

CHAPTER NUMBER

ECHOES OF ERASMUS: COLLABORATIVELY CREATING MUSIC IN RESPONSE TO INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

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For generations, musicians and composers have not only borrowed from their own cultural traditions to express identity, but have explored soundworlds of other cultures in their musicking. Some composers evoke national sounds through their work without connection or experience of these places and traditions. Although he never visited Ireland, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) completed a cycle of Irish songs (Hufstader 1959, Cooper 1996); while Norway’s national composer Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) incorporated melodic ideas into his music to express Norwegianness without ever truly replicating the musical traditions and complex rhythms of the Hardanger fiddle repertoire (Grimley 2001, 2006). In contrast, some composers seek to reflect their experiences in their compositions. Inspired by his travels, Felix Mendelsohn (1809–1847) composed great musical tributes to Italy and Scotland amongst his repertoire, evoking musical soundscapes as well as the landscape and culture that he encountered (Schmidt-Beste 2017). Irish-born composer Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924) incorporated Irish folk tunes into his Austro-German compositional practice (Commins 2023). Each of these composers worked within a Western Art Music tradition that followed the conventions established by their predecessors and peers. While some, like Grieg in Norway or Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) in Finland became recognized as “national composers” (Finklestein 1989, 9, 11), their compositions arguably demonstrate transculturality as they bring together compositional practices from an increasingly globalized Western Art Music with influences from folk and traditional musics. This reflects Afef Benessaïeh’s assertion that:

the concept of transculturality is different from transculturation, multiculturalism and interculturality. It captures more adequately the sense of movement and the complex mixedness of cultures in close contact, and better describes the embodied situation of cultural plurality lived by many individuals and communities of mixed heritage and/or experience, whose multifaceted situation is more visible under globalisation (Benessaïeh 2010, 16).

Although many of these composers were operating in the age of European nationalism (see Bohlman 2004), and the composers listed here did not claim mixed ethnic heritage, they were transcultural in their musical expression, influenced by travel, collaboration and the exchange of their work through performance.

The project *Echoes of Erasmus* provided a different, 21st century context that involved reflection on music composition and arrangement that incorporates influences from different cultures. *Echoes of Erasmus* was a project hosted by the Department of Creative, Arts, Media and Music at Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) in 2023. Selected as part of a national programme of events marking Ireland's 50 years of EU membership funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Department of An Taoiseach, the project celebrated DkIT's collaboration with fellow European Erasmus educational partners. Implicit in the call document and programme of events for EU50 was the concept of transculturality, acknowledging the internal complexities and variations in Irish and European cultures and the links between them.

Held from the 2nd to the 4th of May 2023, *Echoes of Erasmus* culminated with a performance of music involving five artist-educators, students on the BA (Hons) Music and doctoral students at DkIT. Three visiting lecturers – bass guitarist Frode Hammersland from the University of Western Norway (Stord-Haugesund), Brendan Hemswoth, director of percussion at the Curso de Música Silva Monteiro in Porto, and Ragnhild Knudson, a hardanger fiddle player based in the University College Southeast Norway, Rauland, Norway – joined with staff from DkIT, Adèle Commins and Daithí Kearney. Drawing on different musical cultures, lived experiences, academic training and pedagogical approaches, the team represented an opportunity to explore transcultural musicking through creative practice. The project culminated in a performance attended by Mr Peter Burke, Minister for European Affairs and Defence in the Department of the Taoiseach. His address at the opening of the concert emphasized the benefits of EU membership for citizens of member states, pointing in particular to

educational opportunities that exist through the Erasmus and related programmes.

A critical focus of this essay is the inclusion of original composition in this project, which invited ideas from project participants leading to an intercultural exchange and transcultural expression. As Irish flute player Desi Wilkinson stated in a reflection on his own participation in a collaborative intercultural ensemble: “Where the participants in an ensemble come from very different cultural backgrounds, with divergent musical and possibly career aspirations, this web of creative negotiation can become both complex and revealing” (Wilkinson 2011, 49). This has implications for education and pedagogy, which is the second theme explored in this essay. Music education scholar Marie McCarthy states: “Nurturing creative music making is at the heart of an artist-teacher’s practice as they navigate the space between tradition and innovation” (McCarthy 2021, 111). For the artist-educators, *Echoes of Erasmus* presented an opportunity to engage creatively with traditional musics and innovations in partnership with each other and music students.

Concentrating on the experience of the two authors, this essay reflects a practice-led process that has implications for Daithí Kearney’s compositional practice, Frode Hammersland’s approach to arrangement and composition, and both researchers’ pedagogical practice. The analysis engages with what Chie Tsang Isaish Tang identified as the: “four main aspects related to intercultural exchange and collaboration: the value of negotiation, the meaning of ambiguity, strategies for navigating cultural meanings, and processes of cultural and musical transmission” (Tang 2018, 3). *Echoes of Erasmus* represents an exchange of ideas, relying on a negotiation that is informed by engaging in practice and reflecting on that practice, albeit in a short and intense period of time. It reflects the nature of ensemble playing as ephemeral and requiring compromise on the part of the individuals involved (Keegan 2011). This essay is divided into five sections that provide a context for who the participants are, describe the impact of transnational experiences, reflect on the compositional process and musical features of the pieces, critically consider the transculturality of the music including an opportunity to listen to a recording, and emphasize the importance of transculturality for the artist-educator.

Daithí and Frode first encountered each other in 2012 as part of an Erasmus Intensive Programme entitled IP-CREAL, which focused on creative and aesthetic learning. Daithí was primarily teaching performance and Irish traditional music studies on a music degree programme. Frode was teaching education students and increasingly engaging in STEAM philosophies that led to the development of the Write-A-Science-Opera

(WASO) methodology (Smegen and Ben-Horin, 2020). They developed a friendship through the projects and learned from their different approaches to music and pedagogy. They were both interested in improvisation and facilitating ensembles to expand their potential by broadening their consideration of sound and music (see also Noone 2021). Over the following decade, Frode and Daithí were collaborators on a series of Intensive Programmes, which sometimes involved them participating in meetings and projects with their students in different countries. In addition to the formal activities of these projects, it was clear that the inter-cultural experiences of students were very valuable.

Writing on improvisation in music, Bruce Benson asks: “at what point is the composer finished?” (Benson 2003, 1). Frode’s approach to music foregrounds an openness to different ideas and approaches and he reflected that: “Collaboration across musical genres and culture is something we should do more! It is very giving on a musical level as well as a personal level” (email to Daithí, November 24, 2023). Entering a classroom where the prescribed learning outcomes were focused on the performance of Irish traditional music, Frode raised questions about how we approach music and the potential to consider different perspectives, pedagogical approaches and musical ideas.

Transculturality: “questions the idea that cultures are separate, stable or even, for that matter, different from one another” (Benessaieh 2010, 18). Irish traditional music has evolved over centuries, borrowing from or sharing with other cultures, and gaining international popularity (Dowling 2014). A number of studies have considered the development of ensemble playing in Irish traditional music (Fairbairn 1994; Keegan 2011) and the globalization of Irish traditional music (Sommers Smith 2001; Motherway 2013). Many of these studies and others point to the external influences that contribute to the development of Irish traditional music over centuries. This reflects Benessaieh’s statement that:

terms such as “transculturation”, “multiculturalism” and “interculturality”, suggest that some sort of “pure” (in the sense of non-mixed) culture exists or precedes the mixture, or that cultural diversity and change are novel features of a globalizing world marked by accelerating and more volatile migrational flows (Benessaieh 2010, 15).

Significant in the development of performance practice in Irish traditional music beyond solo performance was the development of accompaniment (Scahill 2010), typically performed in Irish traditional music on piano and guitar from the early twentieth century, with the addition of bodhrán, drums, bouzouki and double bass in the latter half of the

twentieth century. A critical public engagement with innovation in Irish traditional music was a television series *River of Sound* (1995), presented by performer, composer and academic Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, which prompted a conference on innovation and tradition in Irish traditional music in 1996 (Vallely et al 1999). Matthew Noone's investigation of the relationship between Irish Traditional and North Indian Classical music through musical composition and performance, demonstrates sympathies and divergences in Indo-Irish hybrid music making that lead him to define himself as a "mongrel" (Noone 2016a, 1; 2016b, 7). Unlike Noone, Daithí's compositional practice does not reflect mongrelization as he has not been immersed in Norwegian folk music but, much music contains an element of mongrality as composers draw on different musical influences and experiences of different cultures.

"Stord Sunrise" was composed on board the ferry between Bergen and Leirvik in 2018 and it represents an in-between space (Ingold 2015). Unlike the ferry bringing the composer to a destination, the piece is neither Irish nor Norwegian. It reflects a form of cultural hybridity that Homi Bhabha (1994) defines as a transitional or "third space". In other words, rather than an interchange between cultures, this piece represents something in-between and without a desire to be only "Irish" or "Norwegian". Like the sunrise, it is at the point of becoming. As Anya Peterson Royce states in her examination of the artistry of the Isthmus Zapotec of Mexico: "The in-between is a landscape of possibility and of transformation" that artists call home (Royce 2021, 65).

Composed in the time signature 13/8, the rhythms of "Stord Sunrise" are not typical of either Irish or Norwegian folk music. The opening 6 quavers (fig. 1), represent a motif as defined by James Cowdrey to be "natural subdivisions of a phrase" (Cowdrey 1990, xiv). They are the same as the opening motif of the fifth part of the popular slip jig "The Kid on the Mountain" and are also present in the third part of "Tom Billy's Jig" amongst several other tunes. The opening motif of the second part is (unintentionally) the same as the second part of "Winnie Hayes' Jig", another popular tune in the canon of Irish traditional music. Although based on "hooks"—a short musical riff or phrase used to make a song appealing—it is unlikely to be assimilated quickly into either tradition (see Hillhouse 2005, 2013).



Figure 1 Opening bar of “Stord Sunrise”, composed by Daithí Kearney.

The asymmetrical time signature, 13/8, is complex when compared to the traditional two-, three-, and four-beat measure groupings typical of popular music and Irish traditional music. Telemark-based colleagues Anon Egeland, Mats Johanson and Ragnhild Knudsen have informed our understanding of asymmetrical rhythms in Norwegian music; indeed asymmetrical grooves in Norwegian folk music was the focus of Johanson’s (2009) doctoral thesis. However, in contrast to the asymmetrical division of rhythms in Daithí’s composition, there is a further complexity in the expressive timing asymmetrical rhythms of the pols/springar style within a Scandinavian folk music (Johanson 2009, 2). The term “groove” is integral to the approach to music education and performance followed by Frode who expresses a desire to explore the sense of groove in music performance, with a particular consideration of micro-timing (see also Keil 1987; Zagorsky Thomas 2007). In workshops and rehearsals, Frode often placed emphasis on the groove created by the backline of bass (Jessica Muldrew) and drums (Rhíona McPhelim), which is central to the performance of popular music. Playing mandolin, Daithí focused on the performance of melody with Gavin Gribben (banjo), Aoife Higgins (flute) and Chen Jia Ng Angel (fiddle), reflecting the instrumentation and emphasis on melody in the performance of Irish traditional music.

“Stord Sunrise” comprises three 4-bar parts, each of which is repeated. The division of each bar of 13/8 time signature is 3, 3, 2, 2, 3. The first part is dominated by a descending melodic line, the second built on an ascending melodic line and the third emphasizes the tonic. The composition presents melody only and does not pre-determine an arrangement for ensemble. This reflects the melodic tradition of Irish and Norwegian traditional music (Cowdery 1990; Johanson 2009). Both traditions value improvisation on the part of the performer in interpreting the tune, particularly in solo performance, and ensemble playing challenges the individuality of each performer in pursuit of a homogenous sound (Ó Riada 1982).

Knudsen outlines the characteristics of the Hardanger fiddle dance-tunes played today, which are traditionally played without accompaniment, as comprising a “small motif structure”, whereby: “small motifs are repeated and varied as the player wishes” (Knudsen 2019, 155). “Stord Sunrise” utilizes a few small motifs but in a manner typical of Irish traditional music,

these are structured in a fixed form. Similar to Knudsen’s description of arranging this music for her trio *Glima*: “it can be difficult to change the form intuitively during a performance in a trio; we have to have a fixed form/structure” (Knudsen 2019, 156). For *Echoes of Erasmus*, Daithí and Frode considered various approaches to the arrangement of “Stord Sunrise” but ultimately maintained the fixed form, exploring other options for arrangement that included allowing different combinations of instruments perform at different points in the arrangement. They recognized the potential for variation in the performance of repeated parts but in contrast to “Grieg’s avoidance of strict repetition in favour of a continual redecoration of tiny melodic figures”, their performances do not “constitute ‘improvisation’ in the sense understood by the fiddlers themselves” (Grimley 2001, 123; see also Johanson 2022). Underpinning this was a particular focus on the backline instruments – in this ensemble the bass and drums, on which Frode brought expertise.

In advance of the workshop and performance element of the *Echoes of Erasmus* project hosted in Dundalk, Daithí shared the opening motifs of “Stord Sunrise” and “Buses and Trains/Nearly Home” with the collaborating artist-educators. Taking these notes, each was encouraged to develop a musical piece with their students. Brendan worked with his teenage percussion ensemble in Porto to create a piece that drew not only on tuned percussion but other effects. In Norway, Frode worked with students in the university. Taking the role of composer and bass player, he developed a track with Bendik Hustadnes (drums), Ole Rasmus Hjelle (guitar), Ingrid Helena Braavoll (flugelhorn) and Åge Vaksdal (accordion) that drew on the opening four notes of “Buses and Trains/Nearly Home” (fig. 2).



Figure 2 Motif from “Buses and Trains” and “Nearly Home” (composed by Daithí Kearney) used in “Waltzing Echoes” (composed by Frode Hammersland).

The open-ended nature of the task was itself a challenge. A significant aspect of the project concerned the arrangement of Irish traditional music and this influenced Frode’s approach to composition. Also aware that Ragnhild Rose Knudsen was going to embrace a Norwegian folk music aesthetic, he sought to develop a slightly newer and more popular musical/jazz musical guise. After improvising a bit around the motif, he found that the tonality could be based on the Doric scale, which became a

link to Grieg and Norwegian folk music (Tveit, 1937). The motivation behind the rest of the aesthetic expression in the melody was geographically determined, more precisely the West of Norway. He sought to create a calm, cool and floating A-part with a strongly contrasting B-part to illustrate how wonderful, but at the same time challenging, the weather-bitten and unpredictable nature of the West of Norway can be. Therefore, a calm, open, minor-keyed, repetitive A part in 3/4 and an energetic, riffy, chaotic B part in 5/4 were built around a vamp on the notes in the order. The ensemble included strong soloists in Vaksdal and Hjelle who could develop open improvisational parts. The accordion helped to enhance the maritime feel which Frode believed matched the source of inspiration.

The arrangement of the composition was developed with the students. Both A-part and B-part were *tutti* (everyone played). In the solo parts there were no brass instruments. The group worked a lot on the phrasing in the A part to make it as fluid as possible and tried to vary the melody a little each time the A part was presented to create dynamics. The B part was initially composed in 6/4 time, but after discussion the group found that it was more effective to adapt the theme to 5/4 time, creating a more “chaotic” contrast to the A part.

“Waltzing Echoes” presents a jazz-infused composition by Frode that gradually expands on the initial four note motif provided by Daithí to provide an alternative interpretation of a musical idea. There is an opportunity for individual instruments to be heard in the arrangement. After the initial exploration of melody on flugelhorn, the guitar takes the lead in a style reminiscent of Mexican guitarist Carlos Santana. This includes phrasing that places notes both earlier and later than expected and passages that combine blues scalar playing with a Latin flavour. The accordion then takes the lead, continuing in a similar stylistic vein but the sound of the instrument is evocative of Tango. The ensemble collectively returns to a restatement of the opening passage in almost unison. At 3 minutes, the track takes on a more driving rock-style groove and approach with a more distorted guitar sound over a repetitive pattern played on the accordion. At 4’25” the section reaches a climax before returning to a restatement of the opening passage, albeit with a different drum groove, before concluding with an unfinished sound. The piece represents a journey, through which motifs are constantly echoing.

Without the burden of tradition (see Kearney 2024), Frode and the Norwegian musicians explore a soundworld that is only connected to Ireland by the source of the motivic suggestion but reaches out to a world of music to create a transcultural piece. As Adrian Scahill writes about Irish music group Córás Trio, the notes: “are points of departure, rather than, as

is often the case in traditional-based contemporary music, blocks to be built on, overlaid with new textures, and returned to” (Scahill 2024). In Norway, Frode’s group engage in exploring improvisatory techniques and processes that create an altogether different sound that evokes contemporary jazz aesthetics and yet maintains echoes of the source material.

The 1970s is often perceived as a revival period for Irish traditional music, but the global success of the Irish dance show *Riverdance* in the 1990s prompted new commercial and aesthetic opportunities for artists engaging with the genre. The post-2010 economic crisis aligns with what Scahill (2022) identifies as a post-revival period in Irish traditional music. He examines the changing relationships between traditional and rock music, demonstrating how the sound of traditional music has continually been refreshed through intersections with other musics, while the discourse on Irish traditional music presents a “renaissance” or “new revival” as: “traditional music was now finding new listeners from within a broader pop/rock listenership” (Scahill 2022, 146). Incorporating Frode’s influence in the production of a recorded track, “Stord Sunrise” lies between Scahill’s acknowledgement of rock influences and Noone’s appreciation of mongrelisation in the soundworld of Irish traditional music. It is post-ethnic, a term used by Aileen Dillane to describe: “a shift in perspective from musical borrowings from ‘others’ to new cosmopolitan, temporary ownership of sounds indexing lived experiences and relations” (Dillane 2013, 26). As we move towards a post-national consciousness, *Echoes of Erasmus* reflects the joint effect of media and migration/mobility on the “work of the imagination” (Appadurai 1996, 3).

Without undermining the integrity of Irish and Norwegian traditional musics, Daithí and Frode attempted to build on traditional music to create a modern artistic music (see also Costello 2015). The recordings made collectively and collaboratively in Dundalk in April 2024 were edited and augmented by Frode on his return to Norway. Continuing the creative process in his own time and space, Frode drew on his experience in Ireland, worked within the limitations of what was recorded, and the freedom to utilize his own creativity. The resulting track, released in June 2024, reflects a transcultural musical expression.

Exploring approaches to music education and developing a transcultural pedagogical approach was central to the project. Sawyer recognizes creativity as a fundamentally collaborative process in which “the most innovative collaborations flow improvisationally”, and that crucially: “educating for innovation requires creating opportunities for collaborative improvisation in the classroom” (Sawyer 2010, 135). As *Echoes of Erasmus* involved co-teaching, the development of empathy between the facilitators

was critical. There is an element of improvisation in the classroom and they played off each other in terms of “who has the floor” and naturally took over as they came to understand each other’s strengths and personalities. This was shaped by their cultural backgrounds, training and teaching experience in different countries. By working together, their practice becomes itself transcultural - international learning experiences are not opportunities to learn about other cultures but provide insights into different approaches and perspectives in education (Kearney and Commins 2021). McCarthy asserts: “The work of the music teacher in the academy is thus located at the power intersection of artistic practice and cultural development, carried out in a learning space that is in relationship with communities of musical life” (McCarthy 2021, 101). As Frode reflected in relation to the *Echoes of Erasmus* project:

I also try to think of teaching as a way of musical interaction and improvising. An interesting dialogue with students in the classroom can for example sometimes bear more fruits than sticking to the teaching plan at all costs (email to Daithí, November 24, 2023).

As mediators, artist-teachers seek to: “enlarge understanding across differences and to develop dispositions that lead toward intercultural understanding” (McCarthy 2021, 102). As they nurture their students’ performance skills, they invite them to deepen their understanding of music in and as culture (see also Campbell 1992). Advocating for cultural boundary-crossing and cross-cultural competence in music education, McCarthy sets the challenge of:

a level of openness that may be challenging for an individual, an openness to different viewpoints, musical traditions, and cultural values; it requires the music teacher to expand their knowledge and experience beyond the familiarity of their primary cultures and musical practices; it presupposes that the teacher reflects on their own musical preferences and biases and suspends judgement when interacting with students whose musical values differ from theirs, or when presenting music from traditions whose aesthetics they do not endorse (McCarthy 2021, 105).

In correspondence about *Echoes of Erasmus*, Frode commented on how his approach to performing and teaching through his career has changed:

Working with brilliant co musicians and teaching bright students has broadened my horizon in a lot of ways. Most important perhaps is the idea of giving space instead of taking it. It is of course important to play your part as a performer and as a teacher, but I have learned to value and appreciate

the strengths of musical democracy. In both performing and teaching (email to Daithí, November 24, 2023).

Following the initial phase of the project in Ireland, percussionist Brendan Hemsworth similarly communicated:

I believe that different types of pupils might require different types of teachers, depending on various aspects of the pupils' personality. But nevertheless I tend to believe that the more accomplished the teacher feels himself as a creative musician the better teacher he will be. As an example, I can say I've seen the best side in most of my pupils when I manage to create for them a space where I play along with them and they can play freely, improvising and relying on their own musical resources (email to Daithí, November 7, 2023).

The artist-educator not only facilitates the students' expression of self through performance but the process presents an opportunity for transgenerational transculturality as the often younger student brings new expressions of sound to the experience of the often older educator. As Daithí and Frode developed the recording aspect of the project, the coaching of the studio session was critical to make the students feel comfortable and allow them to contribute to the best of their abilities within a limited timeframe. They recognised that there was a mix of experience levels within the classroom and this led to variances in the quality of tracks created. This had implications for the post-production process, when Frode balanced the desire to ensure the students retained ownership while also adding some additional percussion and bass to fill out the overall sound of the track. From a pedagogical perspective, it was necessary to consider how much can be added outside of the classroom experience.

A critical aspect of the collaboration was the use of language. In his study on ensemble playing in Irish traditional music, Niall Keegan reflects on the language used by members of an ensemble in rehearsal. Among the aspects considered, he writes:

There was a considerable amount of structural language that envisages the performance as a narrative with discrete parts. Terms such as "first part", "second part", "first round", "second round", "A part", "B part", "first B part", "second B part" provided structure tools for the musicians to engage their music (Keegan 2011, 41).

The rehearsals in Dundalk used similar language, with recourse to writing on the board, but there were occasional discrepancies between how different participants interpreted these words. For "Stord Sunrise", each part was

labelled A, B and C, charting on the board what instruments would play and when, as well as changes in the backline related to rhythm and harmony, or subtle changes in the melody. The language included Italian musical terms such as *tutti*, meaning all together, made up words such as “dag(h)ada”, an onomatopoeic sounding of the rhythm, and “Africa”, referring to a section that drew influences from African drumming patterns influenced by the involvement the previous year of percussionist Brendan Hemsworth. The use of these words in a room involving musicians from different cultures located in an educational setting is important in understanding the creative process. As Keegan notes: “The language of ensemble clearly emphasizes contemporary aesthetics of traditional music, in particular through terminology associated with individuality and difference” (Keegan 2011, 44). Ultimately, the level of democracy and creative input from students were limited in the example of “Stord Sunrise”, but the contribution of students’ opinions to the arrangement and their role as musicians engaged in a collaborative workshopping of the piece should not be underestimated. While Frode led the development of “Waltzing Echoes”, the input of students was critical in the development of the arrangement.

Echoes of Erasmus highlighted opportunities presented by Erasmus partnerships and programmes, and the potential for artist-educators from different institutions to collaborate with each other and with students to explore musical possibilities through performance. Daithí remains a musician who performs mostly Irish traditional music and Frode is primarily engaged in the performance and production of rock and pop music. Through their collaboration, the tracks recorded for this project reflect a post-genre (Kassabian 2013) or post-ethnic (Dillane 2013) musical expression. They were not trying “to make pop music using traditional music”, as Julian Vignoles (1984, 71) asserts in relation to 1970s bands Moving Hearts and Stockton’s Wing. The initial compositional process was inspired by experiences travelling between Ireland and Norway but the subsequent development of these compositions for a recording project in Ireland involved collaboration that drew on cultural influences beyond Irish traditional music. Through the involvement of students in their collaborations, there were significant pedagogical implications from *Echoes of Erasmus* that included the development of and critical reflection on our teaching practice. Empathy between the artist-educators and also with the student participants is critical to nurturing a democratic creative space that can lead to transcultural expression. The project as a whole demonstrates the potential to embed transculturality in the music classroom and explore transcultural musical expression through creative collaboration.

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