

Questioner, 1863 for solo concert flute James Fox (2015)

Performance Notes

Questioner, 1863 is a video score composed of a carefully selected and edited collection of recorded videos which document deliberate performative action in order to inform, not dictate, an improvised musical performance for solo concert flute. It is the hope that the performer will bring a very subjective and personal approach to the material, creating music which is itself uniquely based on the individual experiences the performer brings to the piece, realised through reactions to the semiotic visual stimulus which is presented; much like speaking one's own opinion. Hopefully this will be achievable by presenting the performer with material which is designed to provoke different types of response and reaction (emotional, physical, philosophical etc., leading to a musical output), which the performer can respond to on their instrument. The material has been arranged to assist a sense of direction and structure, which should be evident in the sonic interpretation.

At times the score communicates literal information, such as fingerings, embouchure and breath, but this information is also sometimes hidden from the performer; when fingerings are blurred, for example. When confronted with any uncertain or unclear situations, the performer is being asked to communicate an interpretation of musical parameters based upon previous and surrounding visual information experience. This can include elements such as zooming, blurring intensity, body motion, facial expression, and superimposition. For example, the performer can create a blurred or moving sound, depending on what is visually present. There is also *implied* information through emotional stimulus such as bodily movement or body and facial expressions (or lack of) which it is hoped can be used to create a literal response to the images,

but preferably should be used to inform a personal and subjective approach to sound production.

The title of the work is significant and important to the composer as there were a few influences which were inspirational for the piece, and it may be helpful to provide the performer with more insight into the intentions of the score, and can be found here along with some information: <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/the-questioner-of-the-sphinx-31296>

Summary

The resulting sound does not have to be an exact synchronisation or sonic representation of the visual score but should move at the natural pace of the video; the aim is not to provide an audio-visual relationship, but to create sound which does not necessarily need the score to be visually present for the listener. Nor is the intention to create or mimic an exact translation of images, meaning that facial expressions or superimpositions should be interpreted musically or instrumentally as changes of air pressure or intensity, rather than a vocal sound; all intentional sounds should be produced and transmitted on and through the instrument, not via any other means of sonic production. For example, shouting (outside and away from the instrument) and percussion are not intended.

Questioner, 1863 attempts to acknowledge, respect, consider, appropriate, and unite the efforts and work of composers and performers a-like, and to use these outputs to create a new piece of music.

A vigorous attempt has been made to limit the amount of visible

instructive instrumental information, in an attempt to avoid the resultant performance becoming a matter of only recreating the visible representation of physical movements. By superimposing other visible images and elements which enhance or change the original footage, it is hoped the performer will have enough explicit information to produce an informed performance based on the aggregate of the visual stimulus. The focus of the piece is not to recreate the exact musical parameters seen in the original video footage, but strive to create a musical performance influenced by the physical and mental exertions of composers and performers captured in video, which have been appropriated, manipulated, combined, reorganised, and presented in a reimagined form.

Materials

- Instrumental/sound parameters (pitch, embouchure, air and lip pressure)
- Video processing effects
- Organisation of materials (repetition etc.)
- Bodily movements and facial expression

- Superimposition

Instrumental Parameters:

- When fingering, embouchure, lip pressure, air pressure and movement which is indicative of phrasing are perceived, please remain close to your belief in what you see.

Processing Effects:

- Rotation can inform vibrato, and changes of airflow.

- Zooming could inform changes in dynamic range, air pressure, lip pressure, or all of these. This should last for the duration of the effect, plus the speed or intensity of the changes should also be considered by the speed or intensity of the zoom effect, and whether this effect is linear.

- Speed of the shot/cut could indicate changes to rhythm and articulation, and also pitch.

- Some performance aspects are explicitly obscured or revealed, such as fingering or embouchure, so when these are presented they must be considered. Certain elements are obscured and later revealed, and some are obscured and never revealed, so in these circumstances the performer is required to make informed decisions based both on the surrounding material, and the information present for that particular moment, to bring balance and unity.

Organisation of Materials and Narrative:

- Progression and development should be evident throughout the form of the video, which attempts to inform a performable musical structure and teleology.

Bodily Movements:

- Repetition or stuttering images are suggestive of rhythms and articulations sympathetic to the visible movement on screen, be it natural or processed.

- The natural motion of the video performer could also be considered when approaching other factors such as tone, timbre, and air pressure.

- Any facial expression or lack of facial expression can also be interpreted into aspects of tone, timbre, lip/air pressure, and dynamic.

Superimposition:

- When another image is superimposed onto another, it is the characteristics of the superimposed image which are of importance, and can provide information regarding: embouchure, intensity of dynamic and/or air pressure, vibrato, and rhythm, which should also relate to the underlying image.