db5	Eb5
Ake Bono-Joshi	F3	Bb3	C4	Db4	F4	Gb4	Bb4	C5	Db5
Iwato-Joshi	F3	C4	Db4	F4	Gb4	Bb4	C5	Db5	F5
Goonkali	F3	C4	Db4	F4	G4	Ab4	C5	Db5	F5
Pygmy	F3	Bb3	C4	Db4	F4	Ab4	Bb4	C5	Db5
Pyeong Yo	F3	C4	D4	F4	A4	Bb4	C5	D5	F5
Kumoi-Joshi	F3	Bb3	C4	Db4	F4	G4	Bb4	C5	Db5
Kokin-Joshi	F3	C4	Db4	F4	G4	Bb4	C5	Db5	F5
Zokuso-Joshi	F3	C4	Db4	F4	Gb4	Ab4	C5	Db5	F5
Melog	F3	A3	Bb3	C4	E4	F4	A4	Bb4	C5

Low Voice (7 tone fields in the circle)

Gong-Diao	F3	G3	A3	C4	D4	F4	G4	A4
Shang-Diao	F3	G3	Bb3	C4	Eb4	F4	G4	Bb4
Yue-Diao	F3	Ab3	Bb3	Db4	Eb4	F4	Ab4	Bb4
Zhi-Diao	F3	G3	Bb3	C4	D4	F4	G4	Bb4
Yu-Diao	F3	Ab3	Bb3	C4	Eb4	F4	Ab4	Bb4
Ake Bono-Joshi	F3	G3	Ab3	C4	Db4	F4	G4	Ab4

Iwato-Joshi	F3	Gb3	Bb3	B3	Eb4	F4	Gb4	Bb4
Goonkali	F3	Gb3	Bb3	C4	Db4	F4	Gb4	Bb4
Pygmy	F3	G3	Ab3	C4	Eb4	F4	G4	Ab4
Pyeong Yo	F3	G3	Bb3	D4	Eb4	F4	G4	Bb4
Kumoi-Joshi	F3	G3	Ab3	C4	D4	F4	G4	Ab4
Kokin-Joshi	F3	Gb3	Bb3	C4	Eb4	F4	Gb4	Bb4
Zokuso-Joshi	F3	Gb3	Bb3	B3	Db4	F4	Gb4	Bb4

3. First generation *Hang* sound model variants

No.	Name	Ding	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
17	Niavent	G3	C4	D4	Eb4	F#4	G4	Ab4	B4	C5
22	Purvi	Ab	C	Db	E	F#	G	Ab	B	C
29	Sho	A3	C4	D4	Eb4	F4	G4	A4	C5	D5
35	Locrian	E3	B3	C4	D4	E4	F4	G4	A4	B4
36	Madhyama-grama	G3	C4	D4 -36Cts	Eb4 -27Cts	F4 -9Cts	G4 -45Cts	A4 -27Cts	Bb4 -18Cts	C5
40	Overtone Scale	Bb3	D4	Eb4	F4	Gb4	Ab4	Bb4	C#5	D5
41	Noh	G3	C4	D4	F4	G4	G#4	A4	B4	C5

42	Phrygian	F#3	B3	C4	D4	E4	F#4	G4	A4	B4
45	Zokuso	E3	B3	C4	E4	F4	G4	B4	C5	E5

Cts = Cents (1200 Cts = 1 octace, 100 Cts = 1 semitone)

4. Second generation *Hang* sound models

D3	A3	Bb3	C4	D4	E4	F4	A4		2006/07
D3	A3	Bb3	C4	D4	E4	F4	G4	A4	2007
D3	A3	Bb3	C4	D4	E4	F#4	A4		2006
D3	A3	Bb3	C4	D4	F4	G4	A4		2007
D3	A3	Bb3	C#4	D4	E4	F4	A4		2006
D3	A3	Bb3	C#4	D4	E4	G4	A4		2006
D3	A3	Bb3	D4	E4	F4	G4	A4		2007
D3	A3	Bb3	D4	E4	F#4	G4	A4		2006
D3	A3	Bb3	D4	F4	G4	A4	C5		2007
D3	A3	B3	C4	D4	E4	F4	A4		2007
D3	A3	B3	C#4	D4	E4	F#4	A4		2007
D3	A3	B3	C#4	D4	F#4	G4	A4		2007
D3	A3	C4	D4	Eb4	F#4	G4	A4		2007

D3	A3	C4	D4	E4	F4	G4	A4		2007
D3	A3	C4	D4	E4	F4	G4	A4	Bb4	?
D3	A3	C4	D4	E4	F4	G#4	A4	C5	2006
D3	A3	C4	D4	E4	F4	A4	Bb4		?
D3	A3	C4	D4	E4	F#4	G4	A4		2007
D3	A3	C4	D4	E4	G4	A4	Bb4		2006
D3	A3	C4	D4	F4	G4	A4	Bb4		2007
D3	A3	D4	E4	F4	G4	A4	Bb4		2007
D3	A3	D4	E4	F4	A4	C5	D5		2006

5. Third generation *Hang* the *Integral Hang* sound model

D3	A3	Bb3	C4	D4	E4	F4	A4

6. Agreement/Certificate for *PANArt* customers

Agreement/Certificate

1. The philosophy of the company PANArt Hangbau AG and its protection
The musical instruments of the company PANArt Hangbau AG are individually crafted creations produced by the Hang instrument makers on the basis of patent No. 693 319. The design of the hang is word-wide protected. Hang as well as PANArt are registered as trademarks. PANArt Hangbau AG has decided to enter into so-called droit de suite agreements with the buyers of PANArt instruments. This is intended to prevent the instruments being commercialised to the detriment of the maker and the institutions with which the maker is associated.

2. The obligations of the buyers
By signing this Purchase Agreement, the undersigned Buyer acknowledges the following obligations:
- to inform PANArt Hangbau AG without delay of any form of sale of the musical instrument, specifying the sales conditions and the address of the buyer, thus enabling the Seller to update the catalogue raisonné; the obligations arising out of this Agreement must be imposed upon the buyer at the time of each sale;
- in the event of a sale in return for payment, the owner of a Hang instrument shall grant PANArt Hangbau AG a pre-emptive right. PANArt shall have the right to buy the instrument back at a maximum price equal to the original purchase price, although shall not be obliged to buy the instrument back, depending upon the condition of the instrument;
- The owners undertake not to sell the instrument at a price higher than the purchase price.

3. Certificate
PANArt Hangbau AG herewith awards you the following Hang Number:.....

4. Terms and conditions of payment
The purchase price is.....

Shipping price:.....

Accessories:.....

Benefit and risk shall be transferred to the Buyer at the time of the conclusion of the contract. The transport risk shall be borne by the Buyer.
The purchase price must be paid in advance by means of a remittance to bank account or by means of cash payment at the time of collection from the domicile of PANArt Hangbau AG.

5. Warranty and right of return
PANArt Hangbau AG warrant the authenticity of the instrument. The instrument shall be dispatched in a protective cover, packaged in a specially-created cardboard box. The instrument may be sent back to PANArt Hangbau AG within 7 days following receipt. The purchase price shall be reimbursed, insofar as the instrument is not damaged. The cost of the return consignment shall be borne by the Buyer. The company PANArt Hangbau AG shall accept no warranty if the Hang has been handled carelessly or improperly repaired by a third party.

6. Contractual penalty
Any breach of this Agreement shall incur a contractual penalty equivalent to the original purchase price.

7. Applicable law / responsible court of law
This agreement is subject to the Law of Switzerland. The responsible court of law for any matters arising therefrom is that of Berne.

Date/place: .....

.....
Signature of Seller

Date/place: .....

.....
Signature of Buyer

7. Verdict of the copyright infringement lawsuit between *PANArt* and *World of Handpans*. Full verdict consists of 48 pages.

Beglaubigte Abschrift

Landgericht Hamburg
Az.: 310 O 160/20

Verkündet am 20.08.2020

Lilischkies, JFAnge
Urkundsbeamtin der Geschäftsstelle

Urteil

IM NAMEN DES VOLKES

In der Sache

PANArt Hangbau AG, vertreten durch d. Vorstand, Engehaldenstraße 131, 3012 Bern, Schweiz
- Antragstellerin -

Prozessbevollmächtigte:
Rechtsanwälte **Preu, Bohlig & Partner**, Grolmannstraße 36, 10623 Berlin, Gz.: 50095-20/TQF/TQF

gegen

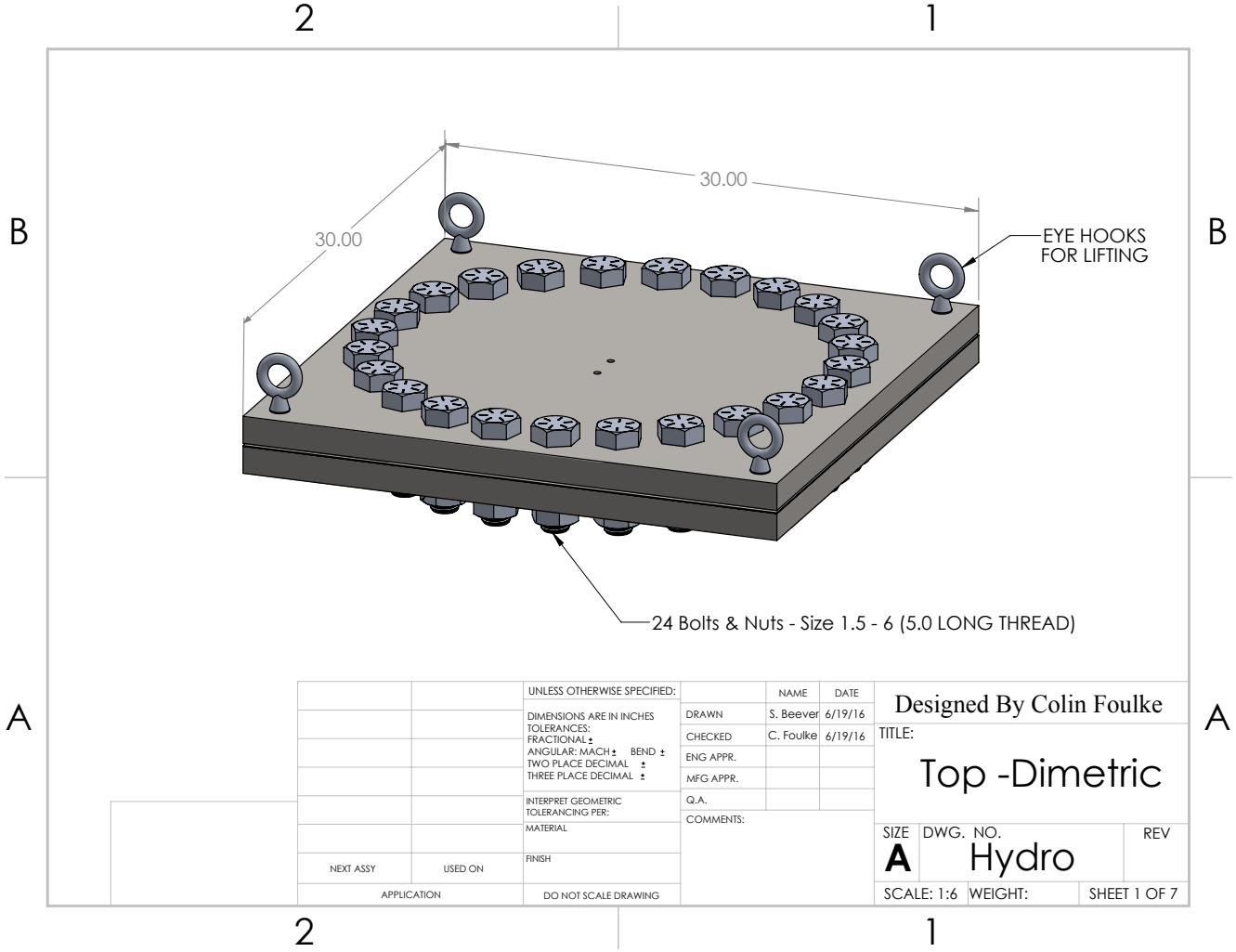
1) [redacted]
- Antragsgegnerin -

2) [redacted]
- Antragsgegner -

Prozessbevollmächtigte zu 1 und 2:
Rechtsanwälte [redacted]

erkennt das Landgericht Hamburg - Zivilkammer 10 - durch den Vorsitzenden Richter am Landgericht Hartmann, den Richter am Landgericht Dr. Schilling und den Richter Lauritzen auf Grund der mündlichen Verhandlung vom 06.08.2020 für Recht:

8. Hydroforming machinery template by Colin Foulke. Full template consists of seven pages.



9. *The Hang Musical Instrument,* Anthony Achong, 2020.

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

ST. AUGUSTINE, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, WEST INDIES
FACULTY OF SCIENCES AND AGRICULTURE
SCHOOL OF NATURAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS
Telephone: (868) 662-2002 Ext. 2051
e-mail:aachong@excite.com

DATE: June 4, 2020

SUBJECT: The Hang Musical Instrument

My name is Dr. Anthony Achong and I am former Senior Lecturer and former Head of Department at the Department of Physics, University of the West Indies. I have been studying the sound of metal sheets and shells all my life and have done extensive research in this field, especially in relation to steelpans. I have published extensively in research journals in a number of areas of Physics and Mathematics with some 25 papers on the steelpan. After decades of research, I published my book "Secrets of the Steelpan - Unlocking the Secrets of the Science, Technology, Tuning and Operation of the Steelpan" in 2013.

Against the background of the Hang's basic shape of two joint bowls, I was asked to comment as an expert to the question, if two different percussion instruments (idiophone class, in the category shells), even if showing different geometric shapes, could provide similar sound features.

I know the Hang as an instrument because of my research and experiments since the year 2000, when it was presented at the International Conference on Science and Technology of the Steelpan, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.

As well as steelpans, the Hang creates sounds by vibrations of a fixed resonance body that include note shapes. The Hang does not differ in this respect from traditional steelpans and received a lot of recognition in the steelpan scene because of its distinctive and original design. The main difference is that it is played with impacts made with the bare fingers as opposed to the rubber tipped sticks used on the steelpan.

One of the most important factors for producing good sound is the material used to form a steelpan or the Hang. My studies showed that shallow metal shells compressed by hammer blows lead to the best results. Besides the raw material, there are more than 30 different parameters that have an influence on the specific sound of such instruments.

The outer shape of a resonance body is of minor importance to the specific sound of such instrument. In case of a Steelpan or the Hang, the basic technical requirement for creating the desired sound is the clamping of the shell. In contrast to freely oscillating instruments such as the cymbal, the Steelpan and Hang oscillate for a shorter period of time.

The first Steelpans were made of oil barrels turned upside down with the bottom of the barrel indented like a bowl. However, the same sound could be achieved by bending the bottom outwards.

Equally, for the Hang the main element from which the desired sound is produced is the clamped upper bowl. The lower bowl has no significant influence to the sound and it is not essential for the sound that the upper bowl is bent outwards. It could produce the same sound when using the upper bowl facing downwards.

Also, the specific shape of that bowl has no influence on the specific sound, which is produced by the True Notes. Consequently, the whole instrument could show basically any form as far as the bowl is clamped by a fixing frame.

The sound of steelpans as well as of the Hang is mainly produced by the vibration of the True Notes that are embedded and compressed in a clamped Pan or Hang face.

The specific position of a properly blocked True Note has no relevant influence to its sound. When looking at the Hang, the note shapes could be placed anywhere on the upper bowl or even on the lower bowl with no difference to the sound that they create. This applies also specifically for the note (called Ding) on the center top of the Hang. The Ding could equally be placed anywhere on the Hang and it is neither essential that the lateral notes are placed in a circular line around the bowl.

Traditional notes are often shaped spherical or ellipsoidal. But in fact, there is an infinite assortment of shapes that the tuner or pan maker can give to the note. Crucial for good sound are compressive stresses in the note, which the tuner affect primarily by adjusting the compression of the material used.

No two manually produced notes are exactly alike in tone. Stamping out notes to precisely the same shape with a specially shaped die in a press-forming process, only determines the shape of the traditional note. So it is not necessary or important to produce notes with the same shape anyway.

Thus it would be possible that two similar looking note shapes produce totally different sounds or that two different looking note shapes produce similar sounds.

As a result, I already concluded in my book that something that looks like a pan is not necessarily a pan. I call such look-alike pans "dummies" and would refer this term specifically to industrially reproduced pans that only reproduce the outer shape of a steelpan or the Hang. Such "dummies" do not possess the required increased stiffness on the notes nor the necessary stress distributions relative to the notes.

It is thus physically impossible that a steelpan that is industrially reproduced by copying the outer shape of a steelpan or of the Hang sounds the same way like a hand tuned instrument.

As outlined above, this also means that the outer shape of the Hang is not essential for the sound that it creates. Similar sound could be produced by a randomly shaped idiophone of the category shells. The specific sound depends most importantly on the tuned note shapes, which alike could be designed by any random outer form and irrespective of its position on the instrument.

Thus I conclude that the specific shape of the Hang with two joint bowls and the circular positioned notes shapes and a center note shape on the top have been chosen by the designers primarily because of aesthetic reasons.

.....

Dr. Anthony Achong