*Imagined Memories* is an autobiographical work that probes into the realms of a relationship that never was, a bond with my biological mother whom I never met. The composition musically illustrates a distinct personal narrative. My choice to write this work for string quartet is telling and purposeful: although the psychological and musical profiles embody deep personal reflections, there are no extra-musical, literary, or visual imageries except the imagined memories themselves. In this way, the ‘personal’ realizes its musical voice in the ‘collective’ of absolute music and allows listeners to tap into emotional landscapes of the human condition that touch us all.

*Imagined Memories* musically explores distinct personal reflections. Heritage, origin, cultural and national ethnicity are popular watchwords that draw attention to safeguard the individual from collective oblivion. Our present age has brought us increasingly closer together – we are the intersections of cultural, technological, social, and political migrations. Somewhere in these shifting sands is our identity – its preservation depends upon the active presence and cultivation of memory: real and **imagined**.

The interrelationship of ‘what was’, ‘what is’ and ‘what will be’ is existentially defining. Time becomes a non-teleological space – our sense of self and identity is shaped through the interconnectedness of past, present and future. The key agent for the formation of identity is memory. Penning a literary memoir is a type of archive, a preservation of memory that places and makes sense of the individual in the otherwise neutral continuum of time and place. *Imagined Memories* is my musical archive: intimate musical reflections based on imagined memories of a distant, severed past.

**Imagined Memories**

I was an orphan. As such, I stand before memories of a time I cannot recall. For truly, I do not know, cannot know, what actually transpired. I was born to a young Kurdish woman (slightly younger than my own daughter is now) in a German town (Pfaffenhofen-an der-Ilm) far away from her own home in Istanbul. I have been told that she risked much to give me life, and then left me in an orphanage to be adopted before returning home. I want to write of a pair joined by the same blood and imagined memories […] from the only time I bore the name she gave me, Yusuf Mustafa Zeren.

*Imagined Memories* recalls/remembers the spaces in my memory of those emotional experiences I do not know that are buried in my subconscious – these memory spaces, inhabited by Naciye and me right before and after she gave me away, form the central **Gedächtnis Dreieck** of the work. This ‘Memory Triangle’ consists of memory spaces, identities, and footprints. Each memory space: **Davor** [Before] – **Trennung (Tod/Leben)** [Separation] – **Danach** [After] contains/articulates/expresses/probes into emotional footprints (emotional states I step into/through as I ‘walk’ through these distant memories) experienced by the three principal identities (actors/agents of my memory): (1) Me [RYG] „imagining” my memories as YMZ (expressed as RYG + YMZ), (2) me „imagining” Naciye’s memory (expressed as RYG + NA) and (3) Naciye’s memory expressed as (NA).

(1) **(RYG + YMZ)**: The most personal memory footprints are those I experience as I „enter” into an apparition of myself in the past. These emotional experiences suffer a „tragic” fate since life that is lived through experiences at this time remains buried as a „not”, as something „inaccessible”, as an „existential void” so to speak. On a conscious level of recollection, the subconscious/non-conscious experiences are in effect ‘non-experiences’.[[1]](#footnote-1) And yet, these ‘tragic’ experiences/’non-experiences’ are profoundly character defining/ shaping/ (de)forming and existentially essential: they are/become/reveal themselves as the child’s first ‘cross to bear’. In (1) **(RYG + YMZ)** and (2) **(RYG + NA)**, emotional footprints/states/experiences might include terror, loneliness, love, bliss, longing, relief, anguish, apprehension… In addition, antipodal psychological states of mind are projected in ‘imagining’ Naciye’s memory as grace/disgrace, pride/shame and honor/dishonor necessarily co-exist as two sides of the experiential coin. (3) **(NA)** Naciye’s memories, although unknown to me, exist in some distant memory spaces. Their existence is acknowledged through musical figures of “ audible silence”.

*Imagined Memories* unfolds in a continuous sequence of musical events - the languages (Kurdish, German, English, Polish) that form the titles and stages of the work reflect my identity shaped by past and present:

**Imagined Memories**

***(Bîranînên Xeyalî)***

**Act of Memory**

Act of Distortion/Presumption/Futility/Love

**Wejście**

**Gedächtnis Dreieck**1

**(…memory spaces/identities/footprints…)**

**Wyjście**

**Act of Memory** leads into the work’s central **Gedächtnis Dreieck**. This opening section is exclusively formed by quotations (a procedure that, in itself, is actually rather ‘violent’ when considering the forceful uprooting of the original…) that serve to musically manifest/ represent the concept of memory. The process is as follows: (1) Quotation is memory. And, since memories – in their very nature – are distortions of the original happening, so (2) the distortion of memories is represented by the distorion of quotations. Also, just as the ‘Act of Memory Recall’ reflects presumption and futility, the use of quotations (as an embodiment of memory) also engenders an ‘Act of Presumption/Futility’: it is presumptive to change the original meaning – this necessarily occurs when a musical passage/idea is excised from its original context and employed as a quotation; at the same time, it is futile to believe that the original meaning could be retained!

In their treatment, the distorted quotations (17 in number to parallel the 17 memory footprints to come) unfold within and between all string quartet voices, a structural layering that reflects the palimpsest-memory concept: The constant, repeated (re)layering of memories produces a multi-layered record that preserves the distinctness of the individual memory while, at the same time, exposes memories to „contamination” of others (as memories are superimposed, merge, intersect…). Essentially the dual nature of the palimpsest memory is both distinctive and accommodative: new memories layer alongside permanent traces of memory. Consequently, the present projected by the palimpsest entails the presence of accumulated memory. Stacked quotations (memories) enter into a relationship where lines of linearity are/become blurred.

All quotations stem from the string quartet repertoire; in ths way, *Imagined Memories* becomes part of „fillo rosso al passato” (the red thread unavoidably connecting the present to the past). The dense vertical and horizontal saturation of quotations accomplish that they no longer transpire through the surface but become concealed/conceal themselves within/part of a web/world of memories!

**Wejście** refers to the entrance/transition from the conceptual ‘Act of Memory’ to my intimate ‘imagined memories’ as I dramaturgically move from engaging as composer/spectator to composer/actor. This move is instrumentally reflected by assigning string identities to the three principal identities: like an apparition, a past memory of himself, RYG and YMZ are represented by vln I and vln II respectively (quasi-identical, so similar but yet not the same…) and NA by the vla (such a close string family relative). The cello symbolizes imagination and serves as a catalyst/trigger that activates this movement into the ‘memory triangle’. After a dialogue in the upper strings, the cello is joined by vln II to transition from playing ord. to a ‘Kamancheh’ style (a traditional string instrument common among peoples in the Caucasus, Anatolia and the Near East, including Kurds) that will timbrally define the entire ‘memory triangle.’

Finally, when quotations from the ‘memory triangle’ join quotations from the repertoire in the final footprint, it becomes apparent by the end that material of the **Gedächtnis Dreieck**, having joined all other quotations, has become part of the repertoire that collectively constitutes the present ‘pool of memory’. The 17th footprint holds a significant dual structural role: It serves as both the end of the path of memory footprints in the ‘memory triangle’ as well as an exit, **Wyjście**. This exit crucially (essentially) functions as a space where the **Act of Memory** and the **Gedächtnis Dreieck** intersect/merge/become/establish themselves as mutual substances of each other’s existence. My memories, now part of the collective stream/continuum of quotations thus reveal/establish an intimate bond and experience between the individual and the collective listener.

*Imagined Memories* is a piece my young mother may never hear. My music will fall on her absent ears and reach her as silence that becomes ever greater with each passing day. And at some point (as in the piece): *„everything […] come[s] to a standstill, and time pass[es] with a sputter. As at the movies when, the picture having vanished through some malfunction, you hear nothing in the darkness of the hall except the sound of machinery going on… with an empty screen”* (Camus).

This empty screen after the picture has vanished is the silence that follows the last sounds of imagined memories. And, just like the tape spinning off the reel while time (the machinery) sputters on, the „audible silence” *within* the imagined memories before, during and *after* separation merges with the ever-present absolute silence between her and I in the present and becomes part of my – our - collective memory. I have been blessed with two mothers in my life – this piece is for her whom I may never meet.

1. A detailed description/explanation of the oversized triangular score–constructs that visually represent the **Gedächtnis Dreieck** is found in the *Quartett [Vor]schrift.* The three triangular constructsaccompany the performance score and are displayed behind the quartet during performances (in view for the audience)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)