

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

For amplified piano and tape

Plucked Piano Strings

(Concrete Cues)

Ian Percy

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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 this 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.

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

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(recomposed and rescored 2013)

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[Rehearsal score: tape cue points and plucked piano strings]

0'00"

0'16"

0'22"

0'24"

0'28"

An atmospheric tape introduction...

ambient noise and environmental sound

subtle concrete textures emerge

plucked piano note, phrases and events

piano ostinato and fade

A concrete walk to the rostrum.....

door opens

hissing tape

Creaking door

*Cue

piano lid opens

wooden rhythm

*Cue

subtle metallic percussive gestures

humming B \flat microtone

Tape

ppp

mf

pp

thick tape drone

pppp

A ♩ = 40 Patient & lyrical, but with growing aggression...

0'30"

0'50"

Tape **4/4**

[drone] *p*

plucked strings [thick guitar plectrum] *subtle rubato*

poco rit.

*Cue hissing tape

Pno. *sfz* *p* *mf* *mp* *mf*

8^{va} 8^{va}



0'55"

*Cue hissing tape
percussive sound

Tape **4/4**

[drone] *mf* surge in volume

poco accel.

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

Pno. *f* *ff*

1'12"

1'18"

1'22"

drone cresc.

subtle rhythms

*Cue
tape harmonics

[drone] *ff* *fff* *p*

squeals

hissing tape

*Cue
poco rit.

[♩ = 40] ♩ = 60

*Cue
wait for tape harmonics

[to keys]

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

Pno *fff* *p* *mp*

sfz



1'26"

1'30"

2'14"

B

48 seconds

tape rhythm & squeak section

*Cue
[blues bar]

[harmonics]

[scrapes]

a sequence of intervals

tape cresc. & perc. roll

*Cue
Fast run with 'stab' chords
[roll perc.]

Tape *ppp*

[to plucked strings]

2'18"

2'30"

C ♩ = 60 Hesitant, then agitated...

D

*Cue *poco rit.*

squealing tape



Rhythm minus squeak fades

*Cue

[gliss x2]

Tape

ff *mf* *ppp* *pp* *p* *mp*

poco accel. -----

plucked strings [plectrum]

[to keys]

8va -----

Pno.

ppp *ff*

Red.



2'32"

2'36"

2'40"

tape piano beaters phrase ----->

Cresc.

rhythms and resonances ----->

tape rall. and dim. ----

ssssssssSSSSSSSSccccTTTTTReeeeeeachhhhhhhh

florid motif

high pitch squeal

Tape

ff *p* *ppp*

deep rumble

2'42"

E

2'56"

F

♩ = 60 Melancholy & expressive...

*Cue

squeal

*Cue

buzzing on tape

*Cue

quick fade

Tape

[to plucked strings]

*Cue wait for squeal to cresc.

plucked strings [plectrum]

8va

mp p

Red.



3'05"

3'18"

G

Tape

[rumble]

pp ppp

subtle squeals on tape

timpani stroke

thin percussion

poco rit. -----

8va

[to keys] [norm.]

mf mp f

3'22"

[thin chain stabs]

*Cue

high E \flat ostinato

mid-pitch drone

Tape

mp *ppp*

==

3'30"

subtle stereo phase

[mid drone]

Tape

ppp

==

3'38"

cash register percussion

squeal

buzzing on tape \longrightarrow etc.

Tape

mp

==

3'46"

squeal and drone cresc.

3'52"

H

*Cue

[quick fade]

Tape

mf *ff* \triangleright *ppp*

[low rumble]

==

3' 54"

cash register percussion

4'00"

cash register percussion

tape gliss

Tape

==

4'02"

4'06"

texture builds

phrase signals start of long crescendo

*Cue *8va* tape plucked strings etc. →

Tape ||

mf *ppp* *mf*

[rumbling drone]



4'12"

[plucked strings]

[approx. rhythm]

poco rit.

I

Tape ||

f



4'24"

5'30"

5'34"

1 minute 6 seconds

1 minute

tape rhythm & crescendo section

repeating motifs: *cresc. rall. & dim.*

bass motif ↑

J [arpeggio] etc. →

[thin gliss] K L *Cue harmonics B & Bb

Cresc. *fff* *fff*

Tape ||

ff *mf* *fff*

6'28"

M

[an almost solo event]

6'44"

*Cue

6'56"

*Cue

thin wooden rhythms

humming B♭ microtone

ccccccrrrrrrrrressssssssssssCennndooooooooooooo

[gliss]

Tape

fff

thick drone **pp**
ppp



7'02"

N

♩ = 40 Patient & lyrical, but with growing aggression...

*Cue

slight surge in volume

hissing tape

hissing tape

Tape

[drone]

p

plucked strings [plectrum]

subtle rubato

poco rit. -----

8va

8va

Pno.

P

sfz

mf

*Cue

Tape

surge in volume

[drone]

mf

thin metallic percussion

drone builds towards cresc.

poco accel.

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

Pno

f

ff

squeals and tape cresc.

quiet percussion & resonance

*Cue

humming B \flat microtone

drone cresc.

[subtle rhythms]

harmonics

Tape

p

fff

ppp

ppp

pp

ppp

poco rit.

squeal motif

*Cue [wait for tape harmonics]

Pno

fff

mp

sfz

Pianist can tap any B \flat string inside piano with the fingertip and fade rhythm with tape

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