



Juri Seo

mostly piano

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Juri Seo, piano

Clara Warnaar, percussion

Sean McClowry, bass

2. Three Mini Etudes in C 4:43

Thomas Rosenkranz, piano

Piano Sonata No. 1 - "La Hammerklavier"**3. I. La Hammerklavier 13:22****4. II. Ricercare 15:57**

Steven Beck, piano

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Nicholas Tolle, cimbalom

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Thomas Rosenkranz, piano

Mark Eichenberger, percussion

—65:06—



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Juri Seo is a composer and pianist based in New Jersey. She seeks to write music that encompasses extreme contrast through compositions that are unified and fluid, yet complex. She merges many of the fascinating aspects of music from the past century—in particular its expanded timbral palette and unorthodox approach to structure—with a deep love of functional tonality, counterpoint, and classical form. With its fast-changing tempi and dynamics, her music explores the serious and the humorous, the lyrical and the violent, the tranquil and the obsessive. She hopes to create music that loves, that makes a positive change in the world—however small—through the people who are willing to listen.

Juri is Assistant Professor of Music at Princeton University. www.juriseomusic.com

Mostly Piano includes a few of my recent piano-centric compositions and a work for solo cimbalom. I was brought up playing the piano, and my love for the instrument feels almost innate. The eighty-eight black and white keys have served as an ideal canvas for my music, which draws eclectic influences from Beethoven to twentieth-century avant-garde to jazz. In these pieces, I wanted to engage with the seemingly limitless versatility of the instrument: its power and intimacy, its agility, its levity and pathos.



I have always been drawn to the spontaneous beauty and easygoing virtuosity of jazz (despite my meager experience as a jazz pianist). In **#three** (2015), little jazzy snippets take surprising turns: from espressivo to scherzo, from Romantic piano flourishes to clamorous rock beats. The collage-like progressions resulted from my struggle to compose piano licks while my husband Mark was drumming away rock grooves in the basement. Somehow, everything worked out in the end. I love such moments, when conflicts dissolve in one giant musical stockpot.



Each movement of **Three Mini Etudes in C** (2011) is based on a simple idea that quickly goes awry. The first movement begins with Hanon-exercise-like scalar motions. It builds on the idea of mistakes: hands fail to coordinate, fingers stumble on wrong notes, and keys get stuck. The second movement

is based on triadic chords and resonance. The differences between sustained and short tones create harmonic ambiguities in an otherwise simple texture. The violent third movement is rock-inspired; its tempo changes create a sensation of continuous accelerando.



In Beethoven's Op. 106 "Hammerklavier" Sonata, rather than hearing the distant, God-given genius of musical legend, I hear an individual confronting the full extent of his limitations. The music toils at the edge of its creator's potential. Beethoven's self-imposed challenges of maintaining structural integrity—despite an ever-expanding form, complex tonal syntax, and painstaking counterpoint—fight with the mad force of his musical subconscious. The result is a remarkable heightening of expression: tempestuous, tender, and wickedly comic.

The first movement of my **Piano Sonata No. 1 - "La Hammerklavier"** (2015-2016) is in sonata form. It distorts the infamous opening leap of Beethoven's sonata with a "wrong" chord that implies two different keys at once. The rhythms trip, as if mimicking a bad performance. Stylistically eclectic quotations—taken from all four of Beethoven's movements—alter the affects of the original, often humorously. Following the example of the late sonatas, my sonata has a fugal development. A lighthearted coda follows the recapitulation.

The second movement, “Ricerare,” is mostly based on the Adagio movement of Op. 106. I wanted the movement to capture the feeling of listening to Op. 106 in a dream, of not being able to remember it precisely. After much searching and wandering, it eventually finds a theme by Beethoven—but, again, it is a “wrong” one, this time combining two separate phrases from the original. Ten variations on this wrong theme follow.



Études for Cimbalom (2012, 2015) was originally written in Rome in 2012 (hence the Italian subtitles and the overarching abstruse sentimentality). I extensively reworked it three years later. The first movement, “prologo,” comprises snippets of all of the following movements. The second movement, initially called “la farfalla” (butterfly), took a dark turn to eventually become “la falena” (moth). The third, “la danza pesante” (heavy dance), is a musical illusion of a heavy folk dance. The fourth, “il rumore” (noise), is built with noisy harmonics and clusters, abstracting the material from “la danza pesante.” The fifth, “la canzone tranquilla” (calm song), is an ever-expanding meditative tune. The sixth, “epilogo,” starts again from the beginning, colored by the memories of the five preceding movements.



Several years ago, after a long period of eschewing consonance and familiar chords for a more abstract, modernist language, I brought back harmony to try

to see it in a new light. In *vi* (2010), triads and seventh chords made a defiant comeback. My longing for a recognizable musical syntax led me back to tonality. As I wrote, tonal moments melted into passages of obfuscating texture only to emerge, when the texture cleared, with a sense of irony. The structure of this piece is delineated by the interaction of subtly-shifting bitonal chords, which are created with the piano’s sostenuto pedal and selective muting in the vibraphone. The climax contains a slanted quote of R. Strauss’s “Also Sprach Zarathustra,” the epitome of major-minor ambiguity.



CREDITS

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