

soundinitiative

new music ensemble · paris



VOICES AND PIANO, scenes for voices and hands

Gwenaëlle Rouger & Fabienne Séveillac: voice, piano, keyboard, tables, tapes, electronics, misc. objects & videos

Gwenaëlle Rouger, pianist and Fabienne Séveillac, mezzo-soprano, soloists from the new music ensemble soundinitiative, driven by a desire to shake up the traditional concert paradigm created 'Voices & Piano', a program of sonic theatre exploring the junction between text, gesture and sound. The inspiration for the program came about alongside the discovery of works by composers using new technologies (e.g. Stefan Prins, Simon Steen-Andersen and Daniel d'Adamo), and composers whose music incorporates re-readings and translations of contemporary texts (Steven Takasugi and Peter Ablinger). The musicians perform their own interpretation of the poetic utterings of a listening passer-by, a bit like Jacques Tati in *Playtime*, with videos used as a kind of curious commentary on these gestural and musical mutations.



Daniel D'Adamo

(ARG/FR, *1966)

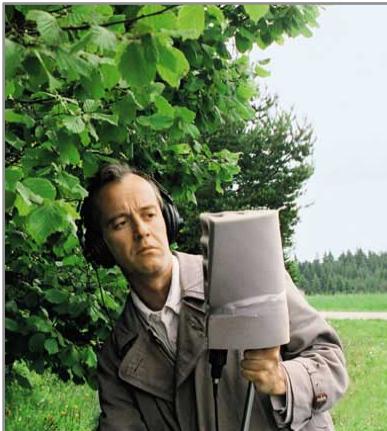
Lips, your lips

for mezzo-soprano and electronics (10')

In the initial section of "Lips, your lips," I used sounds produced inside the mouth stopping right before the sung sounds production, such as the sound produced by smacking lips, the sound of air modulated by the position of the throat or through the vocal cords, the barely audible pronunciations resounding on the palate, the tongue hitting the back of the teeth, short gasps modulated by the mouth etc.. With this palette deliberately turning its back to traditional singing, I built a sonic theater where the characters are the characterizations of the mezzo-soprano on stage and its duplications projected by the speakers.

Primitive sounds of the pre-singing gradually introduce vocal intonation, reminiscing at times ancient singing techniques. A somewhat bare, fragmentary and intimate monody is used at the end of the piece; it recalls the most harmless, but still meaningful aspect of singing. The electroacoustic part consists entirely of vocal sounds recorded by Isabel Soccoja, which I converted later to accompany and enhance the original voice.

The topic of the text of "Lips, your lips," that I wrote myself, is saying and listening, the transmission of meaning through the words and by the voice that sings and speaks it. [D.d'A.]



Peter Ablinger

(AU, *1959)

Voices and Piano (excerpts)

for piano and tape(1998, 8')

"Voices and Piano, written for Nicolas Hodges, is an extensive cycle of pieces, each for a single recorded voice, mostly of a well-known celebrity, and piano. The cycle is still in progress and should eventually include about 80 pieces/voices (around 4 hours of music). The work is always meant to occur as a selection from the whole. At present I like to write works where the whole should not be presented at once. The whole should remain the whole, and what we hear is just a part of it.

I like to think about Voices and Piano as my song-cycle, though nobody is singing in it: the voices are all spoken statements from speeches, interviews or readings. And the piano is not really accompanying the voices: the relation of the two is more a competition or comparison. Speech and music is compared. We can also say: reality and perception. Reality/speech is continuous, perception/music is a grid which tries to approach the first. Actually the piano part is the temporal and spectral scan of the respective voice, something like a coarse gridded photograph. Actually the piano part is the analysis of the voice." [PA]

Simon Steen Andersen

(DAN/ALL, *1976)

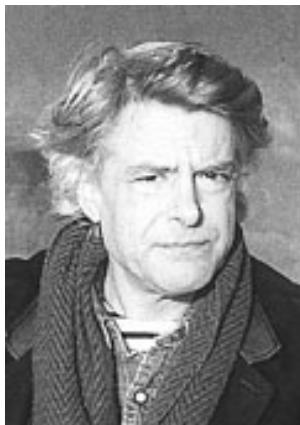
Mono – Autotune study and Nachtgesang [premiere]

for amplified voice and midi keyboard with autotune
(2014, 6 mn)



AUTOTUNE is a much used effect in pop music production, sometimes used in "secret", rather discretely, but just as often used with quite extreme settings as a characteristic effect. The first (main) part of the piece explores or "hacks" the plug-in, trying out its possibilities, bringing it to its limits and looking for the beauty of its flaws.

MONO consists of the two small movements, where the two players create a single musical line together, two small solos, if you will: In the first movement the one plays through the instrument of the other, in the second the other plays through the instrument of the first. [SSA]



Georges Aperghis

(GR/FR, *1945)

Pub II

for solo voice (2000, 1mn30)

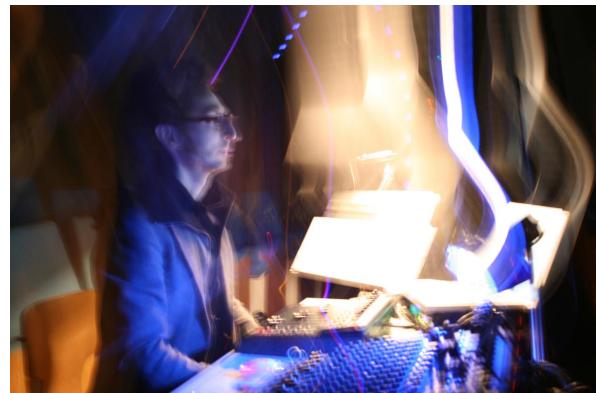
'Flow sweet'

Stefan Prins

(BEL/USA, *1979)

Piano Hero #1

for keyboard, electronics and live video
(2011, 8 mn)



The "modern" grand piano, perfected in the nineteenth century, consists of a keyboard, a set of metal strings and an ingenious mechanism of hammers and dampers, which serves as the transmission between the pianist's muscles and the strings. The wooden body of the piano amplifies the vibrations of the strings when they're hit by a hammer. In Piano Hero this configuration is "updated" and placed in today's context, using some of the typical artefacts of the 21st century: the keyboard now is an electronic one, the computer serves as the transmission and the strings are played by a virtual pianist -the avatar of the pianist of flesh and blood sitting on stage- while the wooden resonating body is substituted by a set of electro-mechanical speakers.

But not only the "piano" is recontextualized. The mechanisms of "observing", as done by the audience, is also taken into the equation. The act of "observing" underwent a radical change of meaning in a society which is ever more being "monitored", either by the millions of security cameras in public places, a network of geo-stationary satellites which can zoom in to human dimensions or the world wide web on which every day millions of homemade videos are posted and watched by millions of anonymous visitors.

Piano Hero #1 is the point zero of the Piano Hero cycle: the pianist becomes a mere operator in a world of bits and bytes. From Piano Hero #2 on, the grand piano (which has become a "fremdkörper" after the context-shift of PH#1) enters the game to fully articulate the tension between the real and the virtual, the human and the mechanical, the past and the present. More chapters in this cycle are envisioned and will be composed in the years to come.



Steven Takasugi

(JPN/USA,*1960)

Etrange Automne

for two performers & electronics

(2003/2014, 17mn)

Wieland Hoban's bilingual poems are infested with paradox. They evade the space of one language or the other or both. Where are they then? Imagine a bilingual edition of a volume of poems. Imagine the original poem (conventionally on the verso page-side) and its translation (on the recto side) both sliding into the seam between the pages—or a poem resulting when both verso and recto meet, original and translation pressed against each other. Such reflects the structure of the poetic space, but in either case, the possibility of reading is no longer available. Likewise with Hoban's poetry, any attempt to disentangle one language from the other in order to circumvent the semantic cancellation of the two languages, presents only another implacable uncertainty in its place. Despite these perplexities, the poetry manages to penetrate into the interior of the conundrum we call existence, and like a house of mirrors, acquires its illusory dimensions and volume from the accumulation rendered by a multitude of false reflections. One might then begin to understand my interpretation of the poetic space at hand. To translate this into a piece for reciter, percussionist, and electronics was the task of Strange Autumn. It was begun in 2003 and written during the first year of the ongoing occupation of Iraq by US-led coalition forces. It is dedicated to the poet. (S.T.)

*program (apart from Etrange Automne and Mono) premiered in Montréal, Canada, Chapelle historique du Bon Pasteur, May 5th, 2014