

# The 2CELLOS phenomenon: Social and cultural aspects of their fandom

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## Abstract

By applying the ethnographic approach, the virtual community of 2CELLOS fans was studied. The research was conducted in 2015 and 2016 by observing Facebook and Twitter followings, by conducting an online survey among their members and ethnographic interviews with twenty fans and the two members of 2CELLOS. According to the results, social networks are a tool that changes the understanding of fans. One can belong to a fandom today without actually ever going to concerts; fans perceive such fandoms as very important sources of identity. The internet makes the music easily available and facilitates intense communication between musicians and their fans. The establishment of global social networks calls for an appreciation of diversity. Bringing various cultures closer together is reflected in the freer melding of musical genres in both their creation and adoration, and 2CELLOS are an indicative phenomenon with a global fandom.

**KEYWORDS:** fandom, social networks, 2CELLOS, interculturalism

*Our concerts attract people of all age groups, from across musical genres – from classical to rock and folk music lovers – and we actually unite them all. We introduce classical music audiences to rock and vice versa, while for us, music is music, there are no genres; our goal is to celebrate music in all of its forms (2CELLOS).*

## Introduction

The democratisation of music is in particular aided by its distribution over the internet and the emergence of YouTube, which facilitates connecting among musicians and fans, the access to music markets, relatively obscure content, listening without mandatory purchase, etc. (Lessig 2001). The contrast between classical and pop music has never been

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less pronounced. The new crossover music links fans of various genres, enticing them to visit the same sites and form an entirely new subculture and fandom.

Today's fandom can be viewed in the context of musical interculturalism as a concept that in its original meaning sets forth from the concept of cultural pluralism and equality, but also from an active social relationship (Previšić 1994: 20). Therefore, contemporary music is viewed as a way in which an individual reaches beyond an individual identity and forms a new, joint and fragmented one while creating the feeling of belonging to a specific community, i.e., forming a 'we' identity (Wright 2012: 12). A fandom is characterised by a high level of interactivity and mutual influences of both music on its performance and of fans on the music industry. Fans play the role of the most prominent consumers of music as a commodity, building their own identities and meanings of everyday life within the relationship.<sup>1</sup>

We took 2CELLOS, a Croatian-Slovenian cello duo, as an example of contemporary musical, cultural and social changes. Their example clearly shows the formation of an entirely new musical genre affirmed at the global level thanks to the internet and the free dissemination of music. 2CELLOS overcame the boundaries of various cultures thanks to the popularity of its music and influenced the creation of a global fandom, whereby various groups that belong to it create a new subculture in accordance with their social and cultural features. The various Facebook and Twitter followings are an example of groups with an established structure, hierarchy, roles, standards, and values – something of a “miniature society”, tied by their affection for the duo.

The power of the internet in the world of music can be seen by the example of 2CELLOS not only in the form of promotion but also forms a platform for the free dissemination of music and a communication medium between musicians and fans aimed at obtaining feedback via social networks. Such virtual groups are suitable for ethnographic research of the context of interculturalism, the role of the internet in establishing interactions, and the highly emotional bonds between individuals and the band. This contributes to a better understanding of the relationship inside the 2CELLOS fandom as a complex social phenomenon that is almost unique to the music scene.

## **The emergence of 2CELLOS and their fandom**

2CELLOS is a cello duo consisting of Luka Šulić and Stjepan Hauser. Each has received prestigious awards for individual performances of classical music at various cello competitions. Highly praised in the world of classical music, they each wanted to take a step forward and to create something of their own and original. This is certainly one of the most prominent and globally respected name from the Western Balkan region in the world of music, famous for their rendition of Michael Jackson's *Smooth Criminal*, posted on You-

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<sup>1</sup> Even though fandoms existed much earlier, ever since the 19th century and the era of opera and classical music, they emerged in the sense in which we know them today with the promotion of rock music among the young in the mid-20th century. With the expansion of media and music genres, groups of fans began to differ in age and culture (Cavicchi 1998: 33). Today, fans can exert a powerful influence on the music industry through widespread interactive media and by clearly expressing their wishes, by shaping and distorting existing music with help of technology and by posting their own music on the internet (Đorđević 2016).

Tube in January 2011. Their video, filmed in Pula with a modest budget, received over 3 million views in the first two weeks. Soon it was followed by invitations to appear in prestigious American television programmes and talk shows. Thanks to the success of the video clip, the 2CELLOS was formally established and they signed a recording contract with Sony Music Entertainment in April 2011. In June 2011, they were the opening act on the Elton John's world tour (Jurkas 2013). Their success was among the first musical viral hits thanks solely and exclusively to the internet, i.e., the YouTube service.

By putting into use every advantage of the free dissemination of music and by finding their own musical formula for reinterpreting popular songs, 2CELLOS managed to grow from an online, viral phenomenon into a truly global musical promoter of cross-over culture within their seven years of existence. Emphasising their belief that 'all music is equally valuable' and that they never divide it to genres or by geographical origin, they set about erasing genre borders as one of their goals, i.e., merging musical features into a new sound, regardless of origin (2CELLOSlive 2011).

Fans and fandoms are a complex research field. For an adequate understanding of the traits of individuals and fandoms, the field should be placed in a social and cultural context. 2CELLOS is among the rare, if not the only Croatian-Slovenian band that surrounded itself with fans from around the globe. They communicate directly with fans via social networks, either individual or the joint 2CELLOS Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube profiles. The title of their early 2015 album, *Celloverse*, is an amalgam of the words "cello" and "universe", signalling that their fans were becoming members of a new, unique world and culture based on their music. By merging the seemingly incompatible – both musical genres and various cultures of listeners – they are truly a suitable illustration, motive and motif for ethnographical research into the influence of globalisation on the world of music. The art of 2CELLOS is an example of 'maintaining tradition in a non-traditional manner' through the promotion of classical music by merging it with pop music, which results in the amalgamation, interaction and dissemination of social- and cultural-specific fandoms and contributes to the 'cosmopolitan character of today's world' (Giddens 2005: 58).

## **Methodology**

From the perspective of fans and musicians, the present study considers the context of various cultures and the internet as a medium in the creation of a global fandom in contemporary society. Specific questions are taken into consideration:

What are the key activities of fans in the fandom?

What is the importance of fandoms for musicians and fans?

What types of relationships exist between fans, and between fans and musicians?

The research was conducted from May 2015 to May 2016 and encompassed 20 semi-structured interviews with female fans of 2CELLOS. Furthermore, 188 people were interviewed by sharing an online questionnaire via the Facebook and Twitter 2CELLOS fandoms, and an in-depth interview was conducted with the band members. All of the abbreviations of personal names are false, respecting the principle of anonymity of the par-

ticipants. All participants were informed about the aims of the study and data confidentiality. They gave their informed consent for recording the interviews and data publication. The online survey sample can be considered a snowball sample as the members of various groups or fan page managers shared the link with the members of virtual fandoms. Such dissemination of information indicates a high level of linkage and interactivity between the fans of 2CELLOS. Interculturalism imposes itself as one of the primary features of the group, as its members have origins on almost all the world's continents.

Throughout the period, three Facebook fandoms were observed along with the activities and actions of fans on other social networks (Twitter, Instagram). The internet, as a research context, facilitated the implementation of ethnography, access to remote interviewees and the examination of virtual communities.

When it comes to the interpretation of the results, it is important to emphasise that the term *fandom* is not a synonym for any of the many existing Facebook or Twitter fandoms in which most of the interactions take place and that were a valuable source of the research data, but rather refers to the overall population of those individuals who consider themselves fans of the band.

## **Music fans in the contemporary virtual context**

The phenomenon of fans does not have a single definition. The English term is an abbreviation of the word “fanatic” and dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when it described persons “obsessed with and frantic” about religion. The majority of people today can comprehend what the term means, as well as the traits of individuals belonging to a specific fandom<sup>2</sup> (Hills 2002; Boneta, Čamber Tambolaš & Ivković 2017). Fans are associated with the formation of a media cult of someone or something (a motion picture, a television series, etc.). Unlike cultural studies within which these groups are characterised as a social force of its type, the ethnographic approach drives us toward practices, experiences and meanings, i.e., it presents the emic perspective of a fandom. The best insight into what it means to be a part of a fandom can be obtained through direct questions regarding everyday activities to complete the picture of observation that can often be filled with prejudices (Cavicchi 1998).

The 2CELLOS fans call themselves Cellogirls, a name that indicates the dominant demographic features of the group. However, this fandom does not exclusively consist of female and/or young fans. The online survey (N=188) show that the fans are dominated by women (92%), while their ages differ. Most of the fans are between 22 and 35 years of age (29.8%), followed by the 36-45 age group (23.9%) and fans older than 45 (22.3%). Almost a fifth of respondents belongs to the 16-21 age group (17.6%).

As for their current residence, the respondents that participated in the online survey came from the total of 37 countries, the largest group being Americans (25%), followed by Croats (10.1%) and a high number of Argentineans (7.4%) and Brazilians (6.9%). Between five and eight respondents each came from Germany, Italy, Hungary,

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<sup>2</sup> The word was first used in 1903 by adding the ending – ‘dom’ to the English word ‘fan’. Along with the context of a group of fans, it is also used as a collective noun for all activities and typical behaviours of fans (Oxford Dictionary 2006).

Slovenia, Serbia, the UK, and Canada. The survey encompassed five continents, excluding Africa and uninhabited Antarctica. The semi-structured interviews also encompassed 20 female fans from 10 countries, which testify to the cultural diversity of the fandom, with an equal number of American and Japanese (four each) and five Croatian fans, as well as one each from Germany, Italy, Slovenia, the UK, Russia, Brazil, and Australia.

The expansion of the internet since the mid-1990s led research into fandoms to move into the virtual sphere and, somewhat later, social networks (Baym 2007). Through the internet, individuals from numerous countries and cultures are now for the first time exposed to the same media content and can become members of the same fandom. Thanks to activities and interaction almost exclusively via social networks, or Facebook groups, anyone who shares an interest in and enthusiasm and love for the music of 2CELLOS can become a “member” of Cellogirls or a member of 2CELLOS fandom. The creation of one of the Facebook groups and the name of the fandom is described by L. Ž., 19, Croatia:

We knew them (the band). Several other girls from Croatia and I came up with the idea of creating a group for them and I established the Cellogirls on Facebook (in 2013). It really turned out great; we shared our opinions, photos, videos, we recorded our own videos... Then we had the idea of opening a Twitter account, but in the meantime I saw there was already a Cellogirls group on Twitter. I thought my friend created it. Anyhow, it turned out, a Swede launched it and we got in touch. She heard about the band, but not about us, the Cellogirls. We worked with her, bit by bit, ‘give us the password’, ‘give us this and that’, and we took over the Twitter account ...

As for the reason for becoming a 2CELLOS’ fan and remaining faithful to the fandom, the majority of the interviewed female participants stated it was the musical innovativeness and originality, a fusion of familiar sounds with new arrangements that cannot be separated from the personality of the musicians, emphasising their energy, virtuosity, humour, and kindness, while their physical appearance was only noted after that.<sup>3</sup> The fans emphasise classical, rock and pop music as their preferred musical genres. The interviewees mostly became familiar with classical music better thanks to 2CELLOS, began listening to it more often and now perceive it differently:

Here in Brazil, access to classical music is something very close to people at high-class, and the schools don’t have music education... So I didn’t grow up thinking that classical music is cool. I only heard Vivaldi once. Now I listen to Haydn, Bach, Villa-Lobos to relax. A winter festival of baroque music will be held this year in my city, and I will be there definitely. Thanks, 2CELLOS (M. L., 30, Brazil).

They take the classical and blend it with the heavy metal, so to speak. I think it’s amazing (G. M., 34, USA).

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<sup>3</sup> The body and the physical appearance are an important aspect of pop music that is more often perceived through physicality and attractiveness than through the quality of performance. Since wide popularity is an important base of commercial success in the music industry, it is no wonder that the shaping of a (physical) identity of a musician is actively participated by the public (Dobrota & Kušević 2009: 202-203).

The most frequently theorised differences between music genres were those between classical and popular, ‘consumer’ music. These genres were often juxtaposed and considered opposite poles in the music world. For example, Adorno believed that the dialectic and critical function of art was only contained in ‘serious’ (classical) music, i.e., in the then avant-garde and today classical works by Webern, Schönberg, and Stockhausen that, thanks to their high quality, could not be downgraded to consumer goods as pop music could (Zabel 1989). The gap between the two genres can be perceived as a certain superiority of classical over pop music; thus, the direction was followed by social and musical research (Dobrota & Tomić-Ferić 2006). Yet, since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, through the media, IT, and increased population movements, the establishment of local communities started giving space to hybrid identities composed of opposing cultural sources (Giddens 2007). People began perceiving culture as a space to create, preserve, combine and expand various traditions, whereby social actors play a creative and active role along with global influences, and the unequal status of the so-called elite and mass cultures becomes increasingly tenuous. Such a social context is conducive to the creation of crossover music that unites virtuosity and wide popularity and cannot be considered industrial, commercial and, finally, conformist and passive on the public’s part. The activity of fandom in the creation and expansion of virtual communities and the broadening of the musical horizons of its members, as well as the numerous hours of preparation on the part of the musicians needed to perform such music testify to this.

The music habits of 2CELLOS’ fans differ. They do not attend music events often. The largest group had attended less than 10 concerts so far (27.6%), followed by those who had attended between 11 and 20 events (26.6%), and those who had attended between 21 and 30 events (16%). The habits of listening to live music and following the performances of certain bands are still not gone, even though they do not have such a strong influence on membership in a fandom as they used to (e.g., hippie movement, 1970s club scene, etc.). The virtual world permeates the real world, creating a sort of hybrid in which fans communicate with one another and with the musicians, regardless of the time and space, and can attend an event “live” from wherever they might be without a problem, provided they have an internet connection (so-called “live streaming”).

Up to the time of their participation in the online survey, most respondents had never attended a single 2CELLOS concert (48.4%) or attended only one or two of their concerts (41.5%). The share of those who attended more than five concerts is insignificant (2.1%). The data confirms the strong influence of the free dissemination of music over the internet on the popularity of 2CELLOS, while the availability of the YouTube channel on which live footage of performances is found (sometimes even entire concerts) makes individuals become fans without a genuine, non-virtual, live experience of a band’s concert.

All of the interviewed fans spend at least a part of their days engaged in activities related to the band. This mostly involves listening to music, watching videos, following events on social networks and commenting or participating in discussions in Facebook groups or on Twitter. Virtual groups are in the real sense social groups, constructed on the basis of “networked individualism”. Individuals link with the desire to belong to a specific group that identify with them and participate in joint activities, i.e., these are

groups of high affective importance for individuals that surpass geographic belonging to a community (Baym 2007). The research participants communicate with other members publicly and collectively in group discussions, and privately outside using Facebook Messenger. They emphasise that it is rather difficult for them to define exactly how much time is dedicated solely to band-related activities, by which they actually demonstrate the importance of virtual communities as the source of identity and broadening interaction beyond physical space (Šarinić & Čaldarović, 2015):

Well it's difficult to say, because I keep checking my phone (laughs). It's not like... well it's constantly looking and checking, it's like continuously I check so it's not like... it's a lot of time (A. H., 51, Japan).

Well, it's turning into a full-time job for me (J. B., n/a, USA).

Forging friendships and discussing topics privately that do not necessarily have anything to do with the band is one of the fans' very frequent activities. Interaction with Cellogirls is emphasised as almost the primary part of everyday life, identifying them with family or friends, which this fandom actually is to them: 'I think I spend about 20 hours a week interacting with Cellogirls. Only 10% of that is for the band specifically, so two hours a week on the band alone' (V. S., 33, USA).

Activities vary depending on the season, the band's activities, their current tour, the release of a new album, etc. The release of a new video or album certainly prompts an increase in public interactions on Facebook and Twitter. Equally so, dates important for the band, like its birthday (20 January, the date when the Smooth Criminal video was posted on YouTube in 2011) or the birthdays of the band members, are specially observed, and surprises and presents are prepared. Most often the fans use videos or photographs to include as many individual personal messages to the band as possible. The everyday life of Facebook groups includes the mandatory publication of videos or photographs from the band's official profile and commenting on them. The members who are about to attend a concert post more often, describing their excitement, while those who just returned from one share their experiences, opinions, videos, photographs, and views of the concert on one of the Facebook groups early on the following day.

## **The meaning and importance of fandoms**

Fans let celebrities into the deepest areas of their minds so they can influence their emotions. They allow them access like anyone else around them, and it is precisely due to the bonding that adoration oftentimes turns into imitating their lifestyle (Cavicchi 1998: 41). The aforementioned psychological component, i.e., the level of emotional bonding with the band, is emphasised in the culturally heterogeneous group of 2CELLOS fans. The importance of the fandom cannot be separated from the importance attributed to 2CELLOS by their fans. The interviewed fans emphasise that it is one of the most important aspects of their lives, following their families and loved ones. Fans believe they owe the development of their personalities, current lifestyle, identity in general and joy of life to the band:

Before never would have thought to come to Croatia, Slovenia, anywhere over here without them... And I would not have even been on social media if it hadn't been for one of the band members, because he was rather active there. They're a very important part of my life, way important (G. M., 34, USA).

I don't even know how to put it into words [crying]... I can't imagine ever going back to the life I had before... It's a known fact, but I am half as fat as I was... I mean I'm in much better health and if like that is not good enough for you. [laughs] I was in a rut; I was miserable; I was doing things just to do. I won't say they've cured my diabetes but it came as close to curing it as you can. I have now had not had insulin in a year and a half. I only take one little pill and that's it. It's overwhelming (J. B., n/a, USA).

It's the sand in the jar that fills the space between the balls and pebbles, so it comes third on the list of joys of life (A. D., 34, Croatia).

A fan status implies specific activities and forms of knowledge. Yet, regardless of the dependence on context, fans retain universal features, among which a certain resistance to dominating norms is expressed. The acceptance of the identity of a fan implies, to a certain extent, assuming a generally unacceptable identity built on a thing perceived as trivial, like a movie, series, celebrity or music star (Hills 2002). Research into 2CELLOS fandom indicates that negative labels are rare, as fans emphasise numerous positive changes brought to them by listening to and following the band. They believe 2CELLOS to be their life's inspiration, see it as an example of realising one's dream and success, which serves as a great motivation and support in life. Along with the previous statements that testify to this, one US fan pointed out that she became more independent by following the band on their tours; a Japanese fan claimed she became sociable because she attended their concerts, while a Russian fan believed that by meeting various people she improved her foreign language and communication skills. The majority of fans pointed out the possibility of meeting other people and various cultures and establishing contacts as one of the major benefits of listening to the band.

Studies of interactions within virtual communities provide a different insight into human relations than the analyses of interactions in the real world. Namely, online interactions are sometimes more suitable for the creation of communities, as they lack premature prejudices. One of the basic advantages of the internet is the high dose of control of self-presentation, i.e., control over shared elements of one's identity, and the maintenance of anonymity, so an individual feels safe when participating in discussions on a topic of joint interest. However, that does not mean that the elements of sex, age, and other features of physical identity are entirely lost on the internet. One's body is still present in the construction of one's virtual identity, yet it is expressed linguistically, through written words and with a physical distance (Rheingold 1993; Bury 2003: 271). Fans gradually create a virtual subculture, and fans become cyberfans (Costello 1999: 5).

Music fans are one of the main reasons for the creation of the first social networks in the year 2000. Besides facilitating communication between a musician and a fan, they became a medium for inter-connecting fans of similar or the same musical inter-



ests, with access to a wealth of information on individuals with which the music interest is shared and, finally, the realisation of close relationships based on the same love for music (Baym 2007). The members of this fandom pointed out the need for belonging and intimacy. For each of them, the term ‘Cellogirls’ means different things. Some identify it with all 2CELLOS fans and describe it using terms linked with a family, close friends, more precisely, a very close and important social group, while some cannot clarify the full meaning of the term Cellogirls, not wanting to belong to a group with such a name because of their need for individuality:

Cellogirls has meant many things to me. In the first place, I am long past the stage of being considered a “girl” by anyone. I refused to be part of their “giggling gaggle of girls”. I have read things written by 14-year-old that made me want to call their homes and ask where their mothers were. I observed the break out of 31’s “coven of horrible horny hags” and the damage that that wrought. I have come to know and deeply respect the steadfast lovely young woman who founded the first Facebook group. I am in her various other groups and in frequent contact with her. But no, not a Cellogirl (E. U., 66, USA).

There is a definition that we have put on the Cellogirls International website. Not on Facebook but on the actual web site.<sup>4</sup> That’s my definition. That’s what being a Cellogirl means to me (J. B., n/a, USA).

Some of the interviewed fans, although very active on social networks, refuse to be Cellogirls, as they identify the term with belonging to one of the Facebook groups that are mostly not on good terms. The high group cohesion and protective attitude of members toward their groups were evident during several clashes lasting a slightly longer than a year and a half, during which time the researcher was their member. All it takes is for one member to disagree with something posted, written or set as a group rule, and the result is numerous comments intended to protect and preserve the existing entity of the group.

The importance of the band and virtual reality for fans, albeit as a supplement to living in the physical space that they cannot replace, is expressed through mostly negative responses to the possibility of leaving everyday life behind and following the band on tour, regardless of whether they like the idea or not:

It’s my biggest dream! But I can’t leave my current life (J. D., 50, Japan).

It’s a fun thought but I don’t want it to spoil the fun... I saw them on the US tour three times, and then I waited a week and I saw them again and it was like: ‘OK, guys, I love you, but...I can only see the same show’ and I want to be excited, I don’t want to have to go every day and I don’t want to make it a routine. So, probably not. No, I wouldn’t. I had to rationalise that. It was hard, oh my goodness (G. M., 34, USA).

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<sup>4</sup> The definition from the website [www.cellogirlsinternational.com](http://www.cellogirlsinternational.com): ‘CELLOGirl is a state of mind. Once you feel it, you are a CELLOGirl. It’s not how many concerts you’ve been to, if you’ve met the band, or even being a member of a certain group. It is about your support of the band, your love and your steadfast devotion.’

It is not religion, after all. It is music! (V. M., 56, Russia).

In this context, it is important to mention several interviewees that would easily drop everything and go follow the band, singling out one US fan who actually did that and attended over 100 concerts, travelling to all continents because of 2CELLOS. A particularly emotional topic for the interviewed fans was the possibility of the band being disbanded. The majority refused to consider the possibility and viewed it as the end of the world:

It makes me want to throw up. It would...it would be devastating. I would be very very sad. However, I think individually they would succeed very well (G. M., 34, USA).

It's heartbreaking...It is the same as the sun disappearing from my life (J. D., 50, Japan).

End of the world, I don't know what I would do except watching videos and reminisce (Z. T., 20, Croatia).

Cellogirls, if defined as all 2CELLOS fans from diverse groups, are characterised by close mutual relationships and their relationship to the band's members. A strong emotional bond between fans and the band is clearly apparent. The emotional relationship emphasises the importance of the reciprocity in interactions that 2CELLOS indisputably maintain as part of its everyday life.

### **'Having' fans: The musicians' perspective**

'Our concerts attract people of all age groups, from across musical genres – from classical to rock and folk music lovers – and we actually unite them all' (2CELLOS/YouTube, 2011). The statement shows that the social and musical diversity of 2CELLOS fans has also been observed by the musicians themselves; thus, there is the important issue of their adaptation to the various characteristics of their fans, and to the various cultures of the countries they visit. Respect for cultural and identity differences is important, as this is a versatile 'global fandom' whose existence was made possible by the development of ICT, on which the success of mutual communication and relations depend as a vital element of the development of virtual fan communities (Bothe 2014; Leigh Rich 2011).

The first meeting of 2CELLOS with fans was as abrupt as was the band's entire career. Even though the phenomenon of fans, in particular, those from various cultures, was something new to them, they approached all of them openly, with no intermediaries and publicity managers, by maintaining profiles on social networks. Until early 2016, following each concert they had a free "meet and greet" – meeting fans, taking photos, and signing autographs. Such meetings often lasted for several hours and access was granted to anyone with a concert ticket. As their career advanced and popularity increased, changes were necessarily introduced in the form of a limited number of tickets for meet-and-greet events sold at higher prices. One of the 2CELLOS explained:

We realised one of our goals, the halls in which we perform became larger, yet still packed full and sold out at least a month ahead, so we can simply not

do the free meet and greet: it would last three times longer than the concert itself. You can't satisfy them all in everything (laughs).

The impracticality of direct communication with fans due to the increase in the size of the concert halls in which 2CELLOS perform and the global increase in the number of fans was foreseen by some of the interviewed fans. However, they pointed out that they did not mind the increase in the number of 2CELLOS fans. It validates the musicians' statement that one of their goals is certainly to spread the popularity of the band around the world. Satisfaction with the rise in popularity of 2CELLOS is briefly described by the following fan, despite some obvious shortcomings:

I am happy for them even if it means it will become more difficult to meet them. In 2014, they did meet and greet after every concert; in 2015, they didn't and it's a bit disappointing (R. M., 23, Italy).

Social networks are primarily characterised by interactivity. The audience no longer simply receives messages and media content, but rather participates in their creation and dissemination. Personal profiles on social networks are a place to engage in numerous activities (Jenkins 2007). Thanks to the availability of the internet music world, the overall insight of musicians into the everyday life and activities of their fans have never been easier, and musicians utilise it when creating their own image. Along with meeting them during concerts and through social networks, musicians can, out of sheer curiosity, follow and respond to daily comments, discussions and reactions provoked by their musical careers and private lives alike. As to their insight into the world of fans, which they truly recognise thanks to activities on social networks, and to what impacts their work on themselves and their concerts, one of the 2CELLOS point out:

Well, for example, it is interesting that each fan is hooked on another aspect ... And then I love seeing that, studying how some are forcing something. Some only talk about music, a phrase, compare, listen, from one concert to another analyse, for example, the vibrato, others are just interested in looks, they don't even listen to what and how we play (laughs). Everyone has his/her own part of the performance onto which (s)he gets hooked.

The musicians describe their trip to Japan, an entirely different culture, as a voyage 'to a different world,' a certain responsibility 'in light of how much they appreciate classical music,' and they point out that the Japanese are 'true perfectionists, so we had to be really careful,' primarily thinking of the precision and quality of their performance, both of classical music and their pop-rock remakes.<sup>5</sup> The band members also note certain cultural differences in the way their fans approach them and point out that 'the Japanese prefer sticking together, they don't like to separate themselves, unlike the Americans for

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<sup>5</sup> All Japanese fans pointed out in their interviews the importance of the virtuosity of 2CELLOS, which is rooted in the Japanese tradition of respecting precision, diligence, and sacrifice, and this certainly encompasses classical musicians, whose years of education are a prerequisite for these characteristics (Grinnell Cleaver 1976). Other interviewees also indicate the importance of the duo's virtuosity, which is emphasised as a distinctive feature of crossover bands in relation to the high number of popular music performers.

example.’ The cultural differences also influence their presentation, a certain image, so they note:

2CELLOS member: In Japan, they don’t like beards, but in America, they do. The Japanese prefer a neat image, like a baby face.

Researcher: You mean, like the commercial you did there?

2CELLOS member: Right, that style, you know, like something from their animated movies.

Musical expression is rarely seen as a political act, even though Dankoff points out that the process of creating music is a highly politically relevant action. Musical culture is a dynamic form of cultural knowledge that creates the feeling of belonging to a group or a place and has one of the leading roles in the dialogue between culture and a community (Dankoff 2011). Even though in the case of 2CELLOS they actually perform world-famous classical, pop and rock hits, and similar concerts are held around the globe, they more frequently opt for musical glocalisation, for returning to the local. By performing local, traditional compositions from any genre, always near the end of their concert, they take another step closer to local audiences, thus giving them importance and visibility, often times performing for days in a row in different countries:

This is again an adaptation to the culture of a country in general, not only to the fans. Essentially, it is always nice to try and get closer to the local audience wherever we are. It’s always a nice ending (2CELLOS member).

In the “global village” of their creation, the media must find their way in the newly created need for interculturalism and democratise cultural rules under the purview of globalisation (McLuhan 2008). Their role is not just to disseminate content and information, but rather to influence the social and cultural creation of meanings, standing side by side with the economy, politics, and judiciary as the fourth branch of power in society (Crespi 2006: 125). In a media-saturated society, any meta-narrative is negated, while in the artistic sense, a form of collage is accepted that combines elements from various cultures and sources into newly created cultural artefacts (Haralambos & Holborn 2002: 918-919). All of the above can also be applied to contemporary changes in the musical industry. It is worth noting that 2CELLOS do not mind the resulting phenomenon of global fandom and the new lifestyle they confronted almost overnight. They are aware of the musical and personal responsibilities in the approach to highly different cultures and individuals, as well as their differences and the possible conflicts, so they conclude:

From our perspective, the fans’ contact is mostly an advantage. They do exactly what we want – “spread the 2CELLOS word around the world”. They are not spies or something. Even though, many started as friends and then fell out. They change who’s friends with whom, who’s in which group, etc. However, they are connecting globally (2CELOS member).

## **Culture, the internet and establishing relations**

A community produces music, which in turn produces a community. As a cultural activity, music makes sense of our lives, creating individual and group identities.<sup>6</sup> Even if musical expression can be in conflict with general social norms or culture, it is one of the ways in which individuals define themselves. The cultural value of music is particularly revealed outside of the framework of orthodox development, in the spheres of creativity and rationality that is not customary (Dankoff 2011).

The decrease in the importance of geographical distance and greater openness for cultural differences spreads new forms of interaction, fandom, and music, which influence the development of an identity, are much more heterogeneous today because of global networking (Baym 2000). Even though most participants in the online survey were European (46.8%), followed by North American (31.9%) and South American (15.4%) and there were no Africans, the 2CELLOS – South Africa fan page and the Twitter profile of the same name indicate that there are fans on the only continent on which the band has not yet held any concerts.

The lack of knowledge of foreign languages arises as a problem in communication. Europeans and Americans point to problems in communication with fans that do not speak a foreign language, i.e., English, pointing to the Japanese fans, while the Japanese complain about their own lack of knowledge of English as the fandoms' generally accepted language.

Cultural problems are observed in the more expressed interaction barrier between fans, primarily in the differences between eastern and western cultures. For example, while the researcher was a member of Facebook groups, the problem of the lack of shared photographs taken by Japanese fans was observed, which is compatible with their culture. Yet, disagreements were soon resolved thanks to respect for other cultures within the groups. One of the research participants pointed out some of the typical problems and their resolution:

The East Asian countries are probably the most difficult to interact with. The online translators seem to not work very well converting their languages to English, so my ability to interact is mostly limited to their English skills. Their culture is also much more foreign to me, and I know that the way I normally talk and interact with people can sometimes be considered offensive and rude in their culture, which also causes barriers... The more I interact with people from other cultures, though, the more I learn and the easier it becomes. However, just because one person from a particular culture is easy for me to interact with doesn't mean that I have an understanding of their culture and can interact with others, but it does help to open the door when I have someone to ask (V. S., 33, USA).

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<sup>6</sup> Even though ancient philosophers talked about the importance of music in a person's upbringing (Brđanović 2013), and Hegel talked about music as a way of conveying messages (Schaff 1993), the development of sociology brought systematic considerations of the relationships between music and society. Max Weber was the first to approach it sociologically, emphasising that the rationality of modern music (tonality, intonation, etc.) is possible due to the acceptance of the principle of rationality in culture in general and in economic practice, which sets music inside a social context (Peterson 2007).

Some Croatian fans find it hard to understand the behaviour of American fans that they mostly describe using terms of infatuation, obsession, and a “lack of culture”:

There is a large group of obsessed fanatics among them, which I can hardly understand. I have met several of them who were not like that and who were ashamed of the behaviour of some of their compatriots during concerts and autograph signings, and also on social networks (A. D., 34, Croatia).

Baym (1993) perceives the need for the virtual communities as a common tool for confronting the alienation of the technological age, whereby an individual gladly enriches the isolation of sitting before a computer by interacting with others. As can be seen, contact with ‘other, and different, people’ is not always free of problems with regard to intercultural understanding. However, it is indicative that the participants found ways to establish communication, cooperation and friendships, which is the foundation for spreading interculturalism and cosmopolitan relations, in this case, via a virtual global fandom. The interviewed fans were not equally active on social networks before hearing the music of 2CELLOS and pointed out the possibility of communication and following events related to the band and the personal profiles of band members as the main reason for registering a profile on more than one social network (which some of them use for business purposes). The fans point out that they passed their musical interest in 2CELLOS onto the individuals around them, that they met other people thanks to the band and became open to other cultures, expanding their perspectives and their social networks, and conclude that meeting new people for their common musical interest is “one of the best things in all that”.

There is a distinction between fandom and the rest of the society – the “we” and “they”. Group members perceive themselves through the positive and successful consumerism of popular culture, while they are often perceived as individuals who constructed their identity poorly (Hills 2002: 3). In over a year as a member of several Facebook groups, the researcher testified to the establishment of numerous new groups, intended to discuss certain other interests, not only 2CELLOS. Individuals who might have been linked by their like interest in music expanded their interactions to other fields of life. This resulted in the unavoidable realisation of contacts with other members of fandoms outside social networks, attendance of concerts together and new friendships.

With two friends I met personally, and it was really fun. Others I’d like to meet, but they live in other countries or in distant cities (M. L., 30, Brazil).

There are those who currently I have only interacted with virtually, but we have plans to interact in the real world. Surprisingly, all of the people I’ve met in person so far I have enjoyed interacting with in real life just as much as I do online (V. S., 33, USA).

Even though fandoms mostly cooperate, in light of the high number of members and high affective value attributed to the role of fans by individuals, certain conflicts are unavoidable. They resulted in a large number of new Cellogirl factions that wish to strengthen their own stance and perspective regarding everything that happens with and around the band. As the main reason for the creation of several groups and conflicts, the interviewed

fans pointed to a book published on the fandom which, according to some, was not written appropriately.<sup>7</sup> Some of the interviewees participated both in the making of the book and in the conflicts. One of the differences worth noting is also the obligation of writing and posting in the English language in some groups, while the others more-or-less allowed for interaction in one's mother tongue among several group members. Conflicts among fans are often caused by 2CELLOS replying to only some of them, which makes the others somewhat jealous. Yet, most fans describe frictions as a normal part of life in a fandom, even though everyone wants the same thing: to promote their beloved band to the greatest extent possible. One of the participants indicated the 'imminence of frictions in large groups of individuals with particular different interests and personal ambitions which they impose upon others, sometimes in an inadequate [aggressive] manner. That is when the [conflict] situation is expected, and the same goes for the space beyond virtual, in general.'

The establishment of interactions and group structure forms a sort of social capital, which is defined by Putnam as 'connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Wright 2012). Cello-girls, however much the fandom is defined and researched, is a real group to its members, and furthermore is considered by some at the same level as close friends and family ties. It is a community that establishes rules and behavioural patterns and is primarily based on accepting cultural differences, as the basis for the establishment of a global fandom, and is one of the rare ones that has members from almost all of the world's countries.

## Conclusion

Contemporary considerations of cultural phenomena indicate the contact between the 'near and far' in the context of (promoting) cultural diversity. Masses, movements, groups, and communities are necessarily flexible and creative in forming their fields of interest (if they seek longevity), respecting the principles of openness and equality. Today's fandoms and crossover music should be considered in that light, as suggested by the researched musical phenomenon of 2CELLOS. It is precisely that kind of music that is the product and reflection of the time characterised by the approximation of cultures with the retention of specificities, virtual networks and global links; therefore, its fans are diverse by culture and remote – as is the case with 2CELLOS.

The band was created, and gained popularity, via the internet and YouTube, combining the features of classical and popular music. Its members point out the importance of virtual networks, considering them 'a part of everyday life, an obligation and leisure, where they share their tasks and jointly conceive longer posts and important news for their fans'. The duo is aware of the importance of the internet in the spread of their popularity, emphasising, for example, the posting of photographs 'where people can see the types of venues filled with their audience and the atmosphere'. Thus, they integrate the audience around the world into a part of their story, without which it would have not been possible, despite the musical virtuosity.

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<sup>7</sup> Hilmar-Jezek, Kytka. 2014. *Cellogirls: Identity and Transformation in 2CELLOS Fan Culture*. St. Petersburg: Distinct Press.

The 2CELLOS phenomenon cannot be separated from the band's fandom, often referred to as Cellogirls, because of the domination of females in some of the most attractive fandoms.<sup>8</sup> Fans are always self-defined in relation to the musicians they follow and adore, thus turning them into stars. The music of 2CELLOS encompasses an audience seeking a high-quality performance that demands long practising hours. It permeates various genres and ethnic elements, despite mostly universal live performances on all continents. The cello duo is youthful, relaxed and cheerful, yet professional, trying not to do anything that would disturb or disappoint various groups of their fans who strongly affectively relate to them. They pay considerable attention to their audience (e.g., meet and greet, daily activities on their official Facebook profile, etc.). The aforementioned features of the 2CELLOS phenomenon drive its widespread popularity among fans. Their videos posted on YouTube have millions of views;<sup>9</sup> three million people are members or actively follow the band's official Facebook profile, while the virtual groups formed by their fans have a rapidly growing number of members and visitors.

Some authors perceive fandoms as groups of "obsessed fanatics". However, the example of 2CELLOS shows that the behaviour of their fans is mostly conventional, in many respects also an example of interculturalism and cosmopolitan relations. Within their groups and social networks, fans fulfil (more precisely, complement) the need for intimacy, perceiving them as family and as a space for friendships. This gives rise to a new research question and recommendation for future ethnographic studies on the potential of virtual fandoms in the forging of primary social groups and relations, which should be considered in more detail. Finally, the intensification of private communication between fandom members does not lead to the weakening of the bond with 2CELLOS at the collective level. This can be seen in the discomfort of the fans when the band members reply on a post made by some of them, as the others feel neglected. This shows a model of possible future activities of musicians with the goal of strengthening cohesion and cooperation within the fandom, including occasional commenting on (praising) the work of the group as a whole, to spread the 2CELLOS word around the world even more successfully.

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<sup>8</sup> Some of the Facebook groups that have from one to several thousand members do not have the word 'girl' in their name, thus suggesting gender equality when joining (e.g. 2CELLOS Fan Club Italia, 2CELLOS Argentina, 2CELLOS Uruguay, etc.).

<sup>9</sup> The remake of the Puerto Rican composition 'Despacito' had over 3 million views in the first four days after being posted in July 2017. Two years later, the number is 35 million views.



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## **Povzetek**

Z uporabo etnografskega pristopa smo preučevali virtualno skupnost oboževalcev 2CELLOS. Raziskava je bila izvedena v letih 2015 in 2016 z opazovanjem Facebookovega in Twitterjevega spremljanja, z izvajanjem spletne ankete med njihovimi člani in etnografskih intervjujev z dvajsetimi oboževalci in obema članoma 2CELLOS. Glede na rezultate so družbena omrežja orodje, ki spreminja razumevanje oboževalcev. Danes lahko nekdo pripada oboževalcem, ne da bi sploh kdaj hodil na koncerte, kjer oboževalci takšne fenomene dojemajo kot zelo pomembne vire identitete. Internet omogoča glasbo enostavno dostopno in omogoča intenzivno komunikacijo med glasbeniki in njihovimi oboževalci. Vzpostavitev globalnih socialnih omrežij zahteva priznavanje raznolikosti. Zbliževanje različnih kultur se kaže v svobodnejšem mešanju glasbenih zvrsti tako pri njihovem ustvarjanju kot v oboževanju, pri čemer sta 2CELLOS okvirni pojav z globalnim oboževalstvom.

**KLUČNE BESEDE:** fandom, socialna omrežja, 2CELLOS, medkulturnost

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