

dyslexic piano (deciphered in the dark) on the other hand – part 1

transcription for piano of a piece originally for harp
for MARJOLAINE CHARBIN
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“I did the wrong mistake” – Thelonious Monk

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A piano player is in the dark, and has to play all the possible pitches on the piano with each of the two hands. Every time a pitch is played, a recognisable signal has to be played on the body of the piano with the same hand. When an error is made, a recognisable « error-signal » has to be played. There are eight different signals. An accumulative loop of two definite notes has to be played every ten pitches. The piano player can't look or feel for the strings except in some special cases.

Nothing is funny, nothing is sad in this piece ; it has to do with an inner computation, a self-computation (« me » as a computer). It is a test like piece, but the test is the very form of the music : it means that whenever a mistake is made, it is only a mistake within the test, whereas the resulting sound is entirely part of the music. On a musical level, no mistake was made.

The audience listens to a subjectivity at work, dealing with itself through numbers, space, time, secrets, (self)honesty and instrument : what could be a inner mapping of the piano.

I — THE PROCESS

The piano player must not see the piano at all : he or she is in the dark.

Each hand has to play each pitch in the piano range (without any detuning during the piece) : each pitch has to be played once and only once by each hand (so each pitch-is-done twice : once by the left & once by the right hand).

Once a pitch is played correctly (without any error), a specific sound (signal) is played by the same hand.

The signal says : « this pitch-is-done by this hand and shouldn't ever be done again by this hand during the piece » i.e. « pitch-is-done ».

The signal is hand specific : one for the right hand & one for the left hand — in other words : there are two « pitch-is-done » signals ; one for each hand and different enough to prevent confusing the audience.

The « pitch-is-done » signal has to be a short sound on the body of the piano : it has to be noisy rather than pitch based.

Once a correct pitch is played its resonance should not be damped by any of the two hands — *L.S. (laisser vibrer)*.

If the correct pitch resonance is stopped or damped by mistake (or on purpose) the pitch has to be played another time (after the proper « error-signal » had been played – see page 4).

The sustain pedal can be used as long as none of the correct pitch resonance is stopped or damped.

The error signal 5 and the loop are the only sounds that have to start in a complete silence : this means that the sustain pedal as to be turned off before (reset the standing resonance of the piano).

The resonance of a wrong pitch can be damped ; also any type of sound can be made as soon as the piano player realises that it is a wrong pitch (a pitch that has already been played).

If the two hands have (or want) to use the same string (pitch, signal or loop) : one hand has to wait for the end of the sound the other hand just made.

Nothing can be added to any of the strings to make them more recognisable (no mark, no tape, nothing).

If the piano player is honestly completely lost, then and only then can he begin again from where he imagines to have gone wrong (after having played « error-signal » 5 – see page 4).

If the piano player needs to, he can use a light in order to write notes as long as he doesn't take advantage of it to light the instrument (this light has to be turned off as soon as it's time to play) — the noise made by taking notes is also part of the piece.

If the piano player needs to, he can use his or her voice (for instance to count the 10 pitches between the loops).

Silence to think, or time to do whatever is required, is allowed whenever.

Nothing is funny, nothing is sad in the computation-like process.

II — ERRORS & « ERROR-SIGNALS »

Each time an error occurs, specific pitches have to be played : let's call them « error-signals ».

The signals are to be played by the hand that made the error.

These specific « error-signals » can be looked for, for example the hands can touch some other strings before finding the right one (step by step toward the signal) or any other kind of test, but whatever the test, it has to « make sounds » ... it has to be audible among the other sounds, as part of the composition (in other words : the piano player should not be afraid of making « noise » (or pitches) while searching for the « error-signal » string — at the same time, the piano player should « be honest » and not make any extra noise or pitches on purpose, in other words, the piano player should not take advantage of this freedom to make music ...).

Choose two strings an octave apart within the medium range, then :

→ either

1 — Tune the highest one 30 cents *spiano* (high string).

2 — Tune the lowest one 1/4 tone flat (low string).

→ or

— Prepare the strings of those two pitches in order to get two very recognizable sounds that have to be clearly pitched even if prepared (the real pitches that are heard don't have to be the ones that these two keys are supposed to do ; to say that the effective pitches can be very different from the name of the keys).

→ their resonances can be damped or not : the choice of the player.

There are 5 types of errors and there is a specific signal for each of them.

Nothing can be added to any of the two keys to make them more recognisable (no mark, no tape, nothing).

« Error-signals » have to be played as soon as a mistake is (mentally) detected.

WHILE PLAYING THE PITCHES

There are three kinds of errors for three specific signals depending which hand made the mistake :

- 1 — Right or left hand plays the high microtonal or prepared string + the next key down (for instance octave above middle C natural 30 cents spiano + B natural): played just after the piano player is aware of making a mistake or cheating.
- 2 — Right or left hand plays the low microtonal or prepared key + the second key up (for instance middle C natural quarter tone flat + E natural) : played just before the piano player is aware of making a mistake or cheating.
- 3 — Right or left hand inside the piano plays above the bridge (it could be any string but once the piano player chooses a string it must always be the same string): played when the piano player is aware, one or more events later of making a mistake or cheating.

WHILE PLAYING THE SIGNALS

There are at least two types of errors that can happen when playing any kind of signal (whether « error » or « pitch-is-done ») :

- 4 — Right or left hand plays high detuned or prepared pitch: an error that happens while the piano player is playing the signal (for example the wrong signal, or the wrong way of playing it) OR the error that happens if the piano player plays the signal when she or he doesn't need to (if the fourth « error- signal » is badly played, it has to be redone again and again until correct).

Then a fifth kind of error is possible (missing « error-signal » and/or fed up signal/or « universal » error):

- 5 — This signal as to be done with the two hands, and it has to start in a complete silence (sustain pedal turned off) : one finger of one hand on the low detuned or prepared string the other hand playing the relevant key : the piano player plays this either when completely lost or when he makes a mistake that is not specifically mentioned above or when he is fed up (it can possibly be the three cases in the same time and like the fourth signal if it is badly played, it has to be redone again and again until correct).
→ In the first case (the piano player is completely lost) the piano player can
 - a — Either finish the piece with « error-signal » 5 (done once).
 - b — Or do it several times so that the piano player can think about the situation.
 - c — Or do it several times and fading out slowly to end the piece for some reason (for example the piano player is fed up, or is lost and fed up, or the concert has to end, or ... the piano player has to go).
 - d — The piano player can change his mind : while doing « b » change to « c » or while doing « c » change to « b » (and even change his mind several times as long as he doesn't try to build a « music » out of these changes i.e. as long as these are really changes of the piano player's mind).

The two microtonal or prepared notes for the « error-signals » have to be avoided as pitches to be played during the process and considered as out of the range of the piano.

III — TIME FOR A BREAK : THE LOOP

Each time a hand has played ten pitches it has to play a loop with the same hand :

- That loop is made of the two detuned or prepared « signal » pitches played one after the other (let's call them A & B).
- The first time, 3 pitches have to be played : ABA.
- The second time 2 more pitches are added : ABABA.
- The third time another 3 (following a process of accumulation) : ABABABAB.
- The loop has to start in complete silence (sustain pedal turned off)

→ And so on :

3	+2	+3	+4	+5	+6	+7	+8
3	5	8	12	17	23	30	38

A & B can start either on the high or on the low pitch.

The loop is freely played and the correct strings can be looked for (the only constraint is that the alternating of the two pitches should be clearly heard ; for instance an extended technique sound is possible but the pitches of the loop shouldn't be masked by a sound that is too noisy).

The loop is played by the hand which correctly played the ten pitches : while the loop is played, the other hand can pursue its own process independently because the same two strings are used for the « error-signal » and for the loop, if the other hand makes a mistake while the loop is played, the loop can be stopped to play the « error-signal », then, once the signal is over, the loop can continue

Furthermore, there are some possible mistakes while doing the loop :

- 1 — If the piano player makes any type of mistake while playing the loop (wrong pitches, wrong duration, etc.) then the 2 detuned or prepared pitches have to be played twice as a chord (left or right hand). The resonance of the last chord has to be heard completely and can't be overplayed by any sound then the loop has to be played again.
- 2 — If the process has started again when the piano player realises he hasn't played the loop properly, then he has to play « error-signal » 3 then the loop has to be done again properly.

IMPORTANT : The piano player can count or search for the strings after the loop has been played (but only for the first pitch of the next 10 pitches).

V — FINE DETAIL & ARTICULATIONS

All the sounds that occur are part of the piece not only for themselves but always a sign that something is going on step by step (i.e. all the sounds are signals that have a precise function in the process).

The two hands are totally independent, both have a process to pursue up to the end (to play all the pitches in the piano range one by one per hand) ; if one of them finishes the complete process before the other one : it just stops doing anything until the end of the other hand.

If a wrong pitch is done the player, and if the player wants to stop it before the end of the resonance, the gesture has to be as clear as possible, i.e. the end of the sound has to be precise.

The only two resonance that can't be damped are the one of the right pitch and the one of the error-signal during the loop.

The only resonance that can't be over played is the one of the error signal in the loop.

The loop and the error signal 5 are the two only sounds that have to start in a complete silence.

Playing over previous sounds and simultaneous sound events :

If a wrong pitch is played, and the piano player doesn't want to stop its resonance then, as the signal has to be played as soon as possible, the resonance of the signal will be mixed with the end of the wrong pitch resonance.

Dynamics :

- The pitch has to be played « *f* » or « *ff* ».
- The « pitch-is-done » signal is played loud, very dry and brief (but the whole piano can resonate after it).
- The resulting sounds while searching for the « error-signal » and the loop strings have to be performed at the extreme dynamic polarities : « *ppp* » or « *fff* ».
- The « error-signal » has to be played « *mf* ».
- The loop is played freely.

The piece can be amplified.

VI — FINAL COMMENTS

Regarding the way to understand and play the piece : The action of playing the piece has to be understood as a real process, and if something has to be learnt by heart it's the rules and not the result. It has to do with an inner computation (self-computation — « me » as a computer), nevertheless once the process is understood, all possible attention has to be

dedicated to the sound, it's quality etc. (yet, the piece or part of it can still be played stupidly on purpose ... or not ... on purpose ...). The piano player has to focus his attention on an acousmatic-like way of listening which means that he has to focus more on a non musical soundtrack type of construction than on an obvious piece of music. That piece has nothing to do with any kind of humour or any ironic statement: the mood is more « neutral ».

The result is the last thing the piano player has to worry about ... which doesn't mean that the piano player shouldn't worry about it at all : it's just the « last » step of a whole process that carries the signature of the way things are done, pursued, achieved, lost, forgotten, recognized...

The piano player can deal with any feeling in the way he is playing the piece, including the one(s) that would prevent him from playing it ... he can give up when he wants, he can make it last for hours, he can play it full of intentions, but also without any intentions, etc. he can change his mind ... BUT one thing is important : time should be perceived as getting thicker and thicker, the interest of the music increases with the progressive achievement of the actions and events one after the other... the function of memory is very important in the piece (the audience's as well as the piano player) : one can listen to this piece as a slow dive in the thickness of memory.

Several strategies can be followed — examples :

- One hand after the other :
 - Pitch after pitch.
 - Ten pitch by ten pitch (with the loops in between).
 - Hand after hand (the piece in two halves : right then left for instance).
- The two hands at the same time.
- The hands in contrary motion or mirroring each other.
- Playing the first pitch the piano player finds and then following a random or melodic logic.
- Trying to make « no-mistake ».
- Not worrying about the mistakes, just playing within the rules : if there's a mistake then, an « error-signal » is played.
- Etc.

