Dr Ian Percy
Website Context and Research

Electroacoustic Composition 8

Odd! Pianos: Sound, Noise AND Music? (2002/13) (Electroacoustic) 8'16"
Single Movement of continuous sound and crescendo for piano and tape

This single source, single movement electroacoustic composition for amplified piano and tape was originally composed from the sounds of a Steinway grand piano during 2002. The piece was literally rescued from the trash in late 2009 when (following a studio clear-out) the composer picked the score out of the bin and decided to give the work 'one last glance' …

The audio was remastered and the score layout was revised early in 2010. Wishing to edit and recompose the piece later in 2010, the original software had long since been extinct and so the source concrete parts could not be accessed. Instead, the concrete audio was digitally remastered, and the original samples were overlaid alongside the master file in an attempt to clean and embellish the soundworld as much as possible.

When it came to recomposition of the live part in preparation for a concert performance in November 2010, it was found that everything sounded like a forced misfit; past and present composing styles were simply too far apart. Recomposition therefore concentrated upon tidying rhythms, shaping and defining dynamic gestures and generally balancing textures.

The formal relationship between pitch-distribution in the different sections of the original was (at times) quite random, and so more linear melodic statements were introduced to act as transition between pitch materials. The sequence, order and repetition of micro units were adjusted to present more recognisable phrases and motives alongside elements of vertical development and linear progression. This also instilled a more tangible sense of form within the sonic textures of near constant concrete crescendo and release.

The concrete audio was remastered again in May 2013, when the full score was also revised into its present state.

Odd Pianos is an unusual piece (one could even call it odd) with passages reminiscent of the work of Conlon Nancarrow for automated player pianos. It is an obvious throwback to the dissonance and atonality of mid twentieth century modernism, but it is certainly not just an academic piece. Emotive and passionate, at times naïve and uncouth, this work is loud and aggressive within a near constant state of crescendo and decay that certainly demands the listener's attention.

Ultimately, the re-mastering, rescoring and recomposition of this single movement for amplified orchestral piano and tape was a worthwhile exercise, salvaging an evocative blast from a compositional past that the composer doubts he will ever revisit.

Concrete Parts and Amplification:

The concrete parts have been mixed for multiple stereo-pair analogue diffusion (surround sound), with additional summated (central) mono and sub-bass (LFE) files. The piano is amplified throughout but should only be mixed to a dedicated pair of speakers front and centre of the stage, either side of the piano (see score preface for further details).

Odd Piano (Acousmatic) (2025) 8' 14"
Single movement for multiple loudspeaker analogue diffusion.

Whilst reviewing this piece during 2025, the composer heard many things he would change if he were composing this today, but it would not be the same raw and organic soundworld. It would not be 'Punk Acousma'. The more mature ears of the 2025 composer would not have as many points of crescendo and does not feel the need for so much sonic drama in a single piece, but again it would not be the same work. With all its faults, the textures still hold enough value (and energy) to justify its place within this portfolio. Furthermore, the composer now offers an acousmatic version (with the live parts removed) remastered in 2025 digital clarity.

A prerecorded version of the plucked-string parts from the acoustic score (recorded by the composer) have been subsumed within the concrete textures of this acousmatic version. The opening and closing crescendos seemed bland without them. Besides, on the two occasions this piece has been performed, the pianist did not have the time to label the strings they needed to pluck, and the lighting in the concert hall was not conducive to performing inside the piano, so, each time a prerecording for these parts was used anyway. The plucked parts also required a lot of rehearsal time, which is a rare commodity for professional musicians.

Odd Piano (Acousmatic) retains all the rough edges of its electroacoustic sibling, but without the acoustic parts, the concrete textures have more opportunities to breathe and the ears can hear just a little more of the subtle (at times almost subliminal) inner textures of this unusual piece of Punk Acousma. Perhaps that should be its nickname?

Contact:

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