

Editorial “The Toy Piano Takes the Stage” Dossier

Sara Carvalho | Guest Editor

Universidade de Aveiro | Instituto de Etnomusicologia Música e Dança (INET-md) | Portugal

* * *

A toy piano is not a toy pianoforte. Despite having the same visual keyboard as a pianoforte, it’s a different instrument, very different in relation to pitch range, timbre and resonance, action and playing technique, size and seating, and lack of pedals. The toy piano has its own history, a shorter history than the pianoforte, emerging in the 1880s as a toy for children. Earlier instruments had glass components or strings, metal bars in the second half of 1800s, and the metal rods of the modern toy piano appeared around 1930. And while toy instruments have been included in classical music since the early 1770s, the toy piano waited until the second half of the twentieth century to receive its classical debut, and move straight to the centre stage thanks to John Cage. Because of its history the toy piano has strong links with the children’s nursery, and composers can draw on these associations, or treat the toy piano like a small piano, or treat it as an instrument and sound source in its own right. Today dedicated performers in several countries commission new works, and composers are increasingly being drawn to write for the toy piano.

The idea to propose a special edition on the toy piano to *Vortex Music Journal*, arose from three organizers [Antonietta Loffredo (Italy), Diana Blom (Australia) and Sara Carvalho (Portugal)] of a two day conference and festival dedicated to the art of the toy piano: “Music as Play Festival – The toy piano takes the stage”. This event was held in Como, Italy on the 6th and 7th of July 2019.

In this issue of *Vortex*, “The Toy Piano Takes the Stage”, the toy piano’s history, both past and contemporary, its timbre and sound qualities plus other characteristics are discussed by

performers, composers and musicologists.

The first two articles are from composers Sara Carvalho (Universidade de Aveiro, INET-md, Portugal) and Diana Blom (Western Sydney University, Australia). My paper “Occupied reflections: audience as performers” opens this issue, and reflects on how audiences can be integrated as performers in a new music performance, more specifically in my piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience. The piece was thought through and planned in such a way that it invited the audience to become active performers, part of the musical plot as music makers. In “Drawing texture with the toy piano”, Diana Blom discusses the influence of hand drawing techniques in her work for toy piano. While her musical response to hand drawing techniques is largely an expressive response, there is an element of trying to adapt the drawing techniques in a way similar to how artists use them, but in sound.

The third and the fourth articles are by two performers: Antonietta Loffredo (I.C. Cernobbio – Italy) and Késia Decoté Rodrigues (Independent researcher – Brazil). On her paper “The Toy Piano is Not a Toy!” Antonietta Loffredo describes a two-day composition workshop dedicated to the toy piano, held in 2019 at a state middle school in Italy. The resulting compositions from the workshop indicate that the toy piano is a useful means to stimulate creativity in young pupils. In “Visuals, Structure and Emotion: The Toy Piano in the Dramaturgy of Piano Recitals” Késia Decoté Rodrigues examines the contribution of the toy piano to the dramaturgy of piano recitals. Three piano recitals were observed as case studies, demonstrating how the addition of toy piano performances can contribute to the dramaturgy of recitals.

Finally, composer and musicologist Brian A. Inglis’ (Middlesex University – London, UK) paper “Serendipity Poetry and Play in Toy Piano composition and *Four Pieces for Toy Piano*” draws on literature by Xenia Pestova, Antonietta Loffredo and Maggie Williams/Margaret Leng Tan, presents an interview with Kate Ryder exploring aspects of toy piano performance/composition, and focuses on his “Four Pieces for Toy Piano” (2018).

I would like to thank all the authors that contributed to this issue of *Vortex Music Journal* – “The Toy Piano Takes the Stage” –, to the reviewers and to the editors for all the help and opportunity.

Dr. Sara Carvalho