

ELECTROCOSMIA

PENG-CHIAN CHEN, PIANO



Pierre Charvet

Neuf études aux deux mondes for piano and computer
(Nine Studies in the Two Worlds), 1999.

These nine piano études were a commission from GRM in 1999, the Groupe de Recherches Musicales founded by Pierre Schaeffer, a seminal figure in electroacoustic music. Charvet was inspired to dedicate the set to Michael Abramovich after hearing him perform J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations.

In Nine Studies, Charvet aims to integrate piano music with the natural tools of our time and find the right balance between a formal approach and an intuitive attitude. The audio from the fixed media includes not only synthesized acoustics but also sounds from real life. In some parts of the études, the fixed media is even louder than the piano, while there are some virtuosi techniques on the piano. Therefore, we can see piano and fixed media as two equal instruments. The balance between them has a chamber music quality, instead of the piano dominating the texture.

As Charvet explains on his website (<http://www.pierre-charvet.com/musique/>), these nine pieces have a relatively symmetrical architecture around Étude 5, which is in octaves. Étude 1 and Étude 9 both begin with strongly rhythmic repeated notes. The pulsating sound from the electronics also gives both pieces a primitive propulsion. These two études bring to mind the fact that nowadays we cannot live without smart phones. The ringing of the phone that interrupts the first piano phrase in Étude 1

reflects how easily we are distracted by phones. The ringing reappears at the end of Étude 9. Compared to the aggressive nature of Études 1 and 9, Études 2 and 8 are gentle and harmonious. Étude 2 is more flowing, while the acoustics of Étude 8 contain the sound of a lady murmuring and kids responding happily. Études 3 and 7 are constructed on different sound spectra, although they share the same material. Étude 3 is the only piece in this set played without electronics while Étude 7 requires a "tape solo," a long sustained acoustic. Étude 4 "Sombre mais calme (dark but calm)" is paired with Étude 6. Both have female voices in the background. In Étude 4, the woman is just whispering while in Étude 6 she is nagging but the listener cannot recognize what it is about.

Neuf études aux deux mondes combines the worlds of live music (piano part) with the world of unchangeable music (fixed media). One of the worlds is built from an organic substance and the other from an inorganic compound. However, all creatures and all materials are indispensable in constructing this unique universe in good order just like the four pieces are interweaved by the live piano with technology.

Cindy Cox

Etude "La Cigüeña" for piano and keyboard sampler, 2014.

Dropping true as Earth
La Cigüeña flies an iridescent spiral
Shining white deep blue-green
An opal of great price given
To one whose luminous work
You may look into but never through

La Cigüeña is the Spanish term for a large white bird with long legs, the stork, which is the metaphorical bringer of babies. In composing this experimental piece, Cox was inspired by her husband John Champion's poem "La Cigüeña." The etude was composed at UC Berkeley's Center for New Music and Audio Technologies (CNMAT) in 2014.

Etude "La Cigüeña" is not the only piece that uses sound to describe the subject of a poem; nevertheless, it combines the piano with new technology to create a vivid, colorful acoustic that a traditional piano cannot make. This Etude requires the pianist to play on two keyboards at the same time: one is a piano keyboard and the other is a 61-key velocity sensitive keyboard sampler with interactive electronics. The sampler should be placed on the piano where the music rack (must be removed) normally is found (like a harpsicord with a two-layer keyboard). The piano produces lines with steady pitches and rich clusters in the bass. The sampler creates a mysterious sound effect.

There are five sections in the piece: A-B-A-C-B'. When listening to the piece, the image of a bird flying can clearly be heard. The acoustic portion is in the shape of a parabolic curve, reflecting the line "dropping true as Earth." Also, there are soft yet discernable shimmering high sounds in the background. They deliberately portray the adjectives "iridescent," "shining," and "luminous" from the poem. In the B sections, the endings of each are opposite. The first time has a descending line while the second (the ending of the piece) has an ascending line that spins faster and faster but fades out at the end. To me, it is a musical metaphor for the line "You may look into but never through."

Elainie Lillios

Nostalgic Visions for piano and live interactive electroacoustics, 2009.

My heart of silk
Is filled with lights,
With lost bells,
With lilies and bees.

I will go very far,
Farther than those mountains,
Farther than the oceans,
Way up near the stars,
To ask Christ the Lord
to give back to me
the soul I had as a child,

matured by fairy tales,
with its hat of feathers,
and its wooden sword.

Nostalgic Visions is a composition for piano and live, interactive electroacoustics inspired by a stanza of “Balada de la Placeta” (“Ballad of the Little Square”) from Libro de Poemas by Federico Garcia-Lorca (English translation by Robert Bly.)

As Lillios writes in her program notes, “Lorca’s text expresses the longing felt by one seeking a return to the innocence of youth. The poem’s dual time streams, the reality of present day and visions of the past, are expressed musically by the pianist, who alternates between playing on the keys and inside the piano. At times present and

past are clearly divided; other times the lines between them blur and reminiscence becomes a hopeful yet impossible reality. Nostalgic Visions was commissioned by and is dedicated to pianist Thomas Rosenkranz.”

Nostalgic Visions requires the pianist to use his/her imagination and enthusiasm to create his/her own intimate, personal version of the piece. According to the notes to the performer, improvisation plays a large role, allowing the pianist to explore his/her own musical ideas and memories through performance. Certain notations in the score are approximate; the instrumentalist should use his/her judgment when sculpting the temporal form of the piece. There are no bar lines for the music, and the patterns are only indicated to finish in the duration of timing. Lillios also quotes the Spanish folk song “Nana de Seilla,” which she specifically wrote down. It is reflective and melancholy to reinforce the piece’s nostalgic essence. The other modern approach in piano technique is that the pianist shifts between the keyboard and the inner strings to reflect reality and memory. Moreover, the score provides all the details for mood in every second, asking the performer to read the score carefully and deliver the emotions through the sounds.

Nostalgic Visions is a very personalized piece. Because it employs chance music, each performer will play his/her unique version without it being written out. The same performer, because of his/her mindset at the time and because of varied conditions, would play it differently each time. It proves one concept of music: music is an art that exists in time, in which the sound will disappear at the moment when the performer stops playing. Also, Nostalgic Visions reflects the concept that notation is limited, but human emotion is unlimited.

Peter Van Zandt Lane

Studies in Momentum for piano and live electronics, 2014.

- Ground State
- Projectile Motion
- Escape Velocity
- Planck's Waltz
- Approaching Entropy

Studies in Momentum is a cycle of five miniatures for piano and live electronics, which a performer should play as a set with relatively little space between each movement. The piece is modeled as four études and a fantasy, with the focus of each étude being a single kind of signal process: harmonization, downsampling, ring modulation, and delay (respectively). The closing fantasy, "approaching entropy," combines the four while also including a kind of hyper-rhythmic musique concrète element that the composer often employs in his electroacoustic works. This set is dedicated to Keith Kirchoff.

According to composer, the titles of each étude were chosen before any of the music was composed. Those titles give each étude's narrative a particular challenge, or sense of tension between where the music is going and how it gets there. Lane is not an authority on these concepts from quantum mechanics and kinematics (which is probably what makes them inspiring to him). He finds layperson-geared explanations of physics highly evocative, sparking exciting ideas about relationships between musical narrative and motion in the physical world.

Each of the études has their own strong character and shows different approaches in compositional style and piano style from peaceful minimalism to hot-rhythm

nightclub dance. The first piece "ground state" (étude on harmonization) creates a placid but fluid atmosphere which is influenced by minimalism. While it is a practice in harmony for the composer, the pianist is asked not to put too much emotional feeling in the phrasing but let the music flow itself. Contrasting with the first piece, "projectile motion" (étude on downsampling) is an excited, animated short piece. The phenomenon of electroacoustics in this piece can be heard as dropping pitch. This étude is also challenging for the pianist with its fast-repeated notes and wide contrast in dynamics. The third, "escape velocity" (étude on ring modulation) uses the mirror effect on the piano part: the line in the right hand converts into the line in the left hand. It also requires virtuosic technique when the two hands play notes syncopated by thirty-second value with a broad range.

After two intense études, the fourth "Planck's waltz" (étude on delay) is a slow étude in which the performer and audience can enjoy listening to the sonority of sound elimination. Interactive electronics provide the performer the freedom of experimenting with the sound and timing. The entire piece is enveloped in a relaxing atmosphere. The last piece "approaching entropy" (fantasy/+concrète) is the conclusion of the former four études.

Peng-Chian Chen

A native of Taiwan, Peng-Chian Chen has gained recognition as an accomplished performer in the United States, Europe, and Taiwan. She has appeared in the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Illsley Ball Nordstrom Recital Hall at Benaroya Hall in Seattle, Hugh Hodgson Concert Hall and Ramsey Recital Hall at University of Georgia Performing Arts Center, Taiwan National Concert Hall, Chih-Shan Hall at Kaohsiung Cultural Center, and Chung Shan Hall in Taichung City. Since 2013, she has been invited by the Hualien government to hold several lecture recitals in Taiwan. Chen has been a soloist with the Stella Matutina Orchestra led by Chia-Hong Drapal Liao, the Sewanee Festival Orchestra led by Yaniv Dinur, and the University of Georgia Symphony Orchestra led by Mark Cedel. She was prizewinner at the Pro-Mozart Society of Atlanta, the Seattle Symphony International Piano Competition, and the Taiwan National Competition of Music.

Deeply committed to new music, Chen has premiered more than fifty pieces. She was invited to perform at the Southeastern Electroacoustic Composers Collective, Atlantic Music Festival, UGA Chamber Festival, and with several contemporary ensembles. Recently, she is focusing on the repertoire written for electronics with piano.

Chen received her Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano Performance with a minor in Piano Pedagogy and Chamber Music from the University of Georgia. She also earned the Excellence in Teaching Award and the Outstanding Teaching Award. She earned her bachelor's degree from the Taiwan National University of the Arts and double master's degrees from the University of Michigan in Piano Performance and Chamber Music. She has studied with Evgeny Rivkin, Louis Nagel, and Tzong-Kai John Kuo. Following her teaching positions at the University of Georgia, Hugh Hodgson School of Music, she is currently an associate professor of piano at the Music College of Zhaoqing University.

For more informaton about her, please follow her on Facebook: Peng-Chian Chen or contact her via e-mail: pianopeng@hotmail.com



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