

**Dr Ian Percy**

Website Context and Research

[www.ianpercy.me.uk](http://www.ianpercy.me.uk)

## **Acoustic Composition 15**

### **Perhaps We Will All Wake Up in Time? (2017)**

(Living with a Past, Present and Future)

Eight Movements for Solo Piano

This is a multiple movement work for solo piano composed during 2017. Throughout 2015/17 the composer has been involved with the preparation, research and planning for a large-scale orchestral work (*Sacsayhuaman*) and has used recent practical research as a catalyst to examine some of the more intricate inner mechanics and micro components of pitch organisation; composing harmonic structures (pitch-schemes, cycles and progressions) and melodic contours (motives, melodies and themes) suitable for potential exposition and development in large-scale orchestral form.

For reasons essential to the conception of the orchestral piece, the composer developed symmetrical, asymmetrical and proportional pitch palindromes and palindromic rhythms in a recent work for chamber trio and percussion: *The Palindrome Triptychs – Part Two (Ultima Thule)*.

Through an approach he has labelled *Matryoshka* form, the triptychs explore palindromes within palindromes, combinatorial sets within combinatorial rows to arrive at their ultimate destination: twelve-tone (vertical and linear) pitch palindromes.

The research for *Sacsayhuaman* is investigating concepts of Chaos Theory: pairs of chaotic attractors/distractors and the clear comparisons one can find in reference to the variable interactions of two (or more) musical instruments.

The composer recognises potential to use Chaos Theories to determine (or inform) the composition of proportional, symmetrical and asymmetrical micro, meso and macro musical form and musical units, whilst establishing liminal and subliminal inner relationships between the interactions of instrumentation (pitch register/pitch timbre) within the orchestra and variable concepts for controlling the combined timbres as a single symbiotic entity.

This research continues studies into composing with ancient and natural resources and the use of universal theories, physics, acoustics and acoustic resonance to inform compositional methodologies synonymous with the recent portfolio from this composer.

Starting from a crescendo of Acoustic Saturation, *Sacsayhuaman* will open with an orchestral tutti in full volume and spend the following bars (and minutes) dissipating this opening crescendo. The opening chord must be a symmetrical twelve-tone (vertical and linear) pitch palindrome, and (further informed by this recent series of compositions) will be one of Elliot Carter's Symmetrically Inverted All-Interval Twelve-Note chords (SI AITN).

Only four SI-AITN chords contain the All-Triad Hexachord (ATH) 6-z17 (012478) in prime form (palindromes within palindromes):

SI AITN 1, 3, 58 and 60 contain the All-Triad Hexachord (ATH): 6-z17 (012478/014678)

SI AITN 1: 27431 6 E985T/27431 6 E985T (6-14)

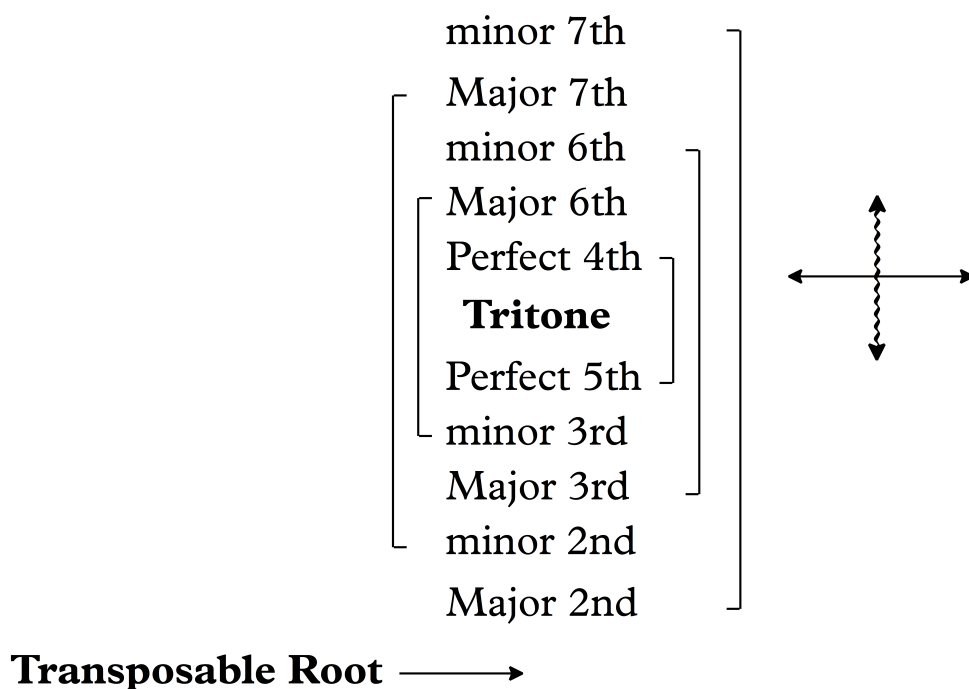
SI AITN 3: 27491 6 E385T/27491 6 E385T (6-1)

SI AITN58: 21497 6 538ET/21497 6 538ET (6-14)

SI AITN60: 21437 6 598ET/21437 6 598ET (6-32)

*Perhaps We Will All Wake Up in Time* was conceived and composed from an abstract musical genesis, with one aim: to explore the linear and vertical musical possibilities for symmetrical and asymmetrical palindromic chords, and, specifically, Carter's Symmetrically Inverted All-Interval Twelve-Note (SI AITN) Chords 1 and 60:

**SI AITN 60:**



**SI AITN 1:** 27431 6 E985T (parent hexachord 6-14)

0	2	9	1	4	5	11	10	7	3	8	6
10	0	7	11	2	3	9	8	5	1	6	4
3	5	0	4	7	8	2	1	10	6	11	9
11	1	8	0	3	4	10	9	6	2	7	5
8	10	5	9	0	1	7	6	3	11	4	2
7	9	4	8	11	0	6	5	2	10	3	1
1	3	10	2	5	6	0	11	8	4	9	7
2	4	11	3	6	7	1	0	9	5	10	8
5	7	2	6	9	10	4	3	0	8	1	11
9	11	6	10	1	2	8	7	4	0	5	3
4	6	1	5	8	9	3	2	11	7	0	10
6	8	3	7	10	11	5	4	1	9	2	0

**SI AITN60:** 21437 6 598ET (parent hexachord 6-32)

0	2	3	7	10	5	11	4	1	9	8	6
10	0	1	5	8	3	9	2	11	7	6	4
9	11	0	4	7	2	8	1	10	6	5	3
5	7	8	0	3	10	4	9	6	2	1	11
2	4	5	9	0	7	1	6	3	11	10	8
7	9	10	2	5	0	6	11	8	4	3	1
1	3	4	8	11	6	0	5	2	10	9	7
8	10	11	3	6	1	7	0	9	5	4	2
11	1	2	6	9	4	10	3	0	8	7	5
3	5	6	10	1	8	2	7	4	0	11	9
4	6	7	11	2	9	3	8	5	1	0	10
6	8	9	1	4	11	5	10	7	3	2	0

The musical character the linear contours (and vertical blocks) introduced were initially composed in reaction to the narrative suggested by the title, but, in turn, further informed internal narrative, connectives and subtitles for the individual movements. The emotional content of the emerging music seemed to naturally stipulate the placement of materials within the eventual macro form.

*Perhaps We Will All Wake Up in Time* is a lyrical and expressive (at times aggressive) multiple movement work composed for the virtuosic and idiomatic qualities of solo piano.

## A Footnote of Interest (perhaps):

On the subject of pitch organisation and the composer's evolving concept of modal sfumato<sup>1</sup> ...

The 'five-flat' key signature (D<sup>b</sup> Major/B<sup>b</sup> minor) used as an abstract collection of notes and rotating modes rather than a fixed parent scale, is of particular interest to the composer at this time (especially when writing for piano), due to the fact it contains the most perfect, perfect-fourth (in equal temperament): C/F, surrounded by the notes of G<sup>b</sup> Major Pentatonic.

These notes (G<sup>b</sup> – A<sup>b</sup> – B<sup>b</sup> – D<sup>b</sup> – E<sup>b</sup> – G<sup>b</sup>) account for all of the black keys on the piano and produce rotating modes of G<sup>b</sup> Major Pentatonic, with the mode depending upon the order in which the notes are voiced, and which note the phrases resolve to.

The scale also accounts for the first seven steps of the cycle of fourths:

C – F – B<sup>b</sup> – E<sup>b</sup> – A<sup>b</sup> – D<sup>b</sup> – G<sup>b</sup>

The seven-note diatonic scale can be naturally extended to a more chromatic nine-note scale through utilising alternate versions of the relative minor (B<sup>b</sup> melodic and harmonic minor) to introduce the notes G and A natural:

B<sup>b</sup> – C – D<sup>b</sup> – E<sup>b</sup> – F – G<sup>b</sup> (G) – A<sup>b</sup> (A) – B<sup>b</sup>

Alternatively, resolving to a C (C/F) within D<sup>b</sup> Major means one is in C Locrian mode. Resolving to G<sup>b</sup> (G<sup>b</sup> Major Pentatonic) within D<sup>b</sup> Major means one is in G<sup>b</sup> Lydian mode. The tonal centre is therefore blurred (modal sfumato) and the key signature has been organised into separate musical components.

In addition, D<sup>b</sup> Major and its six modes can be referred to in 12-tone theory as Heptachord 7-35, the complement to 7-35 is the Pentachord 5-35, which is the Major Pentatonic Scale therefore, all major scales subsume a direct transposition of its own complement: The actual complement to D<sup>b</sup> Major is G Major Pentatonic.

This is (of course) transposable through all twelve keys, but the black and white keys of the piano offer a valuable visual aid to the theorist and composer whilst working specifically with the 'five-flat' key signature. This same visual aid can also be used to help navigate unusual modulation and perhaps even shape overarching pitch schemes:

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<sup>1</sup> Sfumato: Technique used by Leonardo Da Vinci for softening the transition between colours: Imperceptible transitions between colours and tones ...

The 'five-sharp' key signature (B Major/G# minor) contains the two 'white' keys: B – E surrounded by the 'black' notes of F# Major Pentatonic: F# – G# – A# – C# – D# (cycle of fifths). The key has clearly modulated from C# Major to B Major, but the internal Major Pentatonic spelling remains the same (in enharmonic equivalents) and all of the modal relationships have changed ... Modal sfumato ...

Dr Ian Percy  
2019

**Reduced Arrangement:** A Lullaby for the Masses (arranged 2019)

With the more dissonant and serious 'linear development' movements II – IV omitted, this reduced arrangement of *Perhaps We Will All Wake Up in Time (A Lullaby for the Masses)* still results in an analytically cohesive piece but presents a more concise lyrical and musically poignant sonic journey to the listener. Movement I (the longest of all the movements) still balances in contrast with and against its modal surrounding movements, but the poetic nature of the material in this arrangement seems exponentially amplified and emphasised. Perhaps catering to a more popularist taste, but, as its composer, one immediately recognised the inherent aesthetic value of this reduced arrangement.

**Walking the Hallowed Halls** (2017/19)

A Prelude (and Coda) for John  
Piano

This is a short piano solo arranged with extracts of the latter movements from *Perhaps We Will All Wake Up in Time* specifically for the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Professor John Casken during 2019. These latter movements were originally composed with John in mind, as one aimed to compose a timeless melody (an eternal melody for all saints and sinners). This abridged arrangement was presented to him along with a collection of scores (Festschrift) prepared in handwritten format by many of his past composition students.

The *Prelude* was performed in an informal recital of the (wonderfully diverse) Festschrift in January 2020 and the programme closed with a performance of John's *Six Wooded Pieces* for solo piano. It was an honour to be part of this event.

Thank you, John ...

**Contact:**

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