

Odd! Pianos: Sound, Noise AND Music ...

For amplified piano and tape

Reference Score

Ian Percy

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(live piano part, chronometric timings and written concrete cue-points)

Duration: 8' 16"

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2002/13

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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.

Performance:

The pianist requires a thick guitar plectrum for the parts played on the strings. A jazz plectrum known as the 'Little Stubby' provides the best results for this piece.

The plucked string parts are composed to be performed live through the aid of an additional part score, and it is advisable to label the relative piano strings before performance, but there is also the option to leave these parts on the concrete tape or play them at the keys instead.

Parts of both scores are quite difficult to read and play, but this movement is mainly concerned with timbre and gesture, so a level of approximation in rhythm is acceptable at times. During the fast, textural crescendos, some notes (especially in the bass) can even be omitted to simplify performance. It is always important that the temporal shape and proportion of materials is observed in order to maintain the relationship between live musician and fixed media.

The timings given in the score have been synchronised with the playback of digital audio files and cue points provide aural cues to concrete landmarks. These files are available from the composer via the contact details given at the end of the score.

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[Study score: live piano part with accurate timings and written cue-points highlighting concrete landmarks]

0' 00" $\text{♩} = 120$ An atmospheric tape introduction...

0' 10" subtle concrete textures emerge

0' 16" *Cue subtle metallic percussive gestures

0' 20" thin wooden rhythm

0' 26" piano ostinato and fade

ambient noise and environmental sound

a concrete walk to the rostrum

plucked piano note, phrases & events

door opens

Creaking door

hissing tape

*Cue piano lid opens

humming B \flat microtone

Piano *ppp*

pppp tape drone begins

0' 30" **A** $\text{♩} = 40$ Patient & lyrical, but with growing aggression...
plucked strings [thick jazz guitar plectrum]

0' 50" *Cue hissing tape

0' 55" *Cue percussive sound

1' 12" hissing tape

1' 18" *Cue squeals

1' 22" *Cue hissing tape
tape harmonics

subtle rubato

poco rit.

poco accel.

[attack the bass 'E' notes to make the strings vibrate]

[to keys]

16 *sfz*

p *mf* *mp* *mf* *f* *ff* *fff* *p* *mp* [to keys]

sfz

Ped.

move to the keyboard
and wait for the first
blues bar sound to
start to decay

4' 22"

4' 26"

4' 30"

4' 34"

I *Cue [aggressive bass and metallic scraping sounds build in texture and intensity] -----> *Cue [tape plucked string phrase]
 [tape plucked string phrase ends]

105 *8va*

p *fff* *ff* *f* *ff*

4' 36"

4' 40"

4' 44"

[aggressive bass and metallic scraping sounds build in texture and intensity] -----> [bouncing metal balls] ----->

112 *(8)*

mf *fff* [approx.] *ff*

4' 46"

4' 48"

4' 52"

4' 58"

5' 00"

[approx.] *Cue [timpani stroke] [aggressive bass sounds] [metallic string stabs phrase] [aggressive bass] *Cue [timpani stroke] [hissing tape]
 [piano clusters and gestures interact with, and react to, similar events on tape]

117

fff [broken cluster] *mf* *f* *ff*

8va -----] *8vb* -----]

5' 26"

metallic percussion and resonance

textures build towards cresc.

Musical score for measures 137-140. The score is in G minor (one flat) and 3/4 time. It features a complex texture with multiple layers of sixteenth-note patterns. The upper staff has a melodic line with triplets and sextuplets. The lower staff has a rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics range from *ff* to *f*. Performance markings include accents and slurs.

5' 32"

5' 34"

5' 38"

5' 44"

5' 50"

*Cue tape cresc. hissing tape cresc. dissipates

*Cue squeals K tape gliss

tape ostinato and motif

Musical score for measures 140-145. The score continues from the previous page. It features a complex texture with multiple layers of sixteenth-note patterns. The upper staff has a melodic line with triplets and sextuplets. The lower staff has a rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics range from *fff* to *mf*. Performance markings include accents, slurs, and a *rubato* marking. A section of the score is circled in red, indicating a specific performance instruction.

8 5' 54"

5' 58"

6' 04"

*Cue

sounds like change in a cash register

L

textures build towards cresc.

hissing tape

151

mf

f

[octaves through to fig. M]

6' 08"

6' 10"

6' 16"

6' 20"

*Cue

prominent scraping sound

squeal motif

textures start to fade

158

ff

6' 22"

6' 28"

6' 32"

6' 34"

*Cue subtle metallic bouncing percussion

hissing tape

M

*Cue

squeal motif

textures build towards cresc.

piano phrase plays in reaction to a similar event on tape

165

mf

pp

mf

mp

mf

6' 36"

6' 40"

6' 44"

6' 46"

6' 50"

6' 54"

6' 58"

textures build towards cresc.

*Cue resonant tape cresc.

♩ = 60

*Cue tape drone thin wooden rhythms

[to plucked strings]

172

f *p*

[octaves through to Fig. N]

7' 02"

7' 28"

7' 44"

8' 16"

tape drone → hissing tape → hissing tape → thin metallic percussion → drone builds towards cresc. → squeals and tape cresc. → quiet perc. & resonances

N ♩ = 40 Patient & lyrical, but with growing aggression... *poco rit.*

poco accel. → *poco rit.*

181

subtle rubato *sfz* *p* *mf* *mp* *mf* *f* *ff* *fff* *p* *mp* *sfz*

[attack the bass 'E' notes to make the strings vibrate]

*Cue wait for tape harmonics

sfz

Ed.

musician can tap any B♭ string inside the piano with the fingertip and fade rhythm with tape to end

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