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Editorial “The Toy Piano Takes the Stage” Dossier

Sara Carvalho | Guest Editor

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

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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

Occupied reflections: audience as performers

Sara Carvalho

Universidade de Aveiro | Portugal

Instituto de Etnomusicologia – Centro de Estudos em Música e Dança (INET-md) | Portugal

Abstract: *New music* is often perceived as challenging, and many times generates controversial opinions. Nevertheless, it allows for some non-obvious relationships between composers, performers, and listeners. Finding more effective ways to engage listeners into *new music* could be an alternative way to reach out to further audiences. This paper aims to discuss and give examples of how the audience was integrated as a performer in a new music performance, more specifically in the piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience (composed by the author of the paper). 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. Conclusions suggest that what was asked from the audience opened up a unique *new music* experience, as they had to follow instructions and actively participate in the construction of the sound.

Keywords: New music; Composition; Toy piano; Audience; Performance

As music is a temporal art form, it is often very difficult to retain all the musical ideas of a piece, as “Music unfolds in temporal experience; it is always continuous and in flux. Still, we have the definite impression that music involves a characteristic experience, principally one in which the flow of temporal events is organized in some way” (SERAFINE, 1988, p. 36). The trilogy between composer/performer/listener (composition/interpretation/perception) proposed by Kendall and Carterette (1990) reflects on the idea of how a musical goal/expression could be conveyed. The composer uses notation to create music, which is given to the performer who transforms it into the sound that is received by the listener; also, musical composition has been generally characterized as “some kind of intellectual property to be delivered securely from composer to listener” (COOK, 2001, p. 6). Although for past centuries this seemed to be the rule, nowadays not all music works like this.

Traditionally, musical concerts have the audience as non-performative listeners, passive observers and receivers of the creation, “and the audible product is presented to the anonymous listener who is physically detached from the musical activity, seated in an anonymous chair as a passive observer” (DE HANN, 1998, p. 5). In music, the question of meaning, of what music refers to, has not yet reached a consensual answer. Meyer (1956) stated that musical meaning comes from the interaction of each individual with the musical work. He also said that embodied musical meaning had much to do with the listener’s expectations, explaining that, for instance, a particular musical gesture could guide the listener to expect an occurring musical result. Moreover, Wayman (2005) pointed out “Scholars and researchers have searched for the meaning of music-making in humans. In addition, much debate exists regarding how composers express meaning through sound as well as how this meaning is experienced by the listener” (WAYMAN, 2005, p. 21). Therefore, one could infer that meaning is frequently constructed on a personal perspective; “Meaning can be ascribed to actions, activities, experiences, and objects according to their value placed on them by the individual” (WAYMAN, 2005, p. 17).

Although sound forms a basic role in making connections and associations with the world around us, *new music* is often criticised as being “difficult” by listeners. Very often the first (and only) listening of a *new music* piece is in the context of a première, and the audience needs to be predisposed to listen and to make sense of a piece that has never been listened to before. That is one reason for why *new music* is often perceived as challenging, and many times generates controversial

opinions. If we take the example of a live music pop rock concert most audience members know how to react to the band. Often, this is not the case in a *new music* concert. Carvalho & Marinho (2010, p. 108) referred that

Public performances of contemporary music within the Western-art tradition are characterized by recurring patterns involving not only repertoire choices, but also behavioural norms that affect performers and audience alike”, such as “(...) dress rules, sets of specific gestures (discreet for expressive, dignified repertoire, or ample and exaggerated for virtuosistic repertoire), or behaviour models towards the audience. But the audience is also conditioned by specific rules: silence during performances, applause at specific moments only, indignant stares at prevaricators, and cough at appropriate moments (CARVALHO & MARINHO, 2010, p. 110).

Music is intrinsically a collaborative art, and *new music* allows for some non-obvious relationships between composers, performers, and listeners. *New music* works have been providing unique opportunities for composer/performer collaboration, however no significant research has yet investigated how to further include, engage and promote the participation of the audience into *new music* pieces or concerts, and specifically research that discusses the composition process itself.

As de Hann (1998, p. 14) mentioned

The relationships between the sounds, and the people accordingly involved in the making and/or listening to the sounds, are determined through a natural series of connections which although they may be difficult to quantify, are interconnected through a focus on the creation of a *sounding* music as a shared activity (DE HANN, 1998, p. 14).

Therefore, the composer can re-think ways on how a listener can become part of the performance. The participation of the audience as performer may create unique experiences to the listener, as each element of the public is as actively involved in the music-making as the performers.

“occupied mirrors”: the composition process

The starting point for this paper was the commission of a *new music* piece for toy piano. When I received this commission, I started to think about an instrument that is very often considered a toy, but it has also been increasingly used as a concert instrument, with specific repertoire written for it. One of the most well-known examples is John Cage’s “Suite for Toy Piano”,

written in 1948. Other important works include: “Ancient Voices of Children” written in 1970 by George Crumb, Yann Tiersen’s “La Valse d’Amélie” (2001), “Sonata for Toy Piano” by Michael Finnissy (2006-07), or “under the wood” (2012) for 2 amplified toy pianos and ensemble and “Miles to go” for 4 prepared and amplified toy pianos by Karlheinz Essl.

Nowadays, several pianists, for instance: Philip Thomas, Margaret Leng Tan, Phyllis Chen, Antonietta Loffredo and Isabel Ettenauer, are dedicating a great deal of their time performing on the toy piano, and even commissioning new works to composers. Both performers and composers have widened the instrument’s repertoire, including timbral alterations, what is commonly called “extended techniques”.

“The fact that music is played with a toy suggests to the listener that something different will happen and they will have a chance to *join the game*” (LOFFREDO, 2018, p. 121). So, I decided that it would be interesting to include the audience in the piece. This would be the musical bridge between this toy, which was invading the stage as a performative soloist, and the audience itself. In this section, I will not only describe the different stages of the composition process, but also reflect on how each stage calls for different approaches with the audience in mind.

Stage 1 – The starting point for the compositional narrative

Most of my pieces depart from a very specific starting point, which can emerge from many sources: literature, visual arts, landscapes, details, or any kind of experience. It will be this initial stimulus that will determine my narrative and will structure my compositional material. That is why my titles always arise before I start writing the piece.

The starting point for this piece was a picture (picture 1) that I took in Montreal, Canada, in which one can see in a window the reflection of the street; this later became the narrative idea for my piece, “occupied mirrors”.

Picture 1 – Photograph of a Montreal window, in Canada.



Photograph taken by the author of the paper (2017)

When one looks to the window, it is not possible to see the interior of the house; one can only see the reflection of the street, as if the street itself had become the interior of the house. This led me to think about a stage curtain (as often they are traditionally red as in the picture), and the performance event being occupied by other reflections and/or elements. In this case, the audience would be “occupying” the stage. This is the reason why my piece is called “occupied mirrors”, and the paper “occupied reflections: audience as performers”. Departing from the unique timbre of the toy piano, the main idea for the piece was not only to explore the instrument acoustically, but also to find compositional ways in which I could integrate the audience into the piece. I would do this by asking them to play along, and to actively participate in the performance: my aim was to explore, present and analyse all musical reflections that occurred in my creative process.

Stage 2 – The performance

The piece was conceived having the performance in mind, and the composition process was very much influenced by that. I decided that the toy piano would play different gestures and

phrases, and the role of the audience would be to echo, amplify and transform them, in responses that would be related with the musical material that was being listened to.

So, while thinking about the piece, I had to decide how the pianist was going to communicate and perform with the audience during the performance. Therefore, I decided that while entering the concert hall, different sound objects should be randomly distributed to the audience. Before starting the piece, the pianist should briefly explain to the audience how their interaction would be, and what their role would be during the performance of the piece.

In order to trigger the audience participation and interaction with the toy piano, I created three different images (pictures 2, 3 and 4) that would be projected during the performance. These images were presented to the audience, and it was explained how they were related to each sound object, and also the improvisational aspect of their participation. As observed in the pictures 2, 3 and 4 these interventions don't need to follow a traditional score; the idea is that while the pianist plays, the images are triggered, inviting the intervention. For these images/interventions I created three improvisational sound gestures.

The first image to be projected during the performance (picture 2) is a photograph with plastic bags, with the written instruction "Audience: continuous soft sound". When this image appears, the audience members that have plastic bags should improvise with the object, creating a continuous soft sound, accompanying the toy piano. Then, when the audience needs to stop, another projection appears with the word "SILENCE".

Picture 2 – First projection of the piece "occupied mirrors", for toy piano and audience



Audience: continuous soft sound

Photograph taken by the author of the paper (2019)

The second image to be projected (picture 3) is a photograph of two hands rubbing each other; here the instruction given to the audience is not written, but communication is given through the indication of two arrows moving into different directions. The idea is that the entire audience will rub their hands, in any velocity. When the audience needs to stop, a projection appears with the word “SILENCE”.

Picture 3 – Second projection of the piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience



Photograph taken by the author of the paper (2019)

Finally, the third and last image to be projected (picture 4) is a photograph with bubble wrap, with the instruction “Audience: pop + play”. When this image appears, the audience members that have bubble wrap should improvise with the object creating a “popping” sound, playing along with the toy piano. Again, when the audience is to stop, another projection will appear with the word “SILENCE”.

Picture 4 – Third projection of the piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience



Audience: pop + play

Photograph taken by the author of the paper (2019)

The intention is that the audience becomes either an extension or a continuous layer of the toy piano’s sound world. The written score used by the pianist allows a notation that encourages audience improvisation. With the composer’s permission, the audience’s instruments may be substituted with similarly sounding material.

Stage 3 – Structure & compositional material

The 1st intervention

In the 1st intervention, the audience improvises using plastic bags. This occurs approximately 30 seconds after the beginning of the piece, and lasts approximately 30 seconds.

First, it is important to mention that apart from playing with the toy piano, the pianist also plays with small objects, such as knitting needles, soft mallets, and a singing bowl. These objects will be slowly presented throughout the piece. The first one to appear is the singing bowl, simultaneously played as a complementary timber sound for the toy piano at the beginning of the piece (figure 1). The singing bowl gives the toy piano the resonant sound that it lacks; it also opens up the possibility for other sounds to emerge within the piece. The intention was that it could also become a referential element to guide the audience.

Figure 1 – Measure 1-4 of the piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience

The score for Figure 1 is written for two staves: 'toy piano' and 'audience'. The tempo is marked as $\bullet = 60$. The 'toy piano' part begins with a 'singing bowl' instruction. The first measure has a circled note with a '>' accent and the instruction '(strike)'. The second measure has a circled note with a '>' accent and the instruction '(around the edge)'. The third measure has a circled note with a '>' accent and the instruction '(normal)'. The 'toy piano' part includes dynamic markings *mp*, *mf*, and *p*. A note in the first measure is marked with a '>' and the instruction '(grace notes always on the beat)'. The 'audience' part is represented by a horizontal line with vertical tick marks corresponding to the measures.

Figure 2 shows how the score was written in order to allow the 1st audience participation. The improvised section becomes measured in seconds, in order to permit the pianist the necessary freedom to interact. The same occurs with the use of graphic notation. This type of notation allowed me to focus on my main objectives without losing my compositional ideas. For that, I simplified some of the written elements, which helped the pianist’s freedom and synchronisation with the audience. This allowed a performance that conveyed my ideas and my compositional intent.

Figure 2 – 1st intervention of the audience in the piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience

The score for Figure 2 is written for two staves: 'toy piano' and 'audience'. The 'toy piano' part starts at measure 7. The first measure has a circled note with a '>' accent and the instruction '(strike)'. The second measure has a circled note with a '>' accent and the instruction '(knitting needle (gliss along the piano keys - cracking sound))'. The 'toy piano' part includes dynamic markings *p*, *mf*, *p*, and *pp*. A note in the first measure is marked with a '>' and the instruction '(slow, irregular gliss - do not accentuate)'. The 'audience' part includes a 'projection 1' instruction with a 'clac at about 15'' and a duration of 'about 10 seconds'. The 'audience' part also includes an 'improvise' section with the instructions 'pitch: F/F#/G/C/C#' and 'rhythm: as in measures 4 and 5'. The 'audience' part is represented by a horizontal line with a wavy line indicating the sound of plastic bags.

In the 1st intervention the intention is that the audience improvises using plastic bags, creating a continuous soft sound, accompanying the knitting needles glissando played by the pianist

along the piano keys. This intervention has two purposes: 1) it is a response to the knitting gesture of the pianist; 2) gives transitional time for the pianist to move again to the toy piano sound (last measure of figure 2).

All the audience interventions have the function of assuming the role of other percussion instruments. In this case, the audience has the function of a pedal sound, a continuous sound that toy pianos don't have. This intervention allows time to reflect on what was previously heard, and becomes a bridge for what is to come. This gesture is revisited at the end of the piece, as seen in figure 3.

Figure 3 – Revisited 1st intervention of the audience in the piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience

The musical score for Figure 3 is divided into two systems. The first system, starting at measure 45, features a piano part with two distinct glissando interventions. The first is labeled '1 knitting needle (gliss along the piano keys - cracking sound)' and is marked *pp*. The second is labeled '2 knitting needles (disconnected gliss along the piano keys)' and is marked *p*. A duration of 'about 20 seconds' is indicated above the piano part. Below the piano part, a wavy line represents 'audience sound 1: plastic bags (continuous soft sound)'. Annotations include 'before starting again, the audience must be in silence' at the beginning, 'projection 7' with 'start about 8"' above the piano part, and 'projection 8 (silence)' at the end of the system. The second system, starting at measure 48, features a piano part with two interventions: 'bowl (around the edge)' and 'wood'. The score concludes with a double bar line at measure 48.

In order to indicate to the audience when to stop an intervention, a projection appears with the word “SILENCE”. As indicated in the score, it is the pianist that decides when to stop an audience’s improvisation. Figure 4 demonstrates an example that appears in the score.

Figure 4 – Example of the instruction “silence” in the piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience

The musical score for Figure 4 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the piano, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It begins with a measure marked *mf* and contains the instruction "2 knitting needles (disconnected gliss along the piano keys)". Above this staff, a line indicates a duration of "about 15 seconds". The middle staff is for the audience, starting with a bass clef and a dynamic marking of *p*. It contains the instruction "(slow, irregular gliss - do not accentuate)". Above this staff, a line indicates a duration of "about 5 seconds". The bottom staff is a waveform representing the audience's sound. A box labeled "projection 2 (no image = silence)" is positioned above the audience staff, indicating the period of audience participation.

The 2nd intervention

For the second intervention it is suggested to the audience to gently rub their hands. Body percussion has been used for as long as we can remember, and in several contexts (people clap to music, for instance). It is the only intervention where the entire audience participates at the same time, and where everybody does the same thing, whereas in the other two interventions objects are dispersed throughout the audience. This decision not only allowed everybody to participate simultaneously but, because it is a rather soft sound, gave it an amplified texture.

Analytically speaking, and in relation to the previous sound played by the audience, it relates to it as an echo, a softer reflection of the earlier sound. Therefore, as with the plastic bags, its function is again a pedal sound, that accompanies the improvised trills of the pianist (figure 5).

Figure 5 – 2nd intervention of the audience on the piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience

The musical score for Figure 5 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the piano, starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains the instruction "improvise trills - pitch: F/F#/G/C/C#" and a dynamic marking of *pp*. Above this staff, a line indicates a duration of "about 20 seconds". A box labeled "projection 3" is positioned above the piano staff. A box labeled "start about 8''" is positioned above the piano staff. The bottom staff is a waveform representing the audience's sound, with the instruction "audience sound 2: rub your hands gently" written below it. The waveform shows a series of irregular trills with different durations.

The 3rd intervention

Finally, in the 3rd intervention, the audience members with bubble wrap should *pop it*. The idea is to imitate and respond to the pianist's staccato, in order to create an improvised dialogue, which amplifies what is being listened to (figure 6).

Figure 6 – 3rd intervention of the audience of the piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience

The figure displays a musical score for the 3rd intervention. It consists of two systems of music. The first system, starting at measure 30, features a piano part with a treble and bass clef. The bass clef part has a steady accompaniment of eighth notes. The treble clef part has a melody of eighth notes with staccato markings. A dynamic marking of *mp* is present. The second system, starting at measure 33, is labeled 'projection 5' in a box. It features a piano part with a treble and bass clef. The bass clef part continues with eighth notes. The treble clef part has a melody of eighth notes with staccato markings and a dynamic marking of *p* (cresc poco a poco). Below the piano part, there is a staff labeled 'audience sound 3: pop bubble wrap' with a series of small circles representing the sound of popping bubble wrap.

This staccato is related to the other small object used by the pianist, that was not yet mentioned, the soft mallet played on wood. The first time that it is heard is after the 1st intervention of the audience. Firstly, one hears the singing bowl several times; then, the knitting needles along with the piano keys are introduced; and finally, we listen to the sound of wood. Thereafter, and before the 3rd intervention, this sound appears several times, in order to create a relationship between the three types of staccato: the bubble wrap, the wood and the staccato played on the toy piano.

Figure 7 – First time the sound of wood is listened to in the piece “occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "occupied mirrors". It features two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The piece begins at measure 14. The first part of the score is marked *mf* and includes the instruction "(around the edge)". The second part, starting at measure 15, is marked "duration: about 7 seconds" and includes the instruction "2 knitting needles (fast disconnected irregular gliss along the piano keys)". The third part, starting at measure 16, is marked *mf* and includes the instruction "Play in wood (soft mallet)". A tempo marking of "♩ = 60" is present above the second staff. The score uses various musical notations, including glissandi and specific rhythmic patterns.

Final conclusion

“Occupied mirrors”, for toy piano and audience, was premiered in July 2019 to an audience of 50 people. In this piece the listener was not only engaged in listening, but also physically participated in making-music, in much the same way as the performer. Together, performer and audience produced the final outcome, as they both actively participated in the construction of the sound. As the audience’s role was altered, that allowed space to create a meaningful experience and a very unique synergy. My intention was not only to guide the listener during the performance, but also, simultaneously, to allow them to experience something different by participating in the music-making.

In this piece what was asked from the audience opened up a *new music* experience, as they had to follow instructions from the pianist, and actively participate in the construction of the sound. The use of indeterminate and graphic notation in the score allowed for a more flexible piece, and gave space for the audience to participate.

It is a fact that creativity is a fundamental element in the construction of a positive musical experience. So, by allowing creative participation from the audience, by engaging the audience in the music making process, by exploring this kind of interaction between the musicians and the audience, we can lay out an alternative way to reach future audiences. Also, it could allow further discussion on how listeners recollect, perceive and describe *new music*, and therefore amplify current knowledge on the development of how meaning can be constructed.

In this paper it was not my intention to evaluate the audience's participation experience, but mainly to share alternative compositional approaches, when having the audience in mind. However, after the première several people came to me at the end of the concert saying that they really enjoyed participating in the piece. The listeners-performers referred that their participation made them more involved in the music, as it engaged their imagination in an emotional way.

By including the audience in my piece my intention was not only to guide the listener experience during the performance, but also to create an experience, which could be easily remembered, and evoke different types of memories; the piece becomes something that can be read and interpreted from several angles, as by participating different memories emerge.

It is my believe that engaging the audience in the music making process, and exploring this kind of interaction between the musicians and the public, could approximate and attract audiences to *new music*.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sara Carvalho is a composer and a lecturer in Aveiro University, and a fellow researcher of INET-md, Portugal. She is interested in the interaction of different Performing Arts, and all aspects associated with gesture, audience as performers and performer-composer collaboration. Her folio has over 60 pieces that are played regularly, including commissions by ensembles of international merit, and prestigious institutions. Several of her pieces are available on CD and many of her scores are published by the Portuguese Music Information Centre. Her research work is presented at international conferences, and is published in several journals and book chapters. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4391-8498>.

E-mail: scarvalho@ua.pt

Drawing texture with the toy piano

Diana Blom

Western Sydney University | Australia

Abstract: This paper discusses the influence of hand drawing techniques in my work for toy piano. It is known that composers often respond expressively to ideas and draw compositional strategies from other domains of life, for example, the mathematical proportions of architecture on some compositions of Guillaume DuFay, Peter Maxwell Davies and Eve Duncan. For me, a chance comment from an artist friend, Deanna Petherbridge's book, *The Primacy of Drawing: Histories & Theories of Practice* (2010) and Elizabeth Cooper's botanical watercolours of the Australian rainforest tree *Stenocarpus sinuatus* (Firewheel Tree) offered ideas and techniques for several works for toy piano, and piano and toy piano (one player). While my 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.

Keywords: drawing techniques, line, pentimenti, toy piano, architecture.

This paper discusses the influence of hand drawing techniques in my works for toy piano. Composers often respond expressively to ideas and draw compositional strategies from other domains of life. We're taught in music history that Renaissance composer, Guillaume Dufay's motet, *Nuper rosarum florum*, incorporated mathematical proportions of Santa Maria del Fiore Cathedral, the dome of which was engineered by Renaissance architect Filippo Brunelleschi. The motet was written for the consecration of the building and Warren (1973) finds that "in its overall dimension ... *Nuper rosarum flores* has exactly the same proportions as the interior of the cross and dome of Santa Maria del Fiore" (p. 97) - the isometric motet's rhythmic scheme reflects the proportions – 6:4:2:3 – of the cathedral dome. The influence of Renaissance architecture, in particular the churches of Brunelleschi, is also found in Peter Maxwell Davies's *Symphony No. 3* with his use of Fibonacci numbers in proportioning the symphony being modelled on these buildings (DAVIES, 1994).

Australian composer, Eve Duncan (2017), refers to two composers who have been inspired by architecture – Liza Lim's *Ecstatic Architecture*, composed for the 2014 opening of the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles and *Consecration of the House* composed by Ludwig van Beethoven for the opening of the Josephstadt Theater in Vienna in 1822. She calls these "expressive responses to the architecture that do not include incorporating non-musical mathematical architectural parallels in the music" (p. 68). However, in her own work *The Butterfly House* (2011), for piano quintet, Eve Duncan "uses the architectural plans of the modernist McCraith House, designed by architects Chancellor and Patrick in 1957[,],....the linear and angular proportions of the house ...given a parallel in the musical elements, both mathematically and non-mathematically" (BONSHEK, 2015 – no page number). (Image 1)

IMAGE 1 – McCraith House. Photograph by John Lloyd Fillingham (permission of the photographer)



Messiaen links his principle of nonretrogradation (palindrome) to architecture saying – “...thus, in ancient art, Gothic and Romanesque cathedrals, and even modern art, the decorative figures are... symmetrically inverse figures...” (p. 12 SAMUEL, 1986, English trans. by E. T. Glasow, 1994). Here, architectural principles and concepts are adopted rather than precise measurements. And composers often draw on the musical strategies of another culture and adapt them to create a rich sound system within which to play and compose - I’m thinking of Olivier Messiaen and Philip Glass’s interest in Indian rhythmic patterns. The message is that the systems and principles of other domains and other cultures can be a rich source of compositional ideas and strategies.

For me, it was a passing comment made several years ago by a friend who paints, that reminded me artists have as many processes and techniques as music composers. She saw a painting of people on Sumner Beach, New Zealand, by Derek Margetts, a New Zealand painter, on my wall (see Image 2) and commented on it using an illustrator’s style because of a black line around the figures.

IMAGE 2 – Sumner Beach scene, Derek Margetts (1984)



This comment stayed with me and re-emerged when I read Deanna Petherbridge’s book, *The Primacy of Drawing: Histories & Theories of Practice* (2010). Petherbridge explains and illustrates many technical drawing terms - ‘Drawing Strategies’ (p. 152) she calls them, although sometimes she refers to ‘drawing systems’ (p.88). In discussing line in drawing, Petherbridge relates to my painter friend’s passing comment about an illustrator’s style when noting how “the ability of drawing to

unfold in time at both micro and macro levels means that it readily serves time-based disciplines, from book illustration to comic books, graphic novels or animation” (p. 96). She writes of how ‘the basic units of lines, marks and traces and the way that they relate to each other and to the support materials on which they are deployed constitute the primary aspect of the linear economy (p.88)’.

The Blue Ice Cave (2016) for piano and toy piano (one player), composed in 2013, is the first work in which I deliberately drew on the idea of line. It was written for Antonietta Loffredo to play in our collaborative project, *Antarctica*, new music for piano and/or toy piano by composers from five countries, with the southern continent’s landscapes and atmospheres in mind¹. *The Blue Ice Cave* was influenced by a photograph of such a cave taken in Antarctica by Geoff Paul (Image 3), and while the photograph was certainly an influence, the work deliberately explores Petherbridge’s idea of line, and in particular the illustrator’s line.

IMAGE 3 – The blue ice cave. Photograph by Geoff Paul (permission of the photographer)



The piano plays the dominant role but the toy piano, when it appears, is, with one exception, always providing a sharp, ‘icy’ line around the piano’s figure – like an illustrator’s line sometimes together, measure 32 (Image 4), sometimes in counterpoint, measure 37 (Image 5).

¹ 2014 *Antarctica – new music for toy piano and/or piano* – Antonietta Loffredo, piano/toy piano, Wirripang Media Pty. Ltd. CD Wirr 059

IMAGE 4 – *The Blue Ice Cave* (2016) for piano and toy piano mss 31-33 (permission of Wirripang Pty. Ltd.)

Musical score for measures 31-33. The score is for Toy Piano (TP) and Piano. It features three staves. The top staff (TP) has a 'long pause' above it. The middle staff (Piano) has dynamics *mf* and *f*. The bottom staff (Piano) has dynamics *mf*, *p*, *mf*, and *f*. There are also markings for 'legato' and 'rit.' below the bottom staff.

IMAGE 5 – *The Blue Ice Cave* (2016) for piano and toy piano mss. 34-38 (permission of Wirripang Pty. Ltd.)

Musical score for measures 34-38. The score is for Toy Piano (TP) and Piano. It features three staves. The top staff (TP) has a tempo marking '(♩=c.130)'. The middle staff (Piano) has dynamics *mp* and *mf*. The bottom staff (Piano) has dynamics *mp* and *rit.*. There are also markings for 'legato' and 'a tempo' above the top staff, and 'legato' and 'rit.' above the middle staff. There are also markings for 'legato' and 'rit.' below the bottom staff.

This clear, defining timbral quality of the toy piano complements the softer, more diffuse timbre of the piano and together forms a rich, wider keyboard palette for one player.

Petherbridge describes how

Lines can be organised into coded systems to approximate the spatial and descriptive aspects of colour or to simulate textures, but unadorned line escapes the inherently sensory/evocative aspects of paint, *except in its apparent ability to suggest movement*: what the seventeenth-century theorist Franciscus Junuis had referred to as a ‘deceitfull similitude of Life and Motion.’ (PETHERBRIDGE, 2010, p. 88).

One example of this suggested movement is seen in Henry Moore’s (1898-1986) *Women Winding Wool* (1949)² which explores “the volume and surface complexities” (Petherbridge, 2010, p. 98) of the figures being drawn. The drawing is described as

a modern and expressionist version of this linear code for defining volume and movement... although its potential motion has been knitted into monumental stasis. The curved lines that capture and enmesh the simplified forms of the headless female figures establish a homological relationship with the subject matter of winding’ (PETHERBRIDGE, 2010, p. 101).

For the viewer, the lines offer an experience of almost being in the wool winding process itself, an immersive experience as a winder and also the conviviality of the paired task. Drawing on this close connection between viewer/listener and the activity, I wrote *Through Shadows* (2020), a work for toy piano in 2018 for the toy piano festival *Music as Play – the toy piano takes the stage*³, held in Como, Italy in 2019. The piece was influenced by driving through an avenue of 100+ year old plane trees in northern Poland, knowing that the Polish government had been told to cut the trees down by the EU as they are considered a hazard to motorists. Leaving politics aside, the moving sensation of the changing volume of shadow, sometimes flickering, sometime very immersive - like Moore’s busy wool winders portraying volume and movement - is something the two sections of the work try to capture. Firstly, the flickering (Image 6) where the two hands are in contrary movement interspersed with a lighter figure; and later the immersive quality (Image 7) where the alternating hand blocks seek to capture darker, denser shadow interspersed with light.

² There are several drawings by Henry Moore titled *Women Winding Wool*. Petherbridge is referring to the busy 1949 drawing in crayon and watercolour.

³ <https://music-as-play.wixsite.com/toypiano>

IMAGE 6 – *Through Shadows* (2020) for toy piano, mss. 74-80 (permission Wirripang Pty. Ltd.).



IMAGE 7 – *Through Shadows* (2020) for toy piano mss 114-119 (permission Wirripang Pty. Ltd.)



In both these examples, there is a link to Petherbridge’s comments on Kandinsky and Klee, both artist/theorists, and their discussions on “lines and shape within a taxonomy of dynamic and passive lines. Line as a dynamic time-trace subsumes a complex layering of signification in the making of drawing and its reception, where it is not easy to unravel actuality and illusion, inherent movement and implied motion and emotion” (p. 90). Driving through shadows experiences this blurring between actuality and illusion, inherent movement and implied motion.

Pentimenti are second thoughts, evidence of traces of previous work where the artist has changed their mind. Petherbridge reminds us that the origin of the word is a ‘stroke of repentance [regret]’ (p. 31). She writes,

It is a condition of linearity that unless lines and *pentimenti* have been deliberately erased, drawing asserts, or has the potential to assert, the fully extended history and processes of its own making.... In this sense, drawing constructs its own narrative of making, distinct but inseparable from its subject matter (PETHERBRIDGE, 2010, p. 92).

In a drawing, *pentimenti* can be a series of studies on one page but more interestingly, for me, can be the sight of the previous drawing still visible under the second thoughts. In Leonardo da Vinci's *The Madonna and Child with a Cat* (Image 8) we easily see where the Virgin's head could have been.

IMAGE 8 – Photograph of a Study by Leonardo da Vinci *The Madonna and Child with a Cat* (c.1480). (© The Trustees of the British Museum <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1613428768>. Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0))



The term 'faux pentimenti' (p. 157) is where artists deliberately show second thoughts and Petherbridge refers to Susan Rothenberg's *Untitled*, a charcoal drawing of horses, as a work where "the repeated strokes and *pentimenti* suggest a narrative of primitivism and authenticity" (p. 160). For me, the use of faux pentimenti's many lines in the drawing again indicate movement, not wool winding this time, but movement of unsettled horses, moving to the left of the drawing, for others to the right.

One of my interpretations of *pentimento* is the use of pre-existing musical lines from another work or sound world, lines with a previous history. *Cat's Play* (2018) for toy piano, castanet, horn and bell (Image 9), composed in 2018, outlines Domenico Scarlatti's *The Cat's Fugue* subject in the lower notes of the toy piano in measures 30-33 at the end of the work – a musician's joke, if you like, and a piece I have learnt and played on the harpsichord. Here, I am placing my history with the Scarlatti work, coupled with memories of a contemporary cat into a recent composition and in doing so seeking, to requote Petherbridge, "to assert, the fully extended history and processes of [a works] own making".

IMAGE 9: *Cat's Play* (2019) for toy piano, castanets, horn and bell, mss. 26-34 (permission Wirripang Pty. Ltd.)

And the work uses *hocket*, measure 18-25, that is, broken line between the toy piano and the three toy percussion instruments which together sketch a whole shape, a musical device which I argue is a type of *faux pentimenti* (Image 10).

IMAGE 10 – *Cat's Play* (2019) for toy piano, castanet, horn and bell, mss 16-25 (permission Wirripang Pty. Ltd.)

The image displays a musical score for the piece 'Cat's Play' (2019). It is divided into two systems, each containing staves for Clk (Castanet), Hn (Horn), and Bell, and a grand staff for the Toy Piano (treble and bass clefs).
The first system starts at measure 16. The Clk, Hn, and Bell parts are written in a single treble clef staff. The Toy Piano part is in a grand staff. The tempo marking 'a tempo' is placed above the Clk/Hn/Bell staff, and 'rit.' (ritardando) is placed above the Toy Piano staff. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests and dynamic markings like accents and hairpins.
The second system starts at measure 21. The Clk, Hn, and Bell parts continue in the same treble clef staff. The Toy Piano part continues in the grand staff, showing a variety of rhythmic patterns and chordal textures.

In another work, *...earth tones...* for toy piano (2014), composed in 2014, the opening adopts a Bach-like slow movement texture (my own history as a harpsichordist again) and in the final section (Image 11), the sound of three church bell chimes, heard while on holiday in Mostar, Prague and the King's Lynn Minister's 11.30 chime, working with and against each other, end the work. Here musical tourism is a form of history woven through process.

IMAGE 11 – ...*earth tones*... for toy piano (2014) mss 58-65 (permission Wirripang Pty. Ltd.)

Earth Tones

5

58

19

58

19

58

19

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of musical notation for measures 58 and 59. It consists of three staves: a single treble clef staff at the top, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) below. The time signature is 16/8. Measure 58 shows sparse notes in the treble and bass staves. Measure 59 features a more active melody in the treble staff and a rhythmic accompaniment in the bass staff. The system concludes with a double bar line and the number 19.

59

5/4

59

5/4

59

5/4

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of musical notation for measures 59 and 60. It consists of three staves: a single treble clef staff at the top, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) below. The time signature changes to 5/4. Measure 59 continues the melody from the previous system. Measure 60 shows a continuation of the melody with some rests. The system concludes with a double bar line and the number 5/4.

60

3/4

60

3/4

60

3/4

mp *p*

Detailed description: This block contains the third system of musical notation for measures 60 and 62. It consists of three staves: a single treble clef staff at the top, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) below. The time signature changes to 3/4. Measure 60 features a melody in the treble staff with dynamic markings *mp* and *p*. Measure 61 has a rest in the treble staff. Measure 62 continues the melody. The system concludes with a double bar line and the number 3/4.

63

3/4

63

3/4

63

3/4

pp

Detailed description: This block contains the fourth system of musical notation for measures 63 and 65. It consists of three staves: a single treble clef staff at the top, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) below. The time signature is 3/4. Measure 63 has a rest in the treble staff. Measure 64 features a melody in the treble staff with a dynamic marking of *pp*. Measure 65 continues the melody. The system concludes with a double bar line and the number 3/4.

Turrumurra January, 2014
for Antonietta Loffredo

My second interpretation of *pentimenti* is akin to the compositional process Steve Reich used in his work *Drumming* (1971). He talks of “the process of gradually substituting beats for rests (or rests for beats) within a constantly repeating rhythmic cycle” (REICH, 1974, p. 58). Kirzinger calls this ‘reduction, that is, changing sounded notes to rests; saturation (replacing rests with notes)’ (Robert KIRZINGER, 2015). *Through Shadows* (2020) for toy piano begins with a four-measure pattern in the ‘reduction’ stage – more rests than notes - adding notes (and gradually repeating each measure of the original four-measure pattern) (Image 12) until the full pattern is revealed then reduced again. This is coupled with repetition of each measure of the four-measure pattern, first twice each, then three times, and so on.

IMAGE 12 – *Through Shadows* (2020) for toy piano mss 1-10 (permission Wirripang Pty. Ltd.)



And in *Saron Study No. 1* (2020) for toy piano and saron CD soundbed, a similar saturation takes place between the two 23 measure halves of the work, the first half single line (Image 13a measures 12-17), the second half, fuller textured (Image 13b measures 35-40). For me, this is reminiscent of the strategy of *pentimento* – hinting at a fuller pattern which is gradually revealed and, in some works, lost again.

IMAGE 13a – *Saron Study No. 1* (2020) for toy piano and saron CD soundbed, mss 12-17



IMAGE 13b – *Saron Study No. 1* (2020) for toy piano and saron CD soundbed, mss 35-40



In *Saron Study No. 1* the terms saturation and *pentimento* take on other layers of meaning because the timbre and tuning of the saron and the timbre of the toy piano together create a shimmer of conflicting sound waves, and the piece brings together the Javanese gamelan's sound world through the saron, plus the steady pulse of the gamelan, with Western toy piano, one culture merging with another.

Elizabeth Cooper's⁴ watercolour of the Australian rainforest tree *Stenocarpus sinuatus* (Firewheel Tree) depicts its wheel-like inflorescences and developing fruits. To record the details of the plant subject, Cooper (2020) does a series of sketches in graphite and creates a composition she is happy with. After carefully tracing and transferring the image to her final watercolour paper, she begins the process of applying colour. She sets down an initial, quite pale wash of watercolour which she leaves to dry before applying the next, slightly darker shade. Working from light to dark, she builds up multiple layers of watercolour, leaving highlights as she goes and creating an appropriate intensity

⁴ Cooper's botanical illustrations are held in collections at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

and transparency of colour. To create the fine botanical detail of the subject, and to build up form and texture, she applies her dry brush technique, using a small brush with pigment but very little water. She describes this technique as “rather like drawing with paint”. Petherbridge (2010) talks of how “painting participates in a spatial dance whether we want it or not: cold colours recede, warm colours appear to come forward; juxtapositions of colour set up optical vibrancies; forms expand or contract by virtue of their colour relationships” (p. 88). This description shares some observations with Cooper’s description of her botanical watercolour process yet her process does include line too in the initial stages.

Drawing Firewheels for piano and toy piano (one player) (2017), was composed in 2016 for toy pianist and pianist Antonietta Loffredo and strongly influenced by the firewheel botanical drawings of Cooper. The cycle of the flowers and fruit through all stages shaped the work (Image 14), the sound gestures and sustain pedal acted as ‘sound brush’ colouring specified notes and note groups, the role of line is present and the possible movement of firewheel’s fireworks-like flowers was also in my mind as I composed.

IMAGE 14 – Cover of the score of *Drawing Firewheels* for piano and toy piano (one player) (2017). Botanical drawing of *Stenocarpus sinuatus* (Firewheel Tree) by Elizabeth Cooper, used with permission. Score published by Wirripang Pty. Ltd.

Drawing Firewheels

for piano and toy piano (one player)

DIANA BLOM



Stenocarpus sinuatus (Firewheel Tree) © Elizabeth Cooper. Image reproduced with the permission of the artist.

The relationship between the toy piano and piano in the work changes with each section. The opening and closing (see measures 117-119, Image 15) of *Drawing Firewheels* use the toy piano as a faint tracing line, bringing the spaced-out pivot notes of the piano into sharper focus.

IMAGE 15 – *Drawing Firewheels* for piano and toy piano (one player) (2017), mss 112-119.
(permission Wirripang Pty. Ltd.)

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Drawing Firewheels" for piano and toy piano. The score is divided into three systems of staves. The first system (measures 112-119) features a piano part with a "fast clamorous shimmer of the notes both hands - c. 2 secs" and a toy piano part with a "long" note. The second system (measures 117-119) features a piano part with a "slightly wayward pulse - whimsical quality" and a toy piano part with a "RH staccato unless slurred" line. The third system (measures 117-119) features a piano part with a "p laggiero" line and a toy piano part with a "mark each LH entry clearly una corda" line. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (mf, mp, f, p), articulation (staccato, slurred), and performance instructions (take time to place TP notes, mark each LH entry clearly).

In the middle section (Image 16) the toy piano uses the pedalled sustained sound of thick piano chords as a layer on which to place Cooper's dry brush technique, through the toy piano line, bringing the slow section into sharper timbral focus.

IMAGE 16 – *Drawing Firewheels* for piano and toy piano (one player) (2017), mss 56-62.
(permission Wirripang Pty. Ltd.)



In the fast, middle section, the instruments are working together to build active, loud textures before a short lyrical melody and accompaniment section (toy piano melody, piano accompaniment). There is a return to the fast, active texture but this time with a splintering between the two instruments as they swap roles, at times the toy piano in accompanying role, piano with interjections (Image 17 measures 103-106), and vice versa (Image 15, measures 113-115), Cooper’s dry brush technique again.

IMAGE 17 – *Drawing Firewheels* for toy piano and piano (one player) (2017), mss 103-106.
(permission Wirripang Pty. Ltd.)



A series of runs between the two instruments leads to a truncated return of the opening texture with the toy piano again tracing and highlighting the line of the piano figure’s pivot notes. It might be drawing a long bow but the idea of the stages of the Firewheel’s development from fruit to flower and return to fruit again, which underpins the structure of the work, is a *faux pentimento* technique, not necessarily heard but very present.

I'm not a drawer or painter but have written an improvisation frame for toy piano and manual-wind music box, *Biffo in the toy box*, in 2012 (Image 18). And I'm now aware that graphic scores such as this require similar thinking when performed – that is, my primitive images require careful consideration of texture line in the score and then in interpretation by the performers.

IMAGE 18 – *Biffo in the toy box* (2014) for toy piano and manual-wind music box, *Strange Terrain – a new anthology of New Zealand graphic scores 1965-2012* (permission Wai-te-ata Music Press)

Biffo in the Toy Box

Improvisation frame for toy piano and manual-wind music box Diana Blom 2012

Subtitle* -

Manual-wind music box**

Wind medium speed

Stop

Wind faster

Stop

Wind faster still

Stop

Wind very fast

Stop

Wind at tempo of the music box tune

Finish with piano

Toy piano

* the subtitle and last box depend on the music of the music box. Choose a subtitle relevant to the music box's piece. The first performance on 1st Nov., 2012, had the sub-title, 'Romeo and Juliet Work it Out', as the music box's music was 'Romeo and Juliet'.

** The music box must have a handle and be able to be manually controlled by the player. Players to face each other.

My musical response to hand drawing techniques is largely an ‘expressive response’, to use Duncan’s (2017) term, yet there is an element of, not non-musical mathematical parallels, but trying to use the drawing techniques in a way similar to how artists use them, but in sound. Whether the architectural proportions represented in the Dufay, Duncan and Maxwell Davies works are accurately represented in the music doesn’t matter musically (it would architecturally), and whether my musical outcomes bear any overt relationship to drawing, doesn’t matter either. But these drawing techniques foster ideas for me. Petherbridge discusses other techniques such as chiaroscuro, grisaille, parerga, reverso, ébauche among others and looking on the web there are many other drawing and painting strategies or techniques waiting to be discovered. All potentially offer ideas which I can draw into sound but the few I have worked with and discussed above have taken my compositional thinking into different directions and encouraged rethinking and new thinking in sound for the toy piano and other sound sources.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Diana Blom, composer and keyboard player (piano, harpsichord, toy piano), has published on higher education music performance, the artist as academic, preparing new music for performance. She has co-curated several composition/performance/CD projects including: Shadows and Silhouettes – new music for solo piano with a Western-Chinese confluence; Antarctica – new music for piano and/or toy piano; and Multiple Keyboards – new music for pianos, toy pianos. Scores and CDs are published by Wirripang Pty. Ltd., Orpheus Music and Wai-te-Ata Press. Music Composition Toolbox, a co-authored composition textbook, is published by Science Press. Diana is Associate Professor of Music at Western Sydney University. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6527-6233>. Website: www.dianablom.com. E-mail: d.blom@westernsydney.edu.au

The Toy Piano Is Not a Toy

Antonietta Loffredo

Istituto Comprensivo Statale Cernobbio | Italy

Abstract: this paper describes a two-day composition workshop dedicated to the toy piano held in 2019 at a state middle school with a musical address in Italy. Eight young pupils in the early years of their piano studies took part. The resulting compositions are shown and indicate that the toy piano is a useful means to stimulate creativity in young pupils. A further consideration addressed is that operating in the educational field means expanding the future audience with respect to new musical languages and means of musical expression. In discussing both pedagogical practise and composing and performing, the author's aim is to contribute to the comprehension of the 'toy piano phenomenon' which in recent years has increasingly seen this instrument take centre stage on the contemporary music scene.

Keywords: Toy Piano, Music Composition, Creativity, Contemporary Classical Music, Pedagogy.

Described by performer and composer Elizabeth A. Baker (2016, p. 4) as a ‘valuable teaching instrument’ and educational tool when introducing piano studies, my opinion of the toy piano in this role is somewhat critical. From experience, I have found the differing weight and dimensions of the keys, the required posture, unpredictable overtones, limitations in dynamics and imperfect pitch (at least in the models with metal rods, usually played in public by professional musicians) to be problematic. But useful elements can be found by asking the following questions: might the ‘imperfect’ sound and limitations of the toy piano enhance creativity in young pupils? Could the toy piano serve young musicians to give direction to their imagination? The answers are positive with regard to the adult performing world, testified by an increasing interest towards the toy piano in contemporary classical music. Outcomes are less evident when referring to young pupils and the toy piano, and this needs further investigation. In this paper, I will discuss the two questions posed above from a pedagogical point of view, through observations conducted during a workshop entitled *Seriously or Jokingly? Toy piano composition workshop for early stages* held by Spanish composer Mercedes Zavala¹ as invited professor to the state middle school where I teach piano. The steps of the two-day workshop will be described and excerpts of the resulting compositions shown and discussed. Finally, my experience report will be the starting point for personal considerations on the toy piano phenomenon in the light of its current musical status and future performance, teaching and composition perspectives.

1. The two-day workshop

Eight of my students (aged 11 to 12 years), at the beginning of their piano studies, were invited to compose short toy piano pieces under the guidance of composer Mercedes Zavala. My role during the workshop was that of facilitator (being the piano teacher of the pupils involved) and observer. None of the pupils knew this instrument, except for one of them and, in this sense, the toy piano can be considered for most of them an ‘object trouvé’, to be discovered and explored.

¹ Mercedes Zavala studied piano and composition at the Madrid Music Conservatoire. She has been a pupil of Malcolm Singer, a main figure in her development as composer and teacher. In 1997 she graduated in Philosophy. In the 2000s she worked for Radio Nacional de España and was President of Spanish Women in Music Society. Nowadays Mercedes Zavala teaches music composition at Madrid Conservatorio Teresa Berganza. Within her nearly 90 works, there are chamber and orchestral works, pedagogical works, an occasional musical theatre work, and there is the persistent influence of literature.

On the first day, we introduced the toy piano giving particular attention to the sound and how it is produced, and on the performance possibilities of the instrument. We then invited pupils to play some pieces from their repertoire at the piano. Zavala followed, asking questions to the students so they could focus on some simple elements as a useful input to start the composition phase. Her guiding idea at this step is that resource limitations are convenient in the early stages of composition and the toy piano can be, in this sense, a facilitator. Zavala says:

The choice of the toy piano favours some aspects that help the initiation to compose. At this student level, to compose means a change of perspective, a step to another way of understanding music, indeed a passage to another musical reality. The toy piano is a new instrument for all of them, so they have to do prior work of exploration to understand how that new instrument works, and they have to react to its sound and possibilities; but at the same time it is a familiar instrument [since it's a keyboard instrument], so they can manage it very well. Also, it has a restricted range of possibilities that makes the writing easier. Last, but not least, the toy piano is freed from the sometimes-overwhelming weight of the music repertoire of the past. This gives the act of creating music a playful aspect, outside the overwhelming responsibility that the concept of composing sometimes implies. (ZAVALA, 2019, p. 21).

Primary elements used during the execution/listening/analysis initial phase are discussed. At first, the *Gavotte* HWV 491 in G major by G. F. Handel was played. Mercedes asked pupils how many voices they listened to and they identified two lines, characterised by patterns of quavers in the right hand against 'slower' crotchets at the left hand. The second piece (Fig. 1) was *Bagatella Balcanica* (Balkan Bagatelle), taken from a collection of easy piano pieces by Denes Agay (2010, p. 42).

Fig. 1 – Excerpt from *Balkan Bagatelle*, measures 1-8.

The musical score for 'Balkan Bagatelle' (measures 1-8) is presented in two systems. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked 'Moderatamente' and the dynamics are 'mf'. The right hand plays eighth-note patterns, while the left hand plays quarter-note accompaniment. A box above the first measure contains the text 'Innalza ogni Fa al Fa diesis' with an arrow pointing to the first note of the right hand. The score includes a first ending bracket over measures 1-2 and a second ending bracket over measures 3-4. The piece concludes with a final cadence in measure 8.

Source: AGAY (2010, p. 42) *La gioia del primo anno di Pianoforte*
(Courtesy Edizione italiana © 2010 Volontè & Co. s.r.l. – Milano/Hal Leonard s.r.l. Europe)

Pupils grasped the following basic elements: questions and answers; a voice speaks and the other one is silent (with rests) then replies; a voice speaks loudly and the second one speaks softer. The third piece (Fig. 2) was a study by J.B. Duvernoy (1903, p. 3). Here pupils observed how long chords accompany waves of notes above.

Fig. 2 – Excerpt from *Elementary Studies Op. 176 n. 1*, measures 1-10.



Source: DUVERNOY (1903, p. 3)

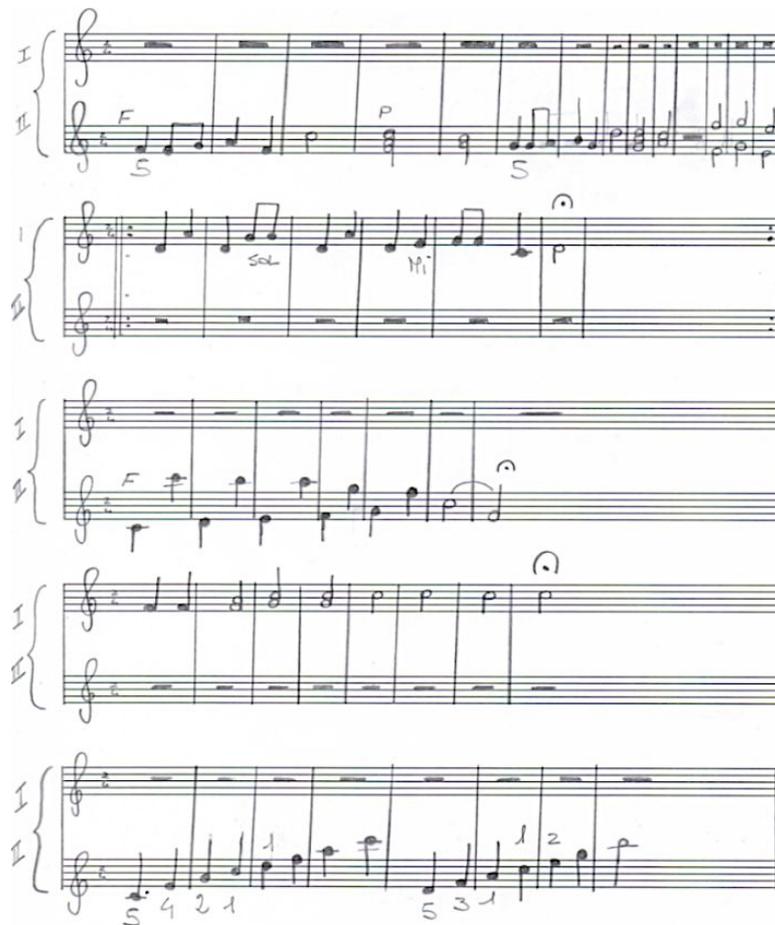
Shortly after, the composition phase began. Pupils were invited to work in pairs, on the basis of collaborative learning strategy and my previous school teaching experience with them, balancing pupils' bonds of friendship with their different individual skills. We assigned a classroom to each couple, spaces familiar to them and sufficiently isolated to allow maximum concentration. They had at their disposal pencils, papers (no music notation software) and a toy piano, and Zavala and I moved from class to class to supervise the works. The pupils' task consisted in trying to write some music, starting from the few elements initially identified; specifically, to compose using the musical resources acquired, and in a language they know. The texture of the pieces intuitively analysed would provide models to start from, but Zavala made it clear to pupils they were free to introduce variations and innovations.

On the basis of the initial assumption that less material makes it easier to handle, the pupils' toolbox contained few but essential elements, which Zavala further summarised to them: "you have listened to works with a melody in one hand and an accompaniment in the other; sometimes the accompaniment comprises repeated notes; sometimes there is another melody in the bass; now and then both hands play independently, or they alternate; somewhere one hand repeats what the other one has previously played, ...". Thanks to Zavala's guidance in suggesting how to develop their

initial ideas and how to represent them on paper as precisely as possible, pupils finished their pieces by the beginning of the next day, and we asked them to give a title to their works.² The reasons behind the choice of the composition titles indicate another composition impetus. While looking for a title was an interesting step that further stimulated pupils' creative and imaginative thinking, in most of the cases it also indirectly illustrated (and guided) the compositional process they carried out.

The first couple (pupils 1-2) took inspiration from a poster hung on the wall, entitled *Il linguaggio segreto delle piante* (The Secret Language of Plants), which resulted in *The Secret Language* (Fig. 3). Keeping only what was useful to their task, they established a link between the title of the piece with the structure of their composition (intended for two performers) pointing out that when they played, it was as if they were talking to each other.

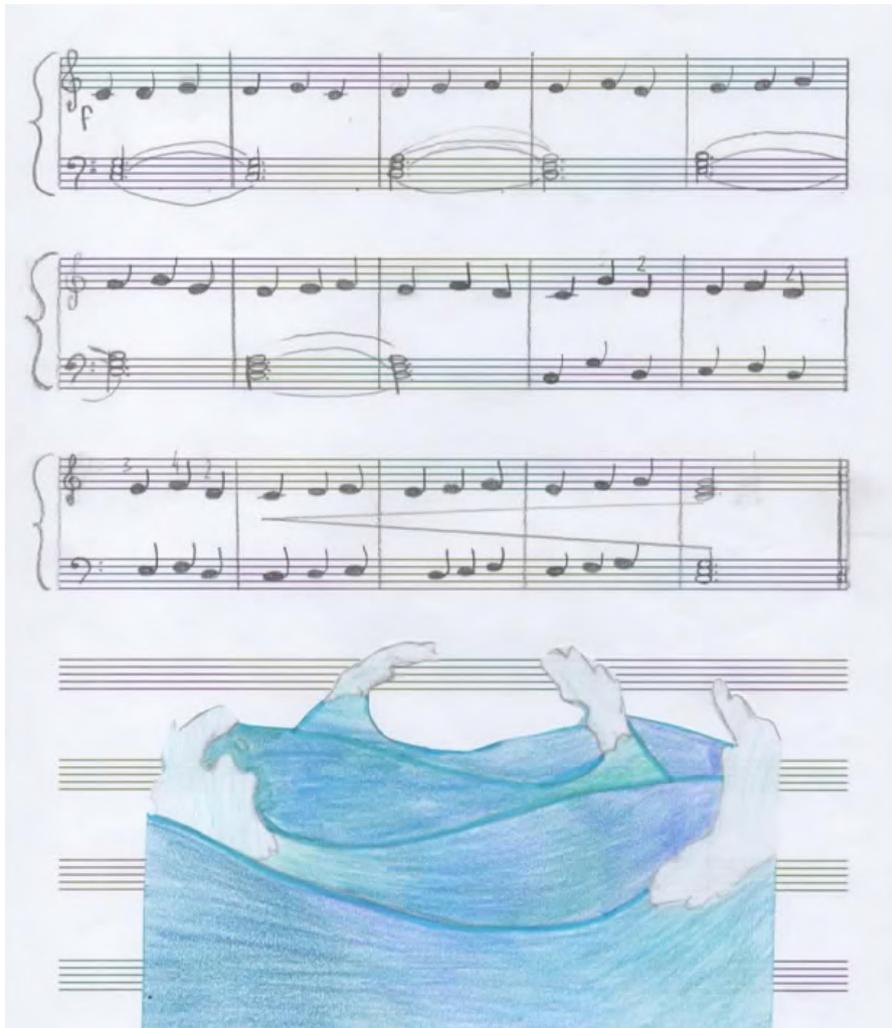
Fig. 3 – *Il linguaggio segreto* (The Secret Language).



² All the pieces have been then performed at the “Music as Play. The toy piano takes the stage” festival, held in Como on the 6-7 July 2019. <<https://music-as-play.wixsite.com/toypiano>>

The composers (pupils 3-4) of the second piece (Fig. 4) were motivated in their choice of the title *La danza del mare* (The Dance of the Sea) because “the melody goes up and down, like the waves of the sea”, once again establishing a link between title and the movement of the sea and key characteristic of their composition.

Fig. 4 – *La danza del mare* (The Dance of the Sea).



For the third piece (Fig. 5), and in the pupils’ words (pupils 5-6), the title *Notte stellata* (Starry night) was because “the toy piano has a ‘metallic’ timbre and so its sound looks like stars appearing in the sky”. It is worth noting the rhythmic approach in this work as what at first might look like a writing error was instead an uncomplicated way to write a more complex rhythmic barring. At first, it was not clear what the composer pupils wanted from a metric point of view but after asking their

intentions, pupils played the piece, and it was clear what they wanted – mixing common and irregular meters.

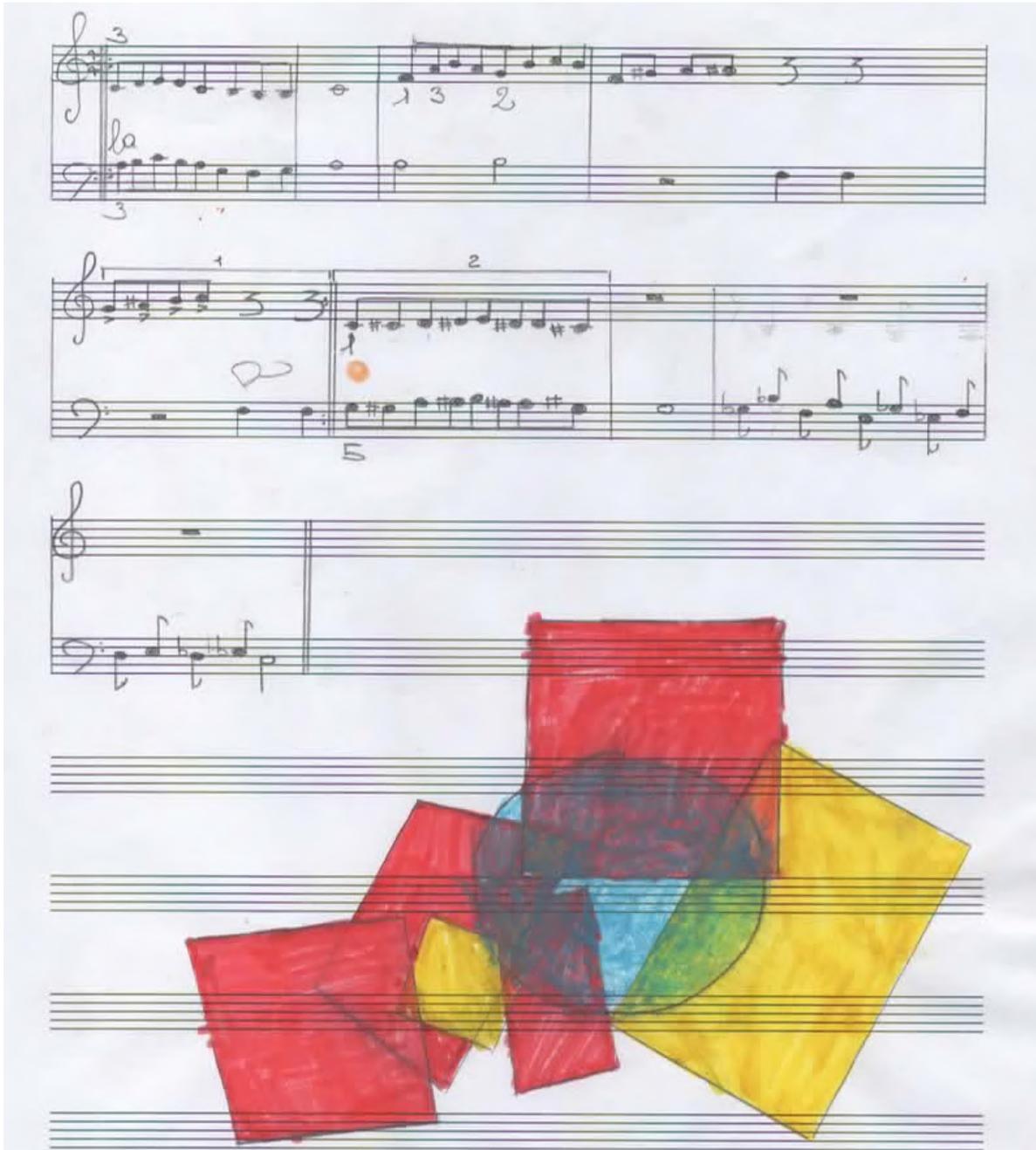
Fig. 5 – *Nocte stellata* (Starry Night).



While the young composers (pupils 7-8) were writing the fourth piece, *Musical changes* (Fig. 6), and facing the difficulty of putting together different ideas/materials, Zavala suggested to place the ideas side by side. This compositional thinking suited the title of the work and the composer pupils said they took the title from the assembly procedure adopted “because there is no logical thread, but continuous changes”. Here the pupils’ compositional approach raises some key points. In the first bar only one beam connects the first eight notes, instead of two or four beams. This indicates phrasing, and it is a practise often used nowadays to show more clearly musical ideas that music writing software programs usually standardise. Thanks to handwriting, pupils instinctively beamed

all the flagged notes. In contrast, and logically, when isolated notes appear, the composers showed that they didn't want to play them with one hand but with alternate hands.

Fig. 6 – *Musical Changes*



The last piece, *Nuvola nera* (Black Cloud) was previously written for piano and then ‘perfected’ and adapted to the toy piano during the workshop (Fig. 7). The composer (pupil 3, not a pair this time) was the pupil who had performed the Duvernoy’s piece and the reference to this source of

inspiration is clear in the texture's waving melody and simple accompaniment of long chords. The pupil chose the title "because it is a 'dark' song" and she was the only one who conveyed personal and emotional content in her piece.

Fig. 7 – *Nuvola nera* (Black Cloud).



As a last activity, an improvisation session, named a *Crazy Improvisation*, gathered all participants together in the music room of Villa Bernasconi Museum, where we moved to on the second day. Once the rehearsal started, Zavala suggested the pupils use very simple elements, such as: small patterns of sounds that may comprise two notes and changing octaves; rhythmic patterns played

with three black keys; four black keys freely played. She emphasised a gestural approach in conducting, with the aim of encouraging pupils to handle the toy piano freely while following her signals and listening to each other.

At the end of the second day, we invited the participants to give a title to the two-day experience. During a brainstorming session, some one-sentence titles arose: “It is not a toy piano!” (pupil 6), “Extraordinary emotion in its small size” (pupil 1), “Even the smallest are important” (pupil 7) and finally “It is not a toy!” (pupil 4). These statements highlight that the instrument is not a ‘miniature real piano’; that it can be a means of expression and that they found symbolic aspects in it; and that it is more than a simple plaything, despite its external shape. Although, when searching for a title, pupils focused their attention on the instrument and not on the activity of composing, the importance of the creative work they carried out on the toy piano is implicit in what they said, highlighting the toy piano as a ‘true instrument’ (It is not a toy!).

2. Personal considerations on the toy piano composition workshop

My first aim in inviting Mercedes Zavala to hold this workshop at the school where I teach was to allow pupils to experience the toy piano in a creative way, not just to play it, and to observe how it was perceived by the young composers. Also, to understand if and how the making of a didactic process, such as the one carried out, could contribute to a wider discussion regarding the growing interest in, perception and consideration of, the toy piano.

To answer these questions, I will begin by looking back at the current debate on new classical music. One view, strongly connected with the toy piano, concerns the interest in self-limitation of pitch and other compositional materials. Considering this issue within a broader sociological context, Cage’s assertion “There seemed to me to be no truth, no good, in anything big in society” (1959, p. 117), which refers to the times when he wrote his *Suite for Toy piano* (1948) after the Second World War, is brought into sharper musical focus by Kyle Gann (2005) who observes that the idea of pitch limitation was in the air from this time:

In 1950, Elliott Carter employed extreme pitch limitations in his Eight Etudes and a Fantasy, using only a D Major triad in the Third Etude and only the pitch G in the Seventh. European works on one pitch were written by Witold Lutoslawski and Giacinto

Scelsi. Those may have been isolated experiments, but in 1960 La Monte Young wrote a piece using two pitches: B and F#, "to be held for a long time." In 1966 Steve Reich wrote Piano Phase using five pitches. Three years later, Philip Glass produced Music in Fifths using only seven pitches, five in each hand with three overlaps. [...] Perhaps it was the very freedom opened up by the emancipation of dissonance and atonality that required Cage and others after him to create their own limitations. (GANN, 2005, para. 3).

Gann also matches the concept of self-limitation with the marginalised composers' condition of today, examined as a consequence of the "capitalist logic of waste and planned obsolescence" (ZIZEK, 2002, p. 6) or in Adorno's words, "the built in demand to be discarded after a short while like empty food cans" (ADORNO; HOECKNER, 1997, p. 120):

In this situation the industry faces an insoluble problem. It must arouse attention by means of the ever-new products, but this attention spells their doom. If no attention is given to the song, it cannot be sold; if attention is paid to it, there is always the possibility that people will no longer accept it, because they know it too well. This partly accounts for the constantly renewed effort to sweep the market with new products, to hound them to their graves; then to repeat the infanticidal maneuver again and again. (ADORNO, 1941, p. 39).

This is a concept to which Berthold Hoekner returns in his insight into Adorno's theories:

The culture industry thus aims to optimize an ever-increasing cycle of commodity production and destruction. While changes in fashion are sometimes grounded in genuine sociocultural needs, most of the music produced in the ensuing style, cannot answer to these needs. Necessarily, such music is drained of musical values that may transcend the contingencies of that style. So, musical expressions that encourage the discipline of imaginative concentration, for example, will not be marketed or promoted. The more deeply satisfying and rewarding to listeners such music turns out to be, the less it is in the interest of the commercial industry to produce and promote it. With its exclusive focus on maximizing turnover through rapid-fire stylistic shifting. (HOECKNER, 2013, p. 173).

In this circumstance, if self-limitation can be a choice by composers, "the limitations of our current marginalisation as composers can be as much of a spur to our creativity as Cage's use of the toy piano was" (GANN, 2005, para. 32), so contingency and immediate obsolescence don't represent an option but a risk. This is especially so when applied to the toy piano and because of the instrument's 'symbolic ambiguity', intended as the "Coexistence of the cognitive meaning of the symbol (which can be conceptualized) and the change-processes elicited and put in motion within the contemplating and experiencing subject" (FRANKENSTEIN, 1987, p. 98). Of course, the

possibility of making several plausible interpretations is fundamental for creative thinking, but a problem arises when composers and interpreters consider and propose the toy piano exclusively ‘sub specie ludi’ [under the aspect of play and playfulness]. On these terms, “the visual matters more than the aural” (TEAGUE, 1991, p. 88) and only the notion of spectacle in performance is enhanced, with the risk of relegating the toy piano to ephemeral occurrences.

It is not a total criticism as many current experiences are worthy of interest (both serious and humorous). Rather, it is a matter of continuing to maintain a critical attitude in the pluralism that pervades the current production of new music. Moreover, in response to the ‘disposable attitude’ culture, into which the toy piano could be easily embedded, the instrument is not a contingent event on the music scene but has a history that dates back over seventy years, without taking into consideration lesser-known experiences that preceded Cage’s *Suite for Toy Piano*. I notice that even professional musicians rarely know the toy piano’s history. Instead they often have a complacent smile when a colleague shows interest in this instrument, banishing it (and her/him) immediately into an undefined area of fun and games. But I have seen how this attitude changes when the sceptic approaches the toy piano for the first time and realises how many challenges they have to face.

It is a matter of lack of knowledge. Even though an ever-wider repertoire choice is available, an in-depth understanding will profit from increasing research and musicological monographs on the topic. For audiences, carefully planned program choices with informative program notes help listeners to not dwell only on the unconventional/curious aspects which characterise a toy piano performance, but hear the instrument as a valid sound source. But to achieve this, “composers and other program note writers might benefit from asking themselves when, where, how, and in what form each work is best communicated to different stakeholders” (BLOM; BENNETT; STEVENSON, 2016, p. 9).³

How can a composition and improvisation workshop carried out with young pupils contribute to the collective perception of the ‘toy piano phenomenon’? In my opinion, all that has been said cannot be separated from a ‘pedagogy in action’, involving young pupils, namely the future audience. Taking into consideration pupils’ composing process, it reflects the attitude of the

³About implications for program note writers and readers, and for educators see: *The Composer’s Program Note for Newly Written Classical Music: Content and Intentions*, Diana Blom et al., 2016.

professional composers towards this instrument. Composers usually convey their own languages in composing for toy piano, as pupils do when transferring the languages they know over to writing their pieces. In doing this, I observed three directions among professionals, from previous discussions on the scored repertoire for toy piano:

[...] provocation with respect to tradition (both from the composing and performing point of view); the enhancement of the instrument's symbolic aspect (childhood with its related imaginative paths) while remaining rooted in tradition; and research and electro-acoustic experimentations evoked by its distinguished sound (e.g. the overtones which are louder than the fundamental pitches). (LOFFREDO, 2013, p. 82).

Focusing on the second point made above, childhood symbolism, the linguistic reference to tradition mostly depicts childhood metaphors or memories.⁴ In the pupils' compositions a tonal language prevailed but this was disconnected from 'memories' – avoiding associations with childhood images – a very different outcome from many adult composers writing for toy piano. The use of a traditional language, conveyed by the distinctive sound of the toy piano and without previous extra musical influences, leads 'towards the new', or better towards 'new sounds'. I mean this in the same sense as intended by Cage when, on his decision to write for toy piano, he said what he wanted was "to discover again, as though they were completely unfamiliar, the most familiar sounds" (KOSTELANETZ, 2003, p. 68-69). And it resonates with the first point made in my quote above although for the pupils, not deliberate 'provocation with respect to tradition'. This thought came to my mind after the workshop when I invited my pupils to play their pieces at the piano and one of them (pupil 1) said: "I like it this way too, but it sounds different, it almost looks like another piece". Here is a key observation on the part of the pupil – the piece was written for toy piano, and while it works on piano, it's not the same sonic experience.

What I observed during the two-day activity – and contrary to my expectations – was that pupils didn't perceive the peculiar sound of the toy piano, including the unpredictable overtones and the restricted dynamic range, as limits but as possibilities. In other words, they didn't reject the 'imperfections' but welcomed them as a distinctive feature. In fact, pupils didn't seem to give particular attention to these aspects, but when it happened, the sparkling sounds of the toy piano

⁴For an overview of the scored repertoire for toy piano, see "The Toy Piano. From the Playroom to the Concert Platform" (LOFFREDO, 2019, p. 92-112).

were compared by pupils to stars appearing in the sky (see *Nocte stellata*/Starry Night; pupils 5-6). Comparisons with the real piano were initially inevitable, both being keyboard instruments, and the difficulties in mastering the clumsy mechanics of the instrument became immediately evident when they played their pieces, facing the same challenges as professional musicians. Except, they immediately moved away from the reference icon, the piano, accepting the toy piano as a new instrument to be explored. I take this as a first step which traces Cage's path, from when he wrote for toy piano as a solo instrument, before introducing it in electro-acoustic music in 1960 with *Music for Amplified Toy Pianos*. Consequentially, the toy piano, combined with the possibility of manipulating its sound, could be a future step for a next project/workshop, to broaden pupils' creative experience while promoting knowledge of the contemporary music compositional possibilities.

As a performer and piano teacher, to make known new musical languages and aesthetics to pupils from the early stages of their piano studies has been a constant aim of mine. Quoting myself from eleven years ago, "It is not a question of introducing this music because it is 'appreciated', but of offering significant means and programmes in a broader context" (LOFFREDO, 2009, p. 9). And the choice to involve composer Mercedes Zavala was not by chance; we collaborated on several initiatives aimed at bringing young pupils closer to contemporary classical music. For this reason, and also for our previous collaborations in projects focused on the toy piano, I invited Zavala to run the composition workshop with my pupils.

After the workshop Mercedes Zavala provided in depth descriptions and discussions on the workshop process and outcomes during two conferences – "¿En serio o enbroma? La composición en las primeras etapas del aprendizaje musical" (Conservatorio "Teresa Berganza", Madrid, 28 October 2019) and "From Piano to Toy Piano: composing as a rite of passage" ("Music as Play", toy piano festival and conference, Como, IT, 7 July 2019). Zavala intends 'rite of passage' to mean the possibility given to pupils to work creatively, for the first time, with composing, her focus during the workshop. This didn't necessarily have to be with the toy piano. According to Zavala (personal communication), the use of the toy piano in this workshop was not an end, but a means to an end (the initiation to compose). From my point of view as an observer, interested in speculating on the current and future status of the toy piano, I return to the initial questions to conclude that, in view of the experiences and outcomes discussed above, drawing further on the

anthropological metaphor, I offer two complementary perspectives on the toy piano for consideration: toy piano ‘as a rite of passage’ towards new listening attitudes; and the toy piano as a ‘music marker’ under construction within and for our culture, open to many and contrasting interpretations, depending on how musicologists, pedagogues, composers, interpreters and the audience receive it.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Antonietta Loffredo, pianist, toy pianist and musicologist, is a graduate of the Conservatorio "F.E. Dall'Abaco" in Italy and of the Conservatoire de Musique d'Issy les Moulineaux in France. She has also conducted studies in a teaching and educational context at the Department of Musicology and Cultural Heritage of Pavia University at Cremona (Specialisation school for secondary teaching, SSIS) and earned a Master of Music degree in musicology from the University of Milan with a thesis on the toy piano. Her book, *The Toy Piano – From the Playroom to the Concert Platform*, was published by Ut Orpheus Edizioni (Bologna, 2019). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4502-1804>. E-mail: antonietaoffredo36@gmail.com

Visuals, Structure and Emotion: The Toy Piano in the Dramaturgy of Piano Recitals

Késia Decoté Rodrigues

Independent researcher | Brazil

Resumo: este artigo examina a contribuição do piano de brinquedo para a dramaturgia de recitais de piano solo. Como ponto de partida para o estudo, o conceito de *artform recital* é apresentado, onde todos os elementos contribuem juntamente com o programa musical para a construção da experiência de escuta. É então proposta a aplicação de ideias da dramaturgia como ferramenta para a combinação coerente desses múltiplos elementos na estrutura do recital. Tomando como estudo de caso três recitais de piano desenvolvidos e apresentados por essa autora, é observado como a inclusão de performance de piano de brinquedo pode contribuir para o enriquecimento da dramaturgia de recitais ao se oferecer como um elemento de interesse visual, também ao trazer outras possibilidades de exploração do espaço e de movimento corporal da/do pianista, estimular percepções afetivas na experiência de escuta, e funcionar como elemento chave na estrutura do programa.

Palavras-chave: Piano de brinquedo, Performance pianística, Recital, Artform Recital, Dramaturgia.

Abstract: this paper examines the contribution of the toy piano to the dramaturgy of piano recitals. As a starting point for the study, the concept of *artform recital* is introduced, as the understanding that all elements come together with the music programme to build the listening experience. In order to weave all these elements together coherently, it is then proposed the application of ideas from dramaturgy. Three piano recitals are observed as case studies, demonstrating how the addition of toy piano performances can contribute to the dramaturgy of recitals by offering a distinct visual interest, allowing other possibilities of exploration of the space of performance and of the pianist's body movement, suggesting emotional connotations to the listening experience, and by working as a key element in the structure of the programme.

Keywords: Toy piano, Piano performance, Piano recital, Artform recital, Dramaturgy.

This article will discuss the toy piano as a relevant addition to the dramaturgy of solo piano recitals. As a pianist, usually the main concerns faced when preparing a recital is the programming of repertoire. This includes choice of work, or works, to be performed and, in the case of a programme with multiple pieces, the order in which they will be presented. In fact, the very question: “What to play on a piano recital?” opens Rosy Ge’s study titled “The art of Recital programming” which examines the transformations of the tendencies in the piano recital programming from the turn of the twentieth century to the present days. Ge observes, from experiences of concerts in what we consider are traditional contexts¹, the frequent feature of a chronological approach to a piano recital programme: “a conventional recital starts with a piece from the baroque era, followed by a German/Austrian composer from the classical era. A collection of works from the romantic era would be next, with something contemporary concluding the program” (GE, 2017, p. 1-2). The crucial importance of the programming in a piano recital was also highlighted by scholar Edward Said: “One looks for programs that appear to *say* something - that highlight aspects of the piano literature or of performance in unexpected ways - that highlight aspects of the piano literature or of performance in unexpected ways” (SAID, 2008, p. 15). Said suggests the sense of narrative as an interesting approach to frame the programme of a piano recital, explaining that “this narrative maybe conventional, moving historically (...) Or a program may have an inner narrative based on evolving forms, tonalities, or styles” (idem, p. 16).

In the research developed in my doctorate studies, I proposed the concept of the piano recital as an artform in itself. In such a proposal, the process of preparing a piano recital would go beyond the programming and practice of the music repertoire alone. The piano recital as an artform in itself calls the attention to the fact that all elements involved in the performance also convey meaning and make altogether the artistic experience - from the means of advertising to the space of performance, and the interaction with the audience.

This approach is also inspired by the concept *musicking* as created by Christopher Small, which proposes that music in itself is an activity, “something that people do” (SMALL 1998, p. 1). According to Small, the act of make music - i.e. of *musicking* - includes any activity which contributes

¹ The cited study was carried on at the University of Kansas, and examined the programmes of solo recitals presented at the Carnegie Hall in New York, USA.

to a music performance happening, from composing and performing to listening, also selling tickets, and ushering the audience in. In this concept, the very meaning of music involves much more than the aural aspect - it is generated through relationships which take place in the act of musicking (idem, p. 13).

It is interesting to consider that listening and the music experience may involve a more encompassing perceptual approach. Erik Clarke points out the ability of our perception to change the focus:

at one moment I can be aware of the people, clothing furniture, (...) and lighting of a performance venue, among which are the sounds of a performance of Beethoven's string quartet Op. 132 (...); and at another moment I am aware of nothing at all beyond a visceral engagement with musical events (...). Music does afford intensely absorbing and particular kinds of perceptual meanings (CLARKE, 2005, p. 188)

By accepting all those “extra-musical” elements as an integral part of the music experience and embracing the proposal of an *artform recital*, it becomes now crucial to engage in a creative process of integration of the various elements coherently. For this, it can be useful to consider concepts of dramaturgy, which is the “weaving of the performance’s different elements” (BARBA, 1985, p. 75).

The next section of this article will briefly introduce concepts of dramaturgy applied to piano recitals, drawing from results of my previous research. Subsequently, the growing incorporation of the toy piano in piano recitals nowadays will be discussed. Three case studies of recitals which I have developed and presented will then be examined to demonstrate the contribution of the toy piano to the dramaturgy of those specific concerts.

1. Dramaturgy of the piano recital: developing the *artform recital*

In my doctoral research I investigated strategies to develop a more comprehensive and immersive piano recital, which culminated in the development of the concept of the piano recital as an artform in itself.

As an art form, the recital should now be approached as an artistic compositional practice, being conceived as a whole artwork, yet thoroughly encompassing the craft of of all elements - from the interaction with the audience to the programming, and the design

of the interdisciplinary elements and their weaving by the dramaturgy. (Decoté Rodrigues, 2017, p. 72)

In this sense, the piano recital would not be seen singularly as a performance of a sequence of works (or of a single work, in the case of a programme made of one larger major piece). The piano recital would now be seen as a work of art in itself, where all the elements speak altogether - from the music programme to the space of performance, as well as the visual components and the aesthetic concept behind it all.

Among some elements which were observed to build, together with the music programme performance, what we call “live music experience”, it has been highlighted: (1) the space of performance, (2) social aspects involved between performer and audience, and audience and audience, and (3) the performative body of the pianist.

It has been found out that a deliberate preparation of the space of the performance can contribute to create a sense of anticipation for audience members, thereby helping to contextualise and frame their listening experience. Also, it has been found out that a space set up to bring a sense of intimacy is effective in heightening the affective aspect of live music performances.

Practical investigations during my doctoral research demonstrated that the social relationships resulting from interactions with other audience members and performers, even if temporary, have a powerful impact on an individual’s engagement in live music performances (BURLAND and PITTS, 2014, p. 176). Furthermore, the body of the pianist (with its performative gestures) carries in itself potential to generate meaning, communicate musical expressivity, also to shape the structure of the whole concert.

Once all these other elements are acknowledged as essentials in the structure of the *artform recital*, side by side with the music programme, the challenge that now emerges is to find strategies to weave them in a cohesive and meaningful way. For this, it became relevant to explore ideas from dramaturgy and their application in music performances.

Here, dramaturgy is understood as ‘the composition, structure or fabric of a play or performance (TURNER and BEHRNDT, 2008, p. 3). Key aspects have been identified in order to build the dramaturgy of the artform piano recital, i.e. to blend the elements together so the recital can be experienced as a cohesive whole, which include:

- The development of a sense of narrative as guideline to the unravelling of the performance;
- Craft of transitions between the pieces of music and the sections of the programme, so to allow the programme to flow;
- The intentional exploration of the physical gestures involved in the music performance, as essential elements in the communication of the artistic content and to hold together the whole of the music performance (DECOTÉ RODRIGUES, 2017, p. 67)

The approach of the piano recital as an artform in itself and the development of dramaturgies to structure them have been guidelines, explicitly or not, in my latest piano performances. In this process, I have found a relevant addition to the development of such projects, the toy piano. The toy piano has become a valuable element to enrich my solo piano concerts regarding: (1) the music content in terms of programme and timbre, (2) the visual aspect and possibilities of exploration of the space, and (3) alternatives to structure the programme and the development of an aesthetic concept within these performance projects.

Before examining three case studies of piano performances which benefited from the feature of toy piano pieces, this article will discuss relevant aspects of the toy piano in the literature, as a contextualisation.

2. The toy piano as a concert instrument

John Cage's *Suite for Toy Piano* written in 1948 is considered the first proposal to take the toy piano as a concert instrument. Since then, the toy piano has been getting more attention by composers and performers and has secured its place in the concert music scene. Pianist Margaret Leng Tan has been a pioneer and pivotal figure in the development of the toy piano in the context of art music (GOH, 2015, p. 36). From performances of John Cage's *Suite for Toy Piano*, Margaret Leng Tan has contributed to building up the repertoire for toy piano through transcriptions and commissions.

As potential reasons for playing on and writing for toy piano, Baker points out emotional connotations, technical challenge, and distinctive musical characteristics:

the toy piano causes one to think about music in a different manner. For some it evokes a child-like sense of whimsy, for other it is about the challenge of writing for an instrument with a limited pitch range, others just like the way it sounds in all it's non-standard tuning glory (BAKER, 2016, p. 3).

Reinforcing the emotional aspect which may be associated with the toy piano, composer David Smooke observes that “the general sound of the toy piano is an instant nostalgia for childhood” (interviewed by McCABE, 2014).

The unique sound characteristics of the toy piano have also been an element of fascination for both composers and performers. Toy pianist Isabel Etternauer calls the attention to the fact that “each [toy piano] has a different sound” (interviewed by POOLE, 2002). Composer Geoff Hanna points out the interesting aspect of the irregularities and inconsistencies of the toy piano: “it's slightly out of tune. The top half and the bottom half of the range are two different harmonic regions. In the bottom half you can hardly hear the fundamental - you tend to hear a fifth up” (interviewed by POOLE, 2002).

Among the factors of the toy piano attractiveness for performers, in particular, the portability of the toy piano is highlighted by pianist and researcher Xenia Pestova Bennett. Pestova mentions the feeling of liberation:

The pianist (...) is able to bypass practical considerations and perform in milieus that include (for example) a tropical rainforest, a natural cave system, a desert landscape, a mountain top, experimental music lofts and other potential public performance environments where there simply isn't a piano, and no practical way to bring one in' (PESTOVA, 2017, p. 2).

Pestova also suggests the incorporation of the toy piano into one's practice as a welcome contribution to a versatile career, as well as an opportunity to bring freshness from the tradition inherited from the nineteenth century piano culture. In that respect, composer David Smooke has said about one of the reasons he enjoys writing for the toy piano:

I also like that there really isn't a traditional performance practice for the toy piano. If I get onstage with a piano, there's hundreds of years of comparison that people just automatically will draw upon. (...) With the toy piano the associations are much more personal and music less attached to a cultural tradition (interview to McCabe, 2014).

As another stimulus for the development of toy piano performance, Margaret Leng Tan has pointed out the challenge to mastering of the toy piano technique and the eventual benefit it will bring to one's piano technique itself:

When I go back to the real piano [I find that] it's refined my technique no end [...] I can play [...] so reliably now after working with the toy piano. I tell my students: "Take any chance you get to work with a toy piano - it will do so much for your technique" (Tan interviewed by WILLIAMS, 2007).

Bringing attention to another aspect of music performance, Pestova mentions the unconventional theatrical visual feature of the toy piano and the eccentric and humorous flavour it can bring to a concert:

The act of crouching on the floor in front of the audience is in stark contrast to the majestic silhouette we associate with the open wing of the concert grand, and acts as an invitation to participate in the event, drawing audiences closer. Traditional barriers between performer and audience are removed, the performer is reduced in stature and can't help contributing to an unusual situation (PESTOVA, 2017, p. 2).

In this respect, Margaret Leng Tan also has highlighted the visual appeal of the toy piano and its role in expanding her concerts towards a more theatrical experience: "They're theatre events rather than just concerts. It's very vivid and colourful - there are all these toy instruments involved, and all this choreography" (Tan interviewed by WILLIAMS, 2007).

The freshness of the toy piano in relation to tradition, the opening of possibilities for mobility and suggestion of sense of scale, its theatrical potential, timbre distinctiveness and connotations of nostalgia, are elements which have been particularly interesting in some of my latest piano recitals. The next section of this article will discuss the role of the toy piano in three of those performances.

3. Case studies - the toy piano in the dramaturgy of three piano performances

In this section, three piano performances which I have developed and presented will be observed as case studies. The contribution of the toy piano to the dramaturgy of those recitals will

be examined by offering possibilities for exploration of the space, other visual and aural perspectives, and as a structural element within the music program.

3.1. Case study 1. *House-Dream* - a short piano performance

*House-Dream*² was a short piano performance presented as part of a showcase event promoted by CARU - Contemporary Arts ReSearch Unit, at Modern Art Oxford art gallery in Oxford, UK. My act was a 20 minutes solo music performance to be presented at the foyer of the gallery, following a programme of artistic numbers ranging from world music to live art performance. I had then the challenge to develop a dramaturgy of this short piano performance, which should contain both a variety of elements and unity among them, presenting distinctiveness in such a limited timeframe.

The theme of “dream” was the chosen thread for the programme, and the space was set with objects that would remind of a house setting - cushions and a wind-chime around a digital piano and a toy piano. The music programme performed was:

Késia Decoté - *Bagatelle 1*, for piano
John Cage - *Dream*, for piano
Késia Decoté - *Bagatelle 2*, for piano
Silvia Berg - *El sueño... el vuelo*, for piano
Késia Decoté - *Bagatelle 3*, for piano
Stephen Montague - *Almost a lullaby*, for toy piano, wind chimes and musical box.

The toy piano piece, *Almost a lullaby* by Stephen Montague, plays with the idea of a deconstructed lullaby. It requires that a wind chime (or a recording of it) is played, chiming throughout the piece. It also asks the toy pianist to wind up a musical box and allow it to play simultaneously with the toy piano during the last sections of the piece.

The feature of a piece for toy piano at the end of the performance created a spacial dynamic, since I had to walk from the digital piano to the toy piano. This could be seen as a subtle but effectively distinct element for visual and kinaesthetic engagement of the audience, since a piano performance is usually still in terms of movement in space due to the characteristic of the instrument itself.

² <https://vimeo.com/162903232>

The performance of this toy piano work also played with perceptions of a sense of scale, as an audience member mentioned having an impression of “a sonic Russian doll” (audience member feedback). This scale aspect was further highlighted because the music box used in this occasion, as a happy coincidence, had the shape of a grand piano. There was then the dynamic of the pianist coming from the “real size” piano from the previous piece to the toy piano and ending up handling the 20 centimetres musical-box piano.

FIGURE 1 – Késia Decoté performs *Almost a lullaby* by Stephen Montague, Modern Art Oxford, 27/09/2015.
Photo: Stu Allsopp



The toy piano itself brought some intended and not-intended connotations, shaping the emotional impact of the performance in different ways. Whilst some audience members related an impression of sweetness, another spectator felt uncomfortable because the toy piano brought unpleasant memories from their childhood. Other people said they had a sense of creepiness, by

linking the toy object with terror movies, corroborating Pestova's remark that "many of us naturally appear to associate the bell-like sound of the toy piano with the slightly unnatural world of childhood, creepy lullabies and horror films"³.

Here in a practical situation is how the toy piano has the potential to affect the listening experience due to its link to each person's emotional past and nostalgia.

In this case study, we could see the toy piano creating a distinctive interest and engagement even in such a short piano performance. It contributed to building a physical and emotional ambience that allowed the unravelling of the theme of the performance - dream. It also contributed to shaping the performance as an interdisciplinary work. On this occasion, there was a perception that the act was more than a presentation of music – there was a concept framing the music programme and performance, also combining visual interest and exploration of space.

House-Dream was a work-in-progress for the development of a full-length concert titled *casa*, discussed in the next section.

3.2. Case study 2. *casa - reflections on house and home*

casa - reflections on house and home was an interdisciplinary piano recital which combined the performance of contemporary Brazilian piano music with theatrical actions. The project was inspired by Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, and had an autobiographical character.

This project also aimed to explore the space of the performance and to challenge conventions of spectatorship: the performance space was "arena" style, with no distinction between stage and audience. There were two pianos and two toy pianos in the space which I alternated playing throughout the programme. There were no seats for the audience, who were informed they were free to walk and explore the space during the performance.

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06sgxjp>, cited by PESTOVA, 2017, p. 9.

FIGURE 2 – Music programme for *casa - reflections of house & home*

Programme

(please feel free to move around and explore the space as you wish)

1. Memories (*Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house*)
Tátil [Tactile]* (2007), by Valéria Bonafé - for piano
2. Echoes (*...the old house, for those who know how to listen, is a sort of geometry of echoes*)
Ressonâncias [Resonances] (1983), by Marisa Rezende - for piano
3. Corners (*When we recall the hours we have spent in our corners, we remember above all silence, the silence of our thoughts*)
Nenhum, Nenhuma [None, None]* (2010), by Gustavo Penha - for piano
4. The attic (*... even when the attic room is lost and gone there remains the fact that we once loved a garret, once lived in an attic*)
Ludvan ven Beethowig* (2009), for two toy pianos and one player, by Daniel Moreira
5. The cellar (*... the dark entity of the house... When we dream there, we are in harmony with the irrationality of the depths*)
gosto de terra [it tastes like earth]* (2013), for piano and live electronics, by Daniel Puig
6. Love, Intimacy, and Dream (*[the house] bespeaks intimacy... The house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace*)
El sueño... el vuelo [The dream... the flight] (2010), by Silvia Berg - for piano

* First performance in the UK

Quotations in italics from Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, 1994 Edition by Beacon Press, Boston

Movement was an integral part of this project, which was highlighted by the fact that I had to walk across the space to play the different pianos. Adding to this dynamic, the toy pianos were on top of a scaffolding tower, so in a way there was also a shift of vertical levels, the spacial aspect (see Fig. 3).

The programme (see Figure 2) was structured in scenes which were related to specific spaces of the house - following Bachelard's reflections - and to phases of my life. Each musical piece corresponded to a scene and was followed by a theatrical gesture. The toy piano piece corresponded to the scene of the 'attic' and suggested the moment to bring out nostalgia and happy memories from childhood.

The toy piano scene was a humorous moment in the dramaturgy of this performance, following a dynamic of releasing tension before increasing again up to the climax in the storyline. The timbre of the toy piano and the fragments of Beethoven's *Pour Elise*, which were deconstructed in Daniel Moreira's piece, built up effectively the scene related to childhood memories.

Also, the act of going up the scaffolding brought a change of visual perspective (see Figure 3): the performance space, which had been explored horizontally through the movements from one piano to another, now also being explored vertically.

FIGURE 3 – *casa - reflections of house & home*: audience's perspective of Késia Decoté performing toy pianos at top of scaffolding tower. Photo: Stu Allsopp



We can see, in this project, here the toy piano is a key element in building up the visual, structural and emotional aspects of the performance. The toy piano brought variety of timbre and visuals, conveyed perceptions of childhood, added an element of humour, and allowed an additional exploration of the space of performance.

3.3. Case study 3. *light, leve, luz*

light, leve, luz was an intimate recital⁴ exploring the word “light” in its various aspects when related to music. In Portuguese, my mother tongue, there are two different words for light: *leve*

⁴ Recital presented at The Abbey Sutton Courtenay, UK, on 22 December 2019.

meaning weightlessness and *luz* meaning luminosity. The music programme presented works which explored these aspects in musical terms. The programme was structured in three sections, each exploring an aspect of the word “light” through the pieces included in those sections (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4 – Music programme of *light, leve, luz*

- Part 1: lightness of touch
Ben Gaunt - *Light Spellsphere*, for toy piano (2019)
Arnold Schoenberg *Leicht, zart* (Light, delicate) - from Six Little Piano Pieces Op. 19 (1911)
Ruth Crawford-Seeger - *Preludes 8* (Leggiero), for piano (1924)
.....
Part 2: lightness of being
Yfat Soul Zisso - *Para a frente*, for toy piano (2018)
Silvia Berg - *El sueño... el vuelo*, for piano (2010)
John Palmer - *Shambhala*, for piano (1990)
.....
[transition]
Michael Taplin - *Wax Candles*, for piano (2018)
.....
Part 3: light - luz
Yfat Soul Zisso - *Full Moon*, for toy piano (2019)
Max Gibson - *Night over Berstane*, for toy piano & piano (2017)
Thomas Adès - *Darkness Visible*, for piano (1992)
Marisa Rezende - *Miragem*, for piano (2009)

Differently from the other projects discussed in this paper, this recital presented a fairly traditional format, being performed to an audience placed in a standard classical music seating arrangement, at a traditional venue. This project was developed with a focus on the performance of the music works, with no interdisciplinary processes being deliberately explored in the sense of visual or theatrical elements.

In this recital, the toy piano pieces acted as signposts in the structure of the programme, marking clearly the beginning of a new section. On one hand, these toy piano moments brought a freshness to the listening process through the intervention of a different timbre. On the other hand, they linked the different sections of the programme. In this respect, if they brought in novelty in terms of timbre and visual perception, with the recurrence at the beginning of each section they started to become recognisable features. Like effective signposts, the toy piano pieces could be understood as the sign for a new section to start immediately once heard. In this way, the toy piano

pieces worked simultaneously as an element of variety and of unity within the programme of a fairly traditional piano recital.

Thus, by working as an element of transition between sections, the toy piano assumed a crucial role in the dramaturgy of this recital, allowing the programme to flow organically while developing the concept of the recital. The transitions are in fact the key to the dramaturgy of a performance work, as pointed out by Turner and Behrndt: “It is the ‘links’ or the ‘bridges between events that are, in fact, key to understand the ‘inner logic’ of the piece. Transitions are not just a question of moving from one moment to another; it is in these transitions that the dramaturgy of the performance is discovered.” (Turner and Behrndt, 2008, p. 33)

Additionally, although the visual element was not an element deliberately explored in this performance, the presence of the toy piano in itself added a visual variety to the performance. It also offered a new element of perspective in relation to a traditional solo piano recital: usually only the audience members seated on the left side of the auditorium can see the keyboard and the hands action of the pianist. In this recital, because I placed the keyboard of the toy piano on the opposite direction to the piano keyboard, the audience seated on the right side could also see the action of the keyboard during the toy piano pieces. Finally, the toy piano brought in a spacial dynamic similar to the first case studied in this paper, for the simple fact that I needed to move from the toy piano to the grand piano, and vice versa.

Conclusion

In this paper I examined how the feature of toy piano pieces contributed to the dramaturgy of three piano performances which I have developed and performed. Drawing from my previous research was the concept of the artform recital where all elements of the performance are understood as essential for carrying expressivity and meaning in the live music experience - from the space of the performance including visual elements, to interactions with the audience, plus the music programme and performance. It also showed the concept of dramaturgy as an relevant tool to weave all these elements together in order to make this artform recital a cohesive whole.

It was observed that the toy piano contributed to the dramaturgy of the piano performances

examined in this paper by: adding visual interest and theatricality, liberating from traditions of classical music concerts, bringing freshness of timbre, offering more possibilities of movement and exploration of the space of the performance (which has allowed variety of perspectives and eventually played with a sense of scale), suggesting emotional connotations such as nostalgia, and working as a key element in the structure of a programme.

Although the outcomes draw from practical experiments involving varied contexts, it is recognisable that the limitations of this study are in terms of scope of repertoire and focused parameters of evaluation. It is our expectation that more studies in the field of toy piano performance will build on and complement the understandings generated by this discussion.

On one hand the tradition of piano recital dates back from the 1800s, on the other hand the toy piano has been gaining its place in the world of concert music only since the late 1940s. These reflections aim to demonstrate how this recent tradition of toy piano performance can contribute to refresh and enrich solo piano recitals, and to enchant audiences sonically, visually, and emotionally in a unique way.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

PhD and MA (Distinction) in Interdisciplinary Arts and Music from Oxford Brookes University (CNPq and Santander scholarships respectively), and Masters and Bachelors in Music - Piano Performance from Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (PIBIC/ CNPq and CAPES scholarships respectively). Késia has a special interest in contemporary music and interdisciplinary arts practices as innovative ways to present music. As a performer, Késia Decoté has a record of solo, chamber music and interdisciplinary performances in the UK, Brazil, Canada, Norway and Portugal. Areas of interest: music performance, piano performance, contemporary music, improvisation, interdisciplinary arts and art in context. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3366-7189>. E-mail: kesiadecote@gmail.com

Serendipity Poetry and Play in Toy Piano composition and *Four Pieces for Toy Piano*

Brian Inglis

Middlesex University | UK

Abstract: In this paper I draw on literature by Xenia Pestova, Antonietta Loffredo and Maggie Williams/Margaret Leng Tan, and primary research in the form of an interview with Kate Ryder (transcribed as an Appendix) exploring aspects of toy piano performance/composition and focussing on my *Four Pieces for Toy Piano* (2018). These pieces were commissioned by Ryder and premiered by her in London in 2018, and subsequently published and recorded. I identify themes which emerge in, and out from, this and other professional repertoire for toy piano relating to composition and performance practice: material/materiality; sonic character, notation, collaboration and communication. I provide a poietic account of some of the processes involved in the pieces' composition and realisation in performance.

Keywords: Toy piano, Composition, Play, Found objects, Serendipity.

Toy piano practitioners have commonly referred to the alternative and playful elements inherent in and integral to their practice and identity – that of a professional adult musician giving concert performances on an instrument intended as a children’s toy. Loffredo (2018, p.122) suggests “the presence of this small musical toy piano on the stage by itself, reminds all of us... that ‘the essential nature of all musical activity is play’”. Other manifestations of this might be the toy piano as a mirror; a special perspective through which the broader contemporary music scene can be viewed, encouraging us to reflect on contemporary music practice more generally. The toy piano has even been described as a “grained” instrument (*pace* Roland Barthes and post-structuralist philosophy), whose “difference” from, and implied inferiority to, the normative piano is a source of special sensual charm through quirks of timbre, articulation and tuning (SMITH, 2019). The instrument’s specific characteristics and quirks have been identified as potential limitations; ways in which it is restricted – but also not; the perceived restrictions can be overcome, exploited or reframed as positive qualities. Loffredo (2018, p. 121) hints at the serendipitous aspect here in reflecting: “The lack of intonation, unpredictable overtones, noisy mechanism and difficulties to master, are ‘deficiencies’ that don’t seem to hinder but instead inspire this curious play-community”. The establishment of the toy piano in the 1990s as a consistently useful and serious resource for concert music can be seen as part of a broader wave of postmodern (re)habilitation of neglected and/or denigrated sound-sources; it blurs the boundaries between children’s entertainment and professional musical resource in a typical postmodern fashion. Another postmodern trait is the instrument’s frequent association with multimedia elements – not just combination with other instruments (toy or not), but visual/theatrical elements and extended sound-sources, often electronic. While I would therefore explicitly link the toy piano with postmodern aesthetics, other perspectives – not necessarily mutually exclusive – include Ryder’s (2019, section 5) linking of the instrument with the experimental tradition, clearly justified through the John Cage connection; and Loffredo’s (2018, p.120) speculation: “Perhaps there was a need to wait for the interest in timbre which has characterised compositional research during and since the twentieth century, plus the advent of electro-acoustic music, another sound world in which the toy piano is often collaborating”.

1. Collaboration and exploration

The composition processes behind my *Four Pieces for Toy Piano*, and their realisations, were the outcome of a collaborative relationship which is summarised by Ryder (2019, section 5) in more general terms as: “that important interim stage. The first step is to listen to the instruments, and there’s the other major step of trying things out, saying does this work? and being delighted when it does work”. Williams (2007) quotes Margaret Leng Tan, who notes that: “A successful work for toy piano is one that capitalises on what the instrument has to offer... it has to exploit the qualities of the instrument, or why bother?” Ryder (2019, section 6) goes further, in talking of an authentic new keyboard repertoire for toy pianos, defined as pieces which are: “written specifically for these instruments and for me, my personality, how I might stack them and how I might do them”, describing this as “the really fascinating thing”.

So what are the qualities of the instrument? Following on from the features identified by Loffredo above, Ryder (2019, sections 5, 6 & 8) talks of it as: “a contemporary instrument – a new instrument” which is “very much part of the experimental genre” in that “It’s re-inventing something; listening to something differently”. Besides the limited, varying ranges, key sizes and dynamic possibilities, Pestova (2017, p.31) identifies the tuning as being unstable, though Ryder (2019, section 2/4) proposes alternatively that: “It can be slightly microtonal, and... that’s a great attraction...”.

One thing Ryder, Pestova, Tan and Loffredo have all noted is the use of extraneous sound sources to expand the toy piano soundworld – sometimes to theatrical effect. These commonly include voice or electronics. Isabel Ettenauer (WILLIAMS 2007) cites Karlheinz Essl (2005) in the latter regard; an example of the former is Joe Cutler’s *La maison de Fred* (2001). Turning to my own pieces, let us first consider the second movement, Laugh.

2. Laugh

This short movement has (unsurprisingly) the character of a scherzo. It is derived from a concrete poem of the same name by Derek Shiel, the late Irish artist and writer (see figure 1).

FIGURE 1 – Derek Shiel (1939-2017), LAUGH.

AH HA
AAH AHA
HA HA HA HAHA
HAW
AAH HA HAHA
HEY
HAHA HAW
HAH
AAH AHA
HE HE HAH HEY
HOHO HA HI HAHE
HUM HUM HO
HOHUM HO
HA HO HAW
HI HAH AAH
HA HA
HEW
HAHA HEHE HOHO
HI HI HI HI
HI HI HA
HEW
HUH HEY
HO HUM HOHO
HUHUUH
HO HA
HA HUH

Source: SHIEL (2011, pp.22-23)

In itself this poem was inspired by Umberto Boccioni's Futurist painting, *La Risata* (figure 2).

FIGURE 2 – *La Risata*.



Source: BOCCIONI (1911) Public domain

Having decided to use the poem, the piece came very quickly and spontaneously, in a manner suggested by the poem's structure. Using a simple cipher expanded from the type used by Robert Schumann and other Romantic composers, I allocated each letter used in the poem to a musical note, always at the same pitch level (helpful given the limited range of toy pianos): figure 3. Rhythms are derived from the number of letters in each word. This systematic process could have generated the piece in its entirety, but it occurred to me that having the performer recite the words of the poem between the musical groups (see figure 4) would make the piece more fun, more memorable, more theatrical, and really bring it to life. So the text is conveyed by two means – in a way which is private, coded and implicit, and in a way which is extrovert and entirely explicit.

FIGURE 3 – Mapping of letters used in poem LAUGH to pitches used in composition.

Letters:	A	H	W	E	Y	O	I	U	M
Pitches:	A	B	C#	E	D#	F#	G#	Bb	C

FIGURE 4 – Score page image of Laugh.

2. Laugh

Text: Derek SHIEL Music: Brian INGLIS

$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 120$ (rubato)
Transpose up or down an octave - or play in octaves - ad lib.

July 2017/February 2018

Source: INGLIS (2018, p. 7)

The realisation of the spoken text gives considerable leeway to the performer. Bearing in mind Ryder’s comment about authentic repertoire, and her personality, I knew she would bring this off with great aplomb.¹ And her success here is borne out by the following comment on the piece: “it enabled me to go really crazy within a certain discipline; a delight” (2019, section 7). Like Wolfe (1996), Laugh exploits the instrument’s potential for humour, though this is:

not to be confused with not taking it seriously, a bit of a joke. I think particularly when you’re working with instruments that are originally toys, you have to have a serious approach, because the composers I work with have never treated them as some kind of joke, but as an alternate soundworld, and that’s the difference. (RYDER, 2019, section 6).

Loffredo (2018, p. 101) contextualises this by observing: “A thread of humour in the use of toy instruments runs through to today but with a slight difference. In the past it was more joking and poking fun... whereas now associative humour prevails”. Ryder (2019, section 8) develops her point

¹ Ryder’s studio recording of this movement has been commercially released (INGLIS, 2020).

in commenting that: “in a wonderful way [the toy piano] cuts through any kind of pretention. But (...) it is an instrument, and not a toy”. This also connects with Ryder’s position on the instrument being valorised in particular by and within the experimental tradition associated with John Cage: “I think Cage validated it immediately, because by the stage [of writing his *Suite for Toy Piano*] he’d won the argument with the prepared piano for a decade”. The argument referred to being that all potential sound sources and modifications thereof should be included and welcomed into Cage’s – and others’ – compositional practice.

3. Beautiful Lofty Things

Beautiful Lofty Things, the third movement of my suite, follows Laugh in two ways. Firstly, it invokes the work of an Irish artist – in this case, the celebrated poet and politician William Butler Yeats. Secondly, it extends the use of a musical cipher, this time into a comprehensive and more systematic “communicable language” of the type employed by Messiaen (1969). Although the title is taken from another Yeats poem, the content is drawn from Yeats’ name and his better-known poem *Sailing To Byzantium*.

This time all 26 notes of the alphabet are linked with the full chromatic gamut in an entirely abstract way; figure 5.

FIGURE 5 – Mapping of letters to pitches in Beautiful Lofty Things.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
C#	D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	Bb	B	C	C#
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
D	D#	E	F	F#	G	G#	A	Bb	B	C	C#	D

In terms of Piercian semiotics, this is a symbolic sign system. The musical spelling-out of William Butler Yeats’ name occurs both vertically (in the repeated chords which preface the piece) and horizontally, in the linear gesture used as a kind of refrain – see figure 6. (Again, the rhythm is linked to the lengths of the words.) It may be interpreted as a kind of emblematic tribute – just as *Laugh* and the *Prelude* were written in memory of Derek Shiel.

4. Water and Stone: Notation and performance

The fourth movement, Water and Stone, offers some novel strategies for notation and performance. The conceptual principles are related to the world of natural and organic elements. An optional accompanying soundtrack consists of field recordings of water sounds recorded in Georgia in August 2017: fountains in the capital Tbilisi, and night-time rain in Mestia, in the mountainous region of Svaneti. When it comes to the notated score, a graphic strategy is employed (see figures 8 and 10). While graphic notation generally forms an important strand within my practice and research,² using the technique in the specific context of this movement had a twofold rationale (as will be explored in this section). Firstly, to extend and develop the kind of performer freedom essayed in Laugh; and secondly to efficiently notate clusters of different kinds. The score has a tangibly tactile relationship with natural phenomena: trees, stones, crystals. Some of the graphics are traced from close-up photographs of branches (see fig. 7 and fig. 8, 6th system) and of pebbles (figs 9-10). Other graphics are drawn around templates formed by cut crystals (figure 11).

² See for instance the graphic score cadenza for my *Concerto for Piano Solo (Homage to Alkan)*, Composers Edition 2015; and my paper Towards an analytical framework for graphic scores, and a proposed typology (online at <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/25905/>).

FIGURE 6 – Beautiful Lofty Things score page image.

8

3. Beautiful Lofty Things

• = ca.88-100
marcato

The musical score for 'Beautiful Lofty Things' is presented in a single staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The piece begins with a tempo marking of ca. 88-100 and a dynamic of *mf*. The first system (measures 1-3) features a series of chords in 7/4, 6/4, and 5/4 time signatures, with dynamics *mf*, *mp*, and *f* respectively. The second system (measures 4-6) continues with a melodic line in 7/6, 6/5, and 5/4 time signatures, starting with *mf*. The third system (measures 7-9) shows a melodic line in 7/4, 6/4, and 5/3 time signatures. The fourth system (measures 10-16) is marked 'libero quasi cadenza' and begins with a dynamic of *f*. The fifth system (measures 11-13) has a tempo marking of ca. 180-200 and features a melodic line in 3/2, 4/3, and *f* dynamics. The sixth system (measures 14-16) includes a trill and ends with a dynamic of *f* in 11/7 and 6/4 time signatures.

Source: INGLIS (2018, p. 8)

FIGURE 7 – Branch photograph, source material for Water and Stone graphic score.

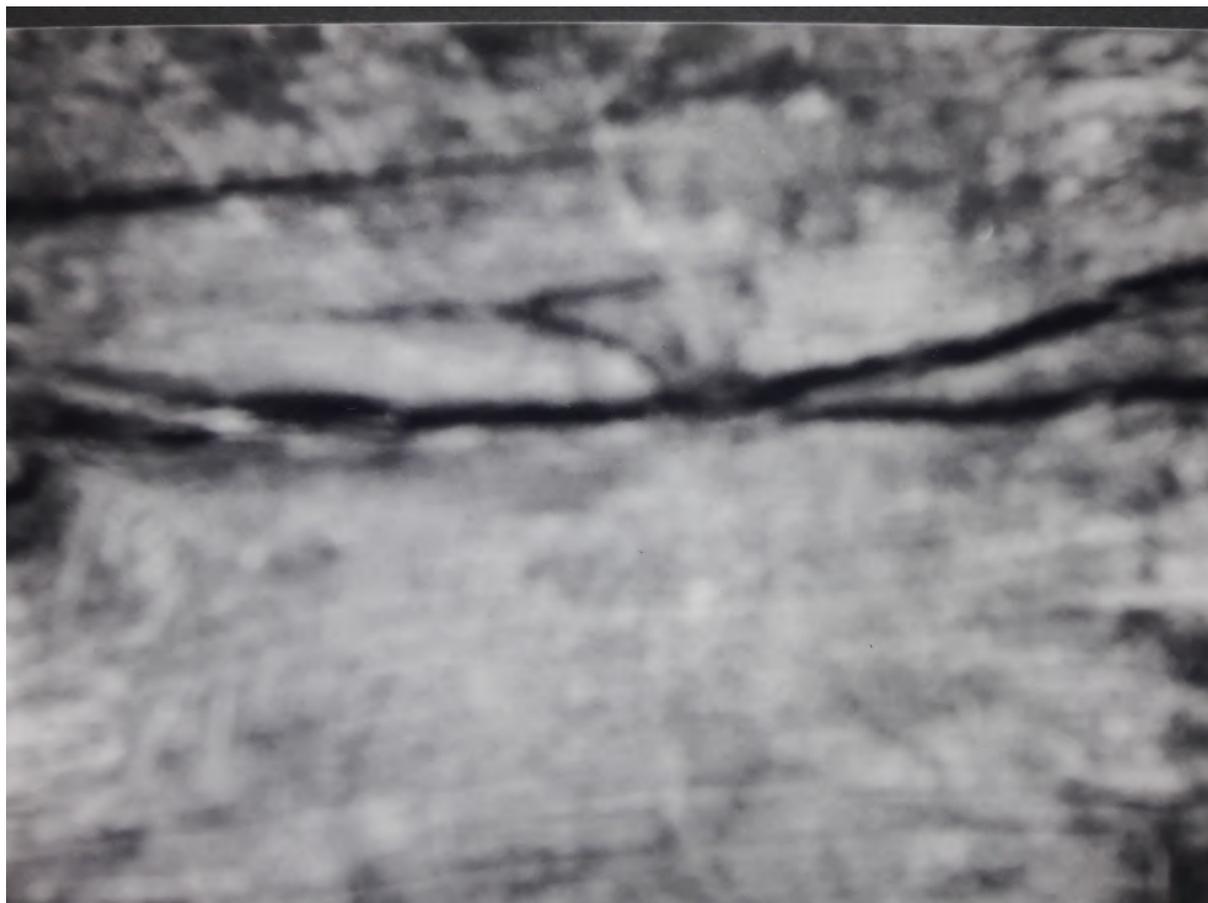
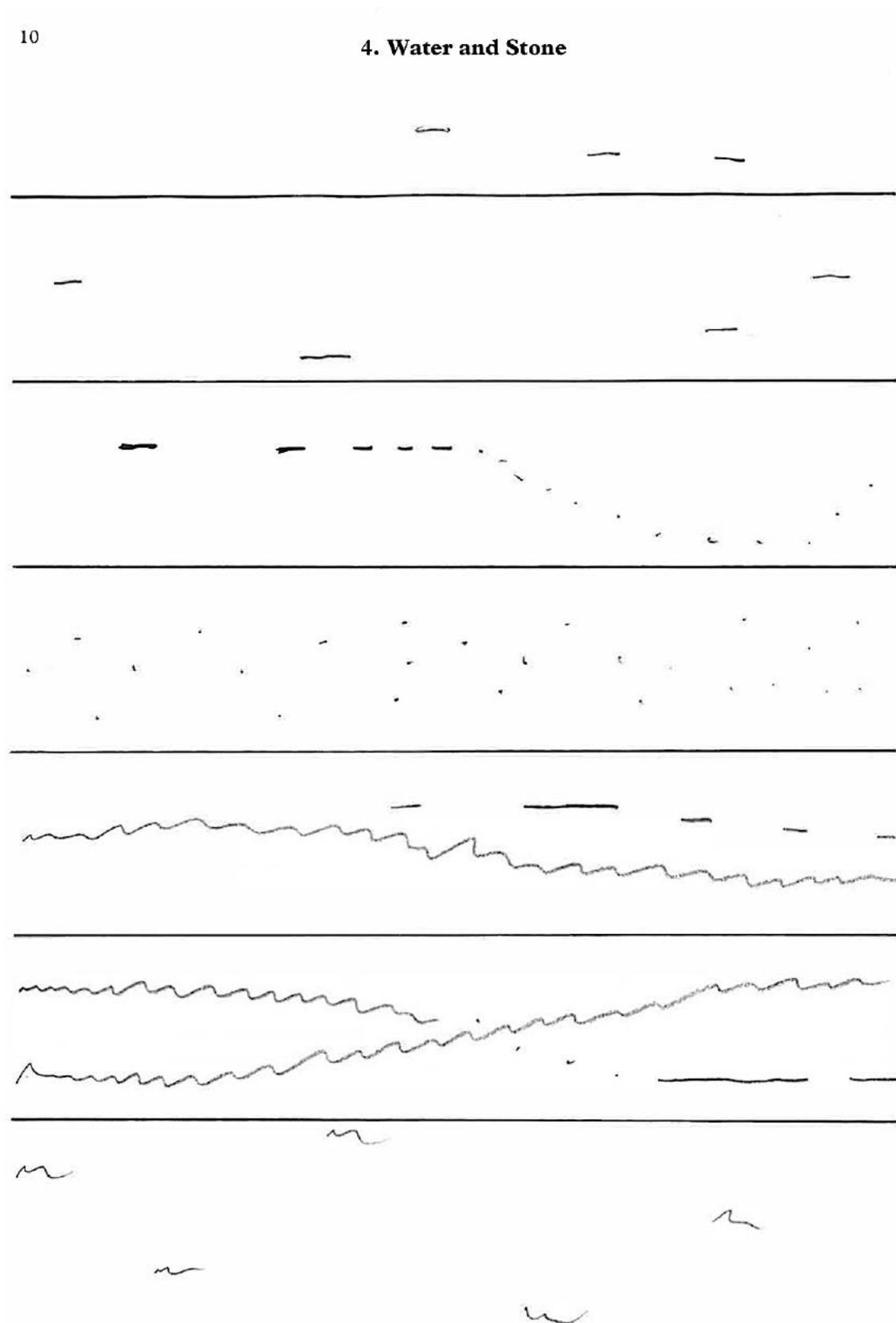


Photo credit: Brian Inglis (2017)

FIGURE 8 – Water and Stone score page image.



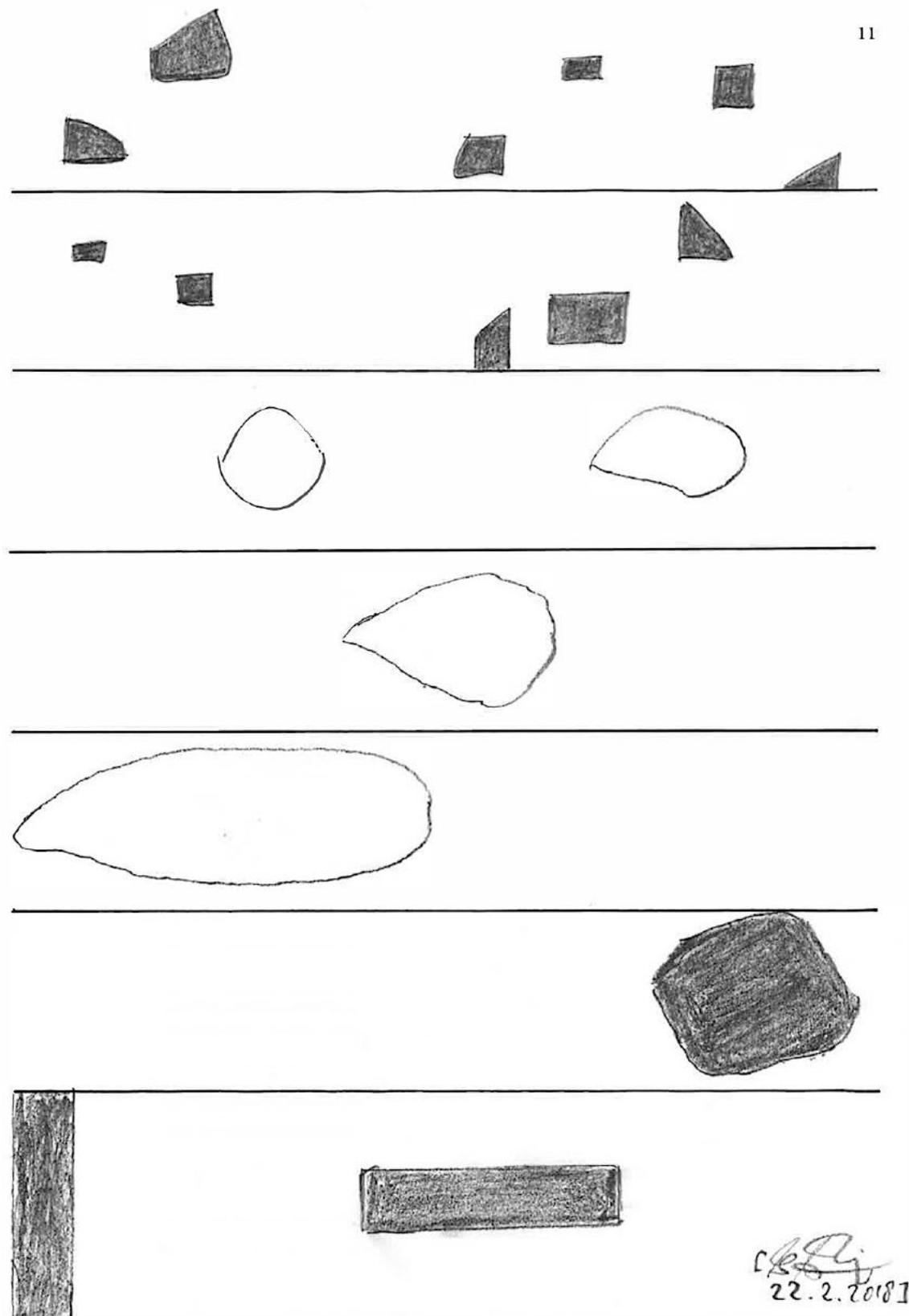
Source: INGLIS (2018, p. 10)

FIGURE 9 – Pebble photograph, source material for Water and Stone graphic score.



Photo credit: Brian Inglis (2017)

FIGURE 10 – Water and Stone score page image.



Source: INGLIS (2018, p.11)

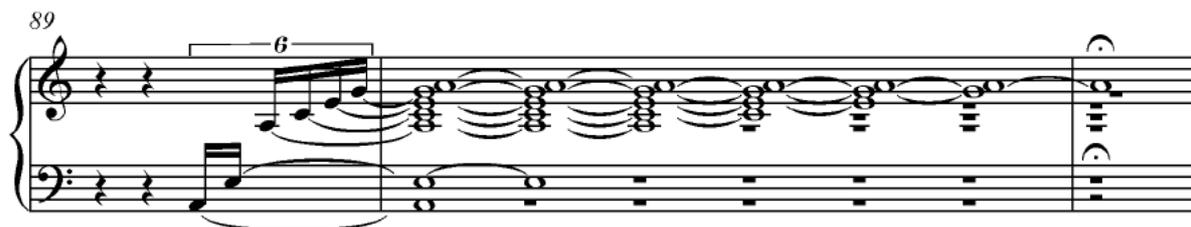
FIGURE 11 – Crystals used as templates for Water and Stone graphics.



Photo credit: Brian Inglis (2020)

The resultant graphic shapes denote clusters of different kinds – chromatic, diatonic, expanding, contracting. The contexts for such realisations are varied, but highlight some of the more general advantages of graphic notation. For instance, in some early piano works by Schumann, such as *Papillons* (figure 12), the composer indicates the gradual reduction of a chord to one note. In conventional notation this is somewhat cumbersome. In graphic notation, this effect – and the opposite one of gradually increasing a chord’s density – can be achieved with great directness and simplicity, even if the specificity is less.

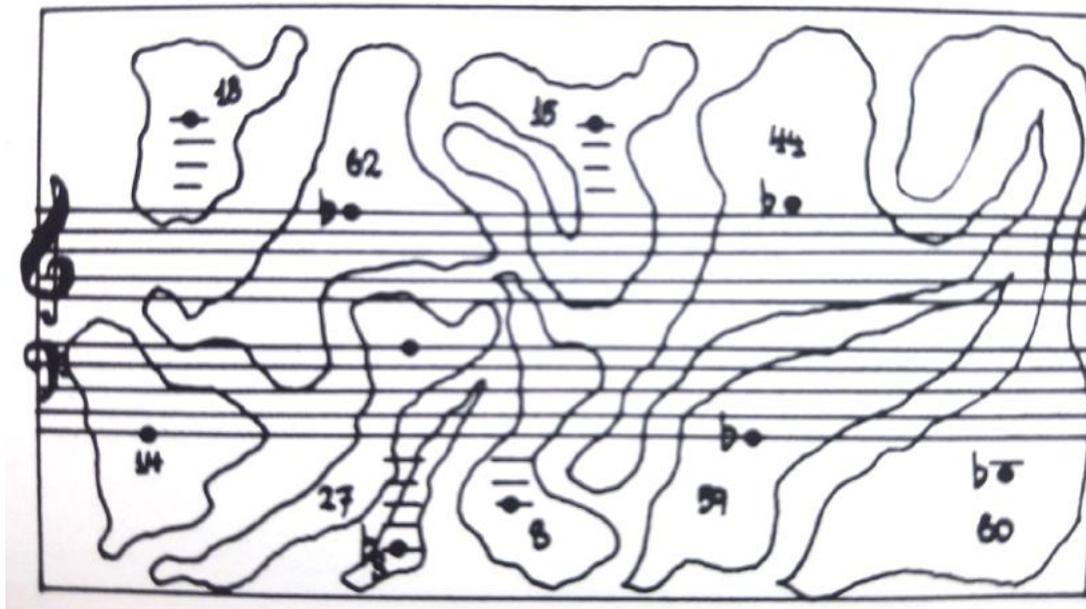
FIGURE 12 – Robert Schumann, *Papillons* op.2 (1832), ending.



Source: HERTTRICH (2009, p.30)

Similar strategies can be found in a more contemporary context in examples by Ligeti and Cage. Notations T and Z from Cage (1960) show a variant, where the focal pitch of a cluster is shown conventionally on a staff, but the shifting limits of the clusters are indicated as graphic “islands”:

FIGURE 13 – Notation T from Cage, *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, Edition Peters No. 6705



Source: CAGE 1960. © 1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. Reproduced by permission of Peters Edition Limited, London.

Ligeti's organ composition *Volumina* (1962) consists entirely of clusters of different types, and is notated purely graphically, without recourse to any conventions apart from the relative positions on the page of right hand, left hand and pedal (see figure 14). Ligeti also, in a relatively precise way, indicates the expansion and contraction of chromatic and diatonic clusters, and their movement:

FIGURE 14 – Ligeti, *Volumina* for organ, excerpt from Edition Peters No 5983

The figure shows a page of musical notation for Ligeti's *Volumina* for organ. It is divided into three horizontal sections: 'rechte Hand' (right hand), 'linke Hand' (left hand), and 'Pedal (tacet)'. Above the sections are circled numbers 7 and 8. The right hand section features a thick black bar with a white arrow pointing right labeled 'W'. The left hand section features a white arrow pointing left labeled 'S' and a thick black bar on the right side with a jagged edge, labeled '(mit Zuhilfenahme der rechten Hand)'. The pedal section is marked 'tacet' with a dashed line. Below the sections are detailed instructions in German regarding swellboxes and jalousie.

Auf einem anderen Manual, dessen Pfeifen sich in einem zweiten Schwellkasten befinden:
allerleiseste Stimme B¹, ohne Tremulant

unmerklich einsetzen

(mit Zuhilfenahme der rechten Hand)

Schweller (rechte Hand):
offen
zweiter Schweller
(linke Hand):
geschlossen

Spiel mit dem zwei Schwellern: -- Ende des Spiels mit dem
während eine Jalousie geöffnet wird,
Schwellern.
wird die andere geschlossen. Diese
Rechte Hand; Jalousie geschlossen
alternierende Öffnen-Schliessen.
Linke Hand; Jalousie offen
erfolgt ad lib, operadisch und mit
accél. und rall. in unregelmässiger Abwechslung.

Litolff/Peters 30385

Source: LIGETI (1962, p. 7) © 1962 by Henry Litolff's Verlag, Leipzig. Reproduced by permission of Peters Edition Limited, London.

Pestova (2017, p. 31) counsels against thick chords in toy piano writing, maintaining that: “Additive resonance of the rods contributes to the general thickness of texture, and the most successful repertoire tends to work with rather than against these limitations, avoiding thick textures and heavy, dense harmonies”. Yet in the case of clusters, sonic saturation is rather the point, so if anything, this limitation - if it is that - *enhances* the effect. For me, working with such material was also a way of avoiding the excessive prettiness of some toy piano repertoire and performance styles also alluded to by Ryder (2019, section 6).

Another effect of the graphic notation is the paradoxical relationship engendered between flexibility and specificity. Graphic or indeterminate notation is particularly suited to the toy piano

medium, as the issue of restricted and variable ranges is dissipated, if not dissolved.³

This has implications for the realisation of *Water and Stone*, as the smaller the range of the instrument employed, the more specific the notation will be, given fixed system heights and the understanding that each system denotes the full range of the instrument. As a phenomenon I find this aesthetically neutral, though it certainly both relates to and enhances the sense of serendipity which is part of the culture of acquiring and collecting the instruments. As Ryder (2019, section 10) advises prospective toy pianists: “it’s... very appealing to look around junk shops, antique shops and... sales.... You have to like them as [literally found] objects”. The serendipitous use of various kinds of found object finds an echo in the employment of natural materials in *Water and Stone*.

Thoughts on performing *Water and Stone* are encapsulated in Ryder’s (2019, section 9) comment that it: “gives a lot of leeway and yet in some ways is incredibly difficult... having to play it within a certain timeframe. And this is one where (...) absolutely, you would have to work closely with the composer”.

5. Concluding thoughts: performance and audience

A final thought relates to the audience for toy piano compositions. There are growing toy piano “scenes” in the USA, Europe and East Asia where professional, amateur and student pianists and composers share their work in concerts, festivals and conferences/conventions. Moreover the instrument has a particular ability to “cut through” to more general, less specialised audiences, seeming more accessible than forms of contemporary music using the conventional instruments of Western classical music. This is not necessarily due to musical languages, as composers drawn to write for toy piano cover a wide stylistic field, and tend to use their own compositional idiolects rather than “writing down” for the instrument, notwithstanding a certain attraction to childhood topics (see Ryder 2019 section 6). Perhaps toy piano composers and performers are (almost inevitably) more drawn to and from the experimental tradition, as already discussed, which tends to be more aware,

³ For another example of graphic notation intended for toy piano see for instance Blom (2014). Smith (2019) compares the “sensual” communication inherent in graphic notation with the “semantic” language of common practice notation (CPN), again echoing Roland Barthes’ (1984, p.182) concept – following Julia Kristeva – of *geno-song* and *pheno-song*.

and inclusive, of the audience. The presence of the sound source outside the realm of high art music – in childhood and popular culture (such as the *Peanuts* cartoon strips) – increases its relatability, in particular, obviously, to children.⁴

Extra-musical elements such as the visual, theatrical and comic provide a “way in” for audiences unfamiliar with contemporary music but accustomed to contemporary culture more generally. In essence, the joy of the practice is that no-one and nothing is excluded: “the fact that music is played with a toy suggests to the listener that something different will happen and they will have a chance to ‘join the game’... even if they are not ‘an expert’” (LOFFREDO 2018, pp. 121-22).

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⁴ An example is *Seriously or jokingly? Toy piano composition workshop for early stages*, conducted by Mercedes Zavala with pupils of Antonietta Loffredo from the middle state school I.C. Cernobbio, described in the paper *From Piano to Toy Piano: Composing as a Rite of Passage*, MUSIC AS PLAY, 2019, Como.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Münster, Germany, of Scottish and Irish heritage, Dr Brian Andrew Inglis is Senior Lecturer at Middlesex University, London, UK, where he is Programme Leader for BA Music. A composer and musicologist, his practice and research explore overarching themes of genre and identity. Recent outputs include an album of solo piano music *Living Stones* (Sargasso), and an edition (with Barry Smith) of *Kaikhosru Sorabi's Letters to Philip Heseltine (Peter Warlock)*, published by Routledge in 2019. A chapter on John Tavener's *To a Child Dancing in the Wind* is forthcoming in *Heart's Ease* (Peter Lang 2020). He is a member of the Editorial Board for the Journal of the Royal Musical Association (UK), and on the steering committee of the international network Music, Spirituality and Wellbeing. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0663-4693>. E-mail: b.inglis@mdx.ac.uk

APPENDIX: Interview with Kate Ryder

Young Vic Theatre, London, 10 June 2019

1. Instruments

BI: I'd like to ask you, when did you first become a participant in the fascinating world that is toy piano practice?

KR: I was thinking about this. Back in Sydney in the 1980s I had been aware of [John Cage's] *Suite for Toy Piano* but at the time I didn't have a [toy] piano, so I might have even played it on a big piano as a little diatonic exercise. But it wasn't until about 2005/2006 I started collecting them.

BI: So the repertoire – the Cage suite – in a sense led you to the instruments?

KR: Yes, I think so. And also performances. I was doing a performance for one of the Cutting Edge series concerts.⁵ Roger [Redgate] wrote me a piece for toy piano, prepared piano and music box.⁶ So it was really for that reason that I started to focus on them, and the first one I ever found was in an antique shop in Crystal Palace [south London], and it was a tiny little thing, kind of Dorian mode, painted keys, not particularly useful! But I had it restored, painted nicely, and it just sat there rather adorably. So that kick started it. I ordered a Jaymar on eBay (it was much easier in those days.) And then I did another Cutting Edge series in which I commissioned a lot of pieces for the instrument, and one of them was by Catherine Kontz, called *Siegfried & Melusina* [2008], based on I think an Icelandic tale. And it was very interesting, as Catherine's pieces are, a little theatre piece, a modular piece in fragments, which had text, puppets, and a personalised music box.

BI: So when you acquired the piano from the antique shop in Crystal Palace was it the sound of the instrument that captivated you or its possibilities?

KR: I would say the sound and the individual character of each; they're all so different. And my attraction has not been to the modern manufactured mini grand pianos, although I do have one and they're wonderful.

BI: So the sound of the antique instruments, and also their individuality, is the key thing here isn't it; their uniqueness, and the fact that they're not as commodified or homogenised as the major modern brands.

KR: There's an interesting thing about them: each one is a piece of visual theatre. It's not just the sound, though each one does have a distinct sound, like found objects, which has always interested me, a bit like percussion. A lot of the instruments I've bought I'd say are slightly disabled, you know they'll have one note that doesn't quite work; for example they'll have a very flattened 7th, or there'll be a scale that's slightly wonky. That to me is very appealing.

⁵ A concert series run by the British Music Information Centre in the 2000s at The Warehouse, Waterloo (London, UK).

⁶ *Koan* for toy piano, prepared piano and music box, 2007.

2. Characteristics

BI: That's interesting because that's something that Pestova (2017, p.31) picks up on, the fact that the tuning is unstable. That's something that might concern some performers and composers and excite others. It sounds like you fall into the latter category.

KR: You see I wouldn't agree with that. I don't think that the tuning's unstable. The tuning is stable, but it's not regular tuning.

BI: It's not homogenised?

KR: It's not homogenised. For example, I would say the prepared piano was unstable, because you can't tell from one instrument to the next what you get. And also, as you prepare, you might do it slightly differently. With the toy piano, what you get is what you get. You do have fixed range – you'll have many different ranges. Of course the other thing is the articulation. This is an interesting challenge because of the way I put them together (stack them) which is a unique way to do it.

BI: So it's a little bit like the registers of an organ, would you say; you're using them like ranks and registration?

KR: More like manuals of a harpsichord, where you might have a buff stop. In a way that is interesting to me, rather than playing one diatonic instrument.

BI: That's a way of extending the range and the sounds as well, I guess.

KR: The point I want to make is that that is what is interesting to me. It's the uniqueness of the antique instruments. Although the Schoenhut company sent me a beautiful 3 octave grand, which is a fabulous theatre piece in itself. I've had two from them actually and the latest one they sent me was for a concert in 2015 at Wellcome Trust [London]. It's a lovely instrument and very responsive. They've made improvements, because they know that it's out there as a performing instrument; they no longer think of it as just for kids.

3. History

BI: That is interesting. Because obviously you have the Cage, an iconic piece from the 40s written for a dance by Merce Cunningham; that's a specific context. You then have things from the 1970s like Hugh Schrapnel and the Promenade Theatre orchestra using toy pianos and reed organs. But it seems to have emerged as a solo instrument quite notably since the 1990s. Why do you think that is?

KR: Maybe the interest composers have in writing for them, and the availability of new pieces. There were some seminal pieces then. Like those early commissions for Margaret Leng Tan (who was really one of the first pianists to embrace it as a solo instrument), like Stephen Montague's *Mirabella*, those pieces are little classics - almost in the same vein as the Cage suite. And her wonderful little CD.⁷ So they're played by everybody; I've played *Mirabella* many times over the last decade. Another one is

⁷ *The Art of the Toy Piano*, Point Music, 1997. Includes original compositions for toy piano by Stephen Montague, David Lang, Jed Distler and Julia Wolfe.

by Errollyn Wallen, also written for Margaret Leng Tan, which is based on little ornamentations and fragments of Louis Couperin.⁸ It's a very popular piece and can also be played on piano, and I've done it both ways. It was handwritten and very much in the vein of writing something quickly for someone, you know – I think Margaret wanted a piece overnight. But it's a very skillful, witty little piece. So things like that, as far as I'm concerned they're classics.

BI: So you'd say it was performer-led, and that leads then to repertoire; people writing pieces.

KR: To repertoire, that's right. Another is Austrian pianist Isabel Ettenauer. But they were really the first two pianists who started pushing the instrument, if I can put it like that. The Karlheinz Essl pieces with electronics⁹ were written for Isabel. So many of those initial, quite successful pieces, were written for Margaret, and for Isabel, back in the 90s. I was aware of them, but I wasn't immediately attracted to them, until the early 2000s, when I started commissioning.

4. Practice

BI: So how do you see toy piano performance relating to other areas of keyboard practice – yours specifically, and the field more generally?

KR: Well in mine specifically I've always been interested in extended sounds, working to add things to the piano. Definitely for me the prepared piano, and electronics, came first – particularly the prepared piano. And so I think again, coming out of Cage and his prepared piano pieces and what he was writing for in the 1940s, the toy piano seemed an absolutely natural extension for him. Seemingly simplified, writing for smaller forces, working with smaller forces, is a kind of discipline. But for me it was always about the sound, and adding instruments *to* instruments as well.

BI: Yes, I think with Cage it was part of his aesthetic of objectivity and restraint wasn't it, and I guess the fact he had a 9-note mode to play with relates to some of his earlier pieces from the 1930s.

KR: I think that's true, but also with Cage, he'd been writing for quite large forces. Obviously the prepared piano occupied him almost totally in the 40s. But I think it was somehow the discipline, where there are constraints, and being imaginative within those constraints.

BI: So with the toy piano as an instrument obviously there are strengths and weaknesses. We've talked about some of the weaknesses (if they are weaknesses)...

KR: You see I wouldn't say they are. Again I come back to the idea of the tuning. It can be slightly microtonal, and I think for me that's a great attraction. And I think for very interesting composers that's a great attraction. The fact that the pitch isn't exact. But it is stable. There are other examples where it's much more difficult on toy piano. Repetitions, tremolo can be tricky, particularly on old instruments. Notes can stick – if you talk about anything being unstable, that's the biggest thing. So anything that's really robust I tend to do on the bigger, modern instruments. Obviously you can't use pedal. You have to be more precise. And the other areas are, of course, dynamics. You can still make subtle differences.

⁸ *Louis' Loops* (Peters Edition, 1999).

⁹ *Kalimba*, op cit; *Sequitur V* for toy piano and live electronics, 2008.

5. Performance & composition

BI: So this brings us to performance & composition and the relationship between the two. Because it seems to me that the toy piano, like the prepared piano, problematises the sign-sound relationship - you don't know necessarily exactly what you're going to get, particularly from one instrument to the next. Which is very interesting.

KR: Are you talking in terms of what – audience?

BI: No - in terms of composers and their relationship with performers. For instance if you're writing for prepared piano, as a composer you need to work very closely with a performer. Would you say the same applies to toy piano?

KR: I would. I'd say it's very much part of the experimental genre of instruments. I would say certainly for composers writing specifically for that format, there is, as you know very well, that important interim stage. The first step is to listen to the instruments, and there's the other major step of trying things out, saying does this work? and being delighted when it does work!

BI: I found in that sense it's similar to writing for certain types of percussion, the more unusual percussion, and things like sound sculptures which as you know I've done with [the late artist and sound sculptor] Derek Shiel. And my first encounter with him, having decided that we would work together, was going to his studio to try out his various sculptures and the sounds they made and make recordings; there were pictures of course as well. With what we did you had the briefing sheets with the ranges, and I went round to your house, took pictures and made recordings.

KR: That's essential really.

BI: Yes, if the instruments are all individual.

KR: So of course these days technology can send sound files of individual instruments, but that's an essential step, and – they shall remain nameless – but I did lend a composer (and I rarely do this) an older instrument, one of the first Schoenhuts that I'd been sent, so I didn't miss it. But it wasn't, I don't feel it was a success, because there wasn't this interim stage, to try things out. So I think it has to be seen in that experimental genre.

6. An authentic repertoire – performance practice

BI: On your website you talk about creating an authentic new keyboard repertoire for toy pianos, it seems in particular vintage toy pianos, as we've discussed. So could you expand on what this might be, this authenticity, within the context of discussing repertoire more generally?

KR: The exciting thing is people use toy pianos for different things. There are those in America particularly who'll play Mozart and bits of Rachmaninoff – that doesn't interest me at all. And so for those of us who are working with it as a contemporary instrument – a new instrument – the really fascinating thing is building a new repertoire. That's a very exciting thing for me. In a sense you're building a unique repertoire, through commissioning and people writing for you, which is very much

your own. I suppose authenticity in this context means really that it's written specifically for these instruments and for me, my personality, how I might stack them and how I might do them. A lot of repertoire I've had written for me has been specifically for my instruments. It doesn't mean that they couldn't be played - and many of them have been played - by other performers. (And it's not that, in my own case, I'd never play music written for anybody else.) But they will have very distinct soundworlds. I think people who write for me know my openness to experiment with different genres, specifically genres, because I'm not ever genre biased as you know, I'll try lots of things; something with a rock base.

BI: Like the Julia Wolfe piece.¹⁰

KR: That wasn't written for me, but I couldn't resist the toy boombox, it appeals to my sense of humour.

BI: Yes, that's something that comes out in toy piano performance isn't it, humour, quirkiness.

KR: Quirkiness and humour, yes definitely. But not to be confused with not taking it seriously, a bit of a joke. I think particularly when you're working with instruments that are originally toys, you have to have a serious approach, because the composers I work with have never treated them as some kind of joke, but as an alternate soundworld, and that's the difference.

BI: Which would link with their presence in the experimental tradition.

KR: Just to add to that, talking about repertoire, and pieces I've commissioned, pieces seem to roughly fall between two stools. There's the kind of, what I would say, the wind chime/lullaby school, childlike school - not that the writing's childlike - of toy piano writing. Pieces called somebody's lullaby, little waltz for so-and-so.

BI: So it's a sort of childhood topic rather than childish?

KR: Indeed, referencing always childhood and the toy. And there's another, treating it very much as an extended instrument, an extension of the piano as well.¹¹ Don't forget there's a very interesting piece by Walter Zimmerman, *The Missing Nail at the River* for piano and T.P.¹² which the concert pianist Nicholas Hodges has performed.

BI: That's interesting, because when toy pianists are mentioned it tends to be women who specialise in this area rather than men.

KR: You would think so, but maybe they're the ones that get the attention, because I've found a lot of guys do it as well. Again, can I just say - in a way - that's an image I wanted to get rid of right away.

BI: You mean the cute image?

KR: This sort of sweetly playing the toy piano in a smock. This is one of the reasons that I often stand a little bit like a rock musician, with keyboards stacked around me. I commissioned a piece from a

¹⁰ *East Broadway* for toy piano and toy boombox, 1996.

¹¹ These observations on repertoire are borne out by Loffredo (2018, p.100): "Note that many composers so far have drawn strongly on childhood associations, enhanced by the childish chime-like sound of the toy piano. Other composers have considered the instrument from completely different perspectives, both by focusing on the sonorousness of the instrument (but far from any childhood relationship) or by bringing to light other possible associations."

¹² 2003/4.

jazz musician, Tim Richards,¹³ which was for all my pianos, and it used loops; a very complex piece to play. Incidentally I took all the instruments including the looper to Russia, to St Petersburg. I think that was almost the end of my touring with toy pianos, so exhausting doing that! In a way the freedom of standing and playing is much more liberating than sitting down.

BI: And it's not something pianists are used to. How do you find audiences respond? because one of the things about toy pianos is you can do it in locations which don't have a big piano; it enables pianists to access more interesting and more unconventional spaces; even outdoor spaces.

KR: Well I did a festival down in the [English] West Country, a rock festival; that was pretty crazy! That was in a big coloured tent. The amplification of them is something I should mention, that needs to be factored in; that's another big thing.

BI: That would add another different element, and I guess with that there's the potential to manipulate sound. So that links with the theme of extended sound sources.

KR: We have these tiny little instruments, reasonably small, and yet you have all these tremendous logistics around them, because really if you're going to work in a big hall you need – particularly if you're going to work with soundtracks - you need to amplify the instruments. So in a way that's one of the most fascinating things about it, that you've got these tiny instruments which should be very simple and actually we've added this massive layer of complexity to it.

BI: And I suppose composers as you said relate to and approach the instruments in very different ways. Obviously as part of your practice you've asked people to write pieces, and commissioned pieces from many composers. Could you talk about some of the people you've commissioned, and pieces which have been written for you?

KR: Well I'd say the earliest pieces were this piece *Koan* from Roger Redgate, which used a specific music box as well, and the pitches worked around the music box. There's a piece from Yumi Hara [Cawkwell], called *Farouche* [2008], where she later added a massive drum solo at the back, in the background, which I think is hilarious, because the actual melody was using a specific one of my instruments, the red-golden Jaymar (completely unique) and that was very witty, whether she intended it or not – this very simple piano line and then with this massive Japanese rock drummer in the background

BI: With live drums?

KR: No – they *were* live, but recorded; piano and CD playback. The piece by Catherine Kontz, of course; the piece commissioned from Tim Richards with many instruments. (I've got so many of them!) My friend from Sydney, Elena Kats-Chernin, wrote me a little waltz, which I premiered on [London's] South Bank for a multi keyboard festival. Errollyn [Wallen] wrote me a tiny little piece too. I have to say also that I played a whole collection of pianos in the Tête-à-tête music festival, the opera festival,¹⁴ called vocal motions; it was a theatre piece and a lot of that involved improvising on the instruments as well, which I've used quite a bit.

¹³ *Syzygy*, 2010.

¹⁴ Founded in London by Bill Bankes-Jones in 2007, originally at Riverside Studios Hammersmith.

7. *Four Pieces for Toy Piano*

BI: So if we could move on to the pieces you commissioned from me, the *Four Pieces*. These pick up on some of the themes we've explored so far. One of them as you know uses text and voice; one of them uses graphic score and another sound source, field recordings.

KR: In a way you seem to experiment with lots of genres, which I find very appealing.

BI: Yes, also some of the music is quite complex, and some of the music is more simple. So would you say there were any specific sort of challenges and/or pleasures of preparing and performing them?

KR: Well I enjoy working with my voice and I absolutely loved Laugh, wonderful, because it enabled me to go crazy really within a certain discipline; a delight.

BI: Yes, there are parameters but it allows the performer a lot of interpretation. So as you know the text is by Derek Shiel, itself inspired by Boccioni's painting *La Risata*. I hadn't actually considered using voice, it just happened; this piece occurred very spontaneously one day, it was just dashed off like you say some [toy piano] pieces have been. And I thought, why not just speak the text as well. The notes are actually based on the letters, they're transcriptions using a sort of musical cipher à la Schumann and Messiaen. So I thought that would be a way of both extending the sound palette and also making it fun. Which it is, and I'm looking forward to performing that myself in Italy,¹⁵ although slightly scared!

KR: It's not simple.

BI: No it's not as easy as it seems at first, and I will have to practice quite a lot.

KR: This is the thing, they're not easy.

8. A serious toy instrument

KR: Playing on toy piano isn't easy – and to actually get academia to take it seriously. Over many years I've done workshops using toy pianos, and having people write for them, I've got quite a body of music written by students.

BI: It's something that the students seem to be very interested in, along with prepared piano, which is perhaps a related thing.

KR: It's re-inventing something; listening to something differently. We come back to this whole thing about it all – if you're giving restrictions to a composer, this can force them to be more inventive; it can be quite inspiring.

BI: Absolutely, it goes back to Stravinsky dictum, through Cage, as we discussed. And this thing of a toy becoming a serious instrument, do you think that's linked to the experimental tradition and its aesthetics, valorising the marginalised?

KR: I think Cage validated it immediately, because by that stage [of composing *Suite for Toy Piano*

¹⁵ At MUSIC AS PLAY, 2019, Como.

in 1948] he'd won the argument with prepared piano for a decade.

BI: He had an inclusive attitude to sound; nothing was excluded.

KR: Further, composers like Karlheinz Essl started adding electronics and playback. Another person I should mention is Stace Constantinou, who wrote that piece [*Cactus Prelude No 6*] originally for piano but then did a version for toy and electronics. He was using Max MSP, which is quite funny when you consider this tiny little instrument and this sophisticated programme. But I think all that kind of thing validates the fact that people put it into the context of concerts, as I try to do, with other instruments, with [concert] piano.

BI: There are earlier precedents like the Leopold Mozart toy symphony,¹⁶ but that seems to treat toy instruments as a bit more of a joke.¹⁷

KR: I would say the essence of it is, not to be pretentious about it, because in a wonderful way it cuts through any kind of pretention. But to take it as an instrument; it is an instrument, and not a toy.

9. Graphic notation for toy piano

BI: Let's move on, via talking about the fourth piece in my little suite, *Water and Stone*, which as you know is notated using a graphic notation. Obviously you have experience of interpreting graphic scores, not only on toy piano but in other contexts too. Do you have a specific approach to them, or does this vary from score to score, because there are different types, as we know.

KR: There are many different types. For me it's interesting whether they're purely [indeterminate] graphic scores, or whether it's pictographic; the graphics are just another form of quite specific notation.

BI: Yes, you can get symbolic signs and pictorial signs; pure ones and different types of hybrid with conventional notation.

KR: I would argue that they're not graphic, that they are simply other forms of notation, some of the Lachenmann pieces, whereas I think something like *Water and Stone* gives a lot of leeway and yet in some ways is incredibly difficult. I have to admit, I found this the most difficult of all the pieces you wrote.

BI: Is it the co-ordination with the track? Or the interpretation?

KR: It was delightful you had a track that was a wash of sound.

BI: Ah yes, there's not much to synch with, apart from the shift in the middle from one kind of sound to the other.

KR: And this is one where, in a sense, absolutely, you would have to work closely with the composer. Unless you had a composer who said, do whatever you wish, interpret it as you will, you can turn it upside down.... But in terms of this one, having to play it within a certain timeframe – graphic scores

¹⁶ The attribution of the *Kindersinfonie* is in fact uncertain. Historically it was attributed to Joseph Haydn, and more recently to Edmund Angerer, but no definitive attribution has been established. See Loffredo 2018, pp.34-35.

¹⁷ See again Loffredo's observation on humour and toy instruments, quoted earlier (2018, p.101).

like this are actually quite tough. People wrongly assume that it's free interpretation, quasi improvisation. I don't think it's free at all because here, the timeframe, and the fact that there is a physical score, limits your interpretative abilities. Because you're always slightly concerned in a performance with when it's got to move on; whether or not it's getting slightly stuck.

BI: I think it's freeing in some ways, but it's not a free-for-all, that's true. And I think most composers of graphic and text instruction scores don't want it to be a free-for-all, including Cage, he was very resistant to that.

KR: Most good composers, yes, serious ones. You see with a lot of students (mind you I've had some fabulous scores from students over the years with brilliant ideas) I think where they fall down is by often not having clear instructions.

BI: Or at least a clear sonic vision in their mind, however that's expressed.

KR: If I were composing a graphic score I would always bear in mind that somebody on the other side of the world might be playing it, and we might not have very good internet access! Therefore the composer needs some kind of clear expression of intent. Of course some composers like Earl Brown, Lou Harrison, Christian Wolff, deliberately obfuscated the instructions.

BI: Encoded ambiguity?

KR: Exactly, encoded ambiguity; deliberately ambiguous. In which case the composer has to be prepared to accept what comes out of that. You can't say "I didn't mean it to be like that", in which case I would say, "Write it as you mean it to be".

BI: I guess with this graphic score, you're right, in a way it is quite specific, with the cluster notation, the various types of trill, notes of different durations, and the quite specific timescale. Having practised this myself with the track, I think it's best not to count it and just feel it, which is the conclusion you came to when you were performing and recording it.

KR: I did. In a way I gave myself a little leeway and I said look, you know what, it's better that I go for it.

BI: Yes, and in that sense it is liberating.

KR: It's kind of a guide.

BI: That's the thing. It's not as specific as it would be in conventional notation, but it's not a complete free-for-all either

KR: Or indeed with a [more synchronised] tape part.

BI: What I was also interested in, it's quite an efficient way of notating things like clusters, particularly clusters which are expanding and contracting. You get this a little bit in Schumann, not with clusters obviously but there are those pieces where you lift each note of a chord. In conventional notation that's quite clunky and cumbersome, but in graphic notation it's very easy and very visual and direct. You get that in Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* and in Ligeti's *Volumina* as well. You start with one note and you gradually add, diatonically or chromatically. And there's nothing more visual or dramatic than notating a full arm cluster with that [a filled-in vertical rectangle – see score page image in Figure 10, beginning of last system]. It's very satisfying to play and notate. In using the clusters I was trying to get away from that cute thing you talked about, and just explore the

instrument as another sound-source. It's also very interesting playing clusters on the toy piano.

KR: Especially if they're amplified!

BI: It's been said that thick chords don't work that well because of the inharmonic resonance and richness of that, but of course with a cluster you're aiming for saturation; it seems to work very well.

KR: Who's to say what works well and what doesn't?

BI: Quite, everyone has their own idea about that, it depends on the person and the aim.

KR: For me they [clusters] work better on the toy piano than on the big piano.

BI: Because they're more subtle and less masculinist? There can be something macho about very loud, very big piano clusters, perhaps!

KR: That's a whole other ball game!

10. Concluding thoughts for composers & pianists

BI: Finally – do you have any tips for composers wanting to write for toy piano, and pianists who'd like to acquire and work with them?

KR: For composers, in the first instance you've got to be enthusiastic about the instrument; you've got to find out the ranges. The ultimate, professional T.P. – which so many pieces have been written for – is three octaves from F below middle C. That's a standard concert instrument. A lot of the instruments including the Jaymar might go from middle C to F. For many other pianos it's just middle C to C. I think probably the piano Cage originally worked on was just 2 octaves, C to C. And then you need to be aware that it doesn't respond like a piano. It's not like a celeste, which is very heavy. A little bit like clavichord, but that's a much quieter instrument and it's an entirely different mechanism. I try to think of it as a unique instrument of its own. For performers, it's still very appealing to look around junk shops, antique shops and car boot sales. Toy pianos are still out there, and you have to like them as (found) objects. If you want to be more specific and play the Cage *Suite for Toy Piano*, which is a great place to start, you can buy them in toy shops. Some of them aren't particularly marvellous – I personally wouldn't go for anything less than two octaves, C-C. I must say they don't like being moved around very much! To take mine to Sydney I had a flight case made at some expense. In Russia I thought I'd be hauled off by security at the airport, but I knew the Russian words for "toy" and "play" and it was fine. In Hong Kong, getting through security – imagine the cameras – they saw these spindles at the back which looked like knives! And they asked "would you mind opening your case?" ... and I said all it is, is a musical instrument – I had to demonstrate in the airport! It was a bit of a surreal moment. And of course they were all smiles and thought it was absolutely marvellous.