UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Dreams of a Young Piano

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Music

by

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The Dissertation of Yiheng Yvonne Wu is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:


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EDUCATION

University of California, San Diego
Ph.D., Music, 2016
M.A., Music, 2011
Composition studies: Katharina Rosenberger (advisor), Philippe Manoury, Chinary Ung, Lei Liang

Yale University
B.A., Music, cum laude, with distinction, 2003
Composition studies: Kathryn Alexander, John Halle, Matthew Suttor

Additional Composition Studies: Richard Carrick (New York City), Steven Takasugi (San Diego), Sophia Serghi (College of William & Mary)
Summer Festivals: Chaya Czernowin (Schloss Solitude, Germany), Sydney Hodkinson (Aspen Music School), Michael Czajkowski (Aspen Music School), Henry Kucharzyk (Arraymusic Young Composers Workshop), Marilyn Shrude (Interlochen Arts Camp)
Masterclasses: Brian Ferneyhough, Beat Furrer, Christian Wolff
Piano Studies: Cynthia Stauffer (San Diego), Anna Grinberg (Yale), Steven Buck (Yale), Naomi Niskala (Yale), Sara Okamoto (New York City), Frank Weinstock (Aspen Music School), Stephen Perry (Interlochen Arts Camp), Christine Williams (Williamsburg, VA)

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

University of California, San Diego, Department of Music

Instructor of Record
Music Theory and Practice I: Species Counterpoint Fall 2015
Music Theory and Practice III: Classical Form and Analysis Spring 2014
Introduction to Composition Fall 2012

Teaching Assistant
Sight-Singing and Dictation (2nd-year Aural Skills) 2011-2012, Spring 2016
Keyboard Skills Winter & Spring 2014
Species Counterpoint Fall 2013
History of Music in Western Culture I, II, and III Winter & Spring 2013, 2010-2011
Basic Musicianship (1st-year Aural Skills) 2009-2010

Self-Employment, San Diego, CA, Brooklyn, NY
Private Piano Instructor

My Music Garden, Jersey City, NJ
Private Piano Instructor

Family Fine Arts Academy, Chula Vista, CA
Private Piano Instructor
COMMISSIONS & COMPETITIONS

5th Mivos/Kanter String Quartet Composition Prize, Mivos Quartet

Utterance to be performed in fall 2016, New York, NY 2015

Rachel Beetz, flute

commission, Relay/Replay for flute and tape 2015

Palimpsest, University of California, San Diego

commission, premiere of Dreams of a Young Piano, first movement 2014

Ossia Composition Prize, Honorable Mention, Stills; edges 2014

Rachel Beetz, flute, and Dustin Donahue, percussion

commission, Duo for Flute and Percussion 2014

La Jolla Symphony with Steven Schick, conductor, La Jolla, California

Thomas Nee Commission, premiere of Transcriptions of Place 2013

Jessica Aszodi, soprano, and Bonnie Whiting, percussion

commission, Four Poems of Li-Young Lee 2012

Formosa Composition Competition, Taipei, Taiwan

Third Place Winner; First Place, Audience Vote; performance of “and then one day...” 2005

Arraymusic, Young Composers Workshop, Toronto, Ontario

commission and one-month residency, world premiere of Edgy Quartet 2004

Timothy Dwight Chamber Orchestra, Yale University

commission, premiere of “and then one day...” 2003

ACADEMIC HONORS & AWARDS

Edward Bouchet Graduate Honor Society, Inducted Member 2015

Erickson Award for Excellence in Graduate Research Exhibited though a Publishable Paper, UC San Diego, Dept. of Music 2013

University of California Institute for Research in the Arts (UCIRA) Mini-Grant 2013

Frieda Daum Urey Endowed Fellowship, UC San Diego 2012-2013

TA Excellence Award for Superior Teaching Performance, UC San Diego, Dept. of Music 2011

Yale Friends of Music grant 2003

John E. Linck III and Alanne Linck Summer Fellowship, Yale University 2002

Robert A. Welch Summer Fellowship, Yale University 2002

Abraham Beekman Cox Prize in Composition, Yale Department of Music 2002


CONFERENCE PAPERS & TALKS

Midwest Graduate Music Consortium, Annual Meeting, University of Chicago Mar 2016

“Ligeti’s ‘Cooled Expressionism’: Text, Body, and Shifting Modes of Musical Affect”

Focus on Composition, UC San Diego Jan 2016

“Character-Spaces and Disjunct Transformations”

Composer’s Forum, Stanford University Apr 2014

“Recent Work: Threads vs. Fragmentation”
Focus, composers’ forum, UC San Diego
“Recent Work: Experiments in Notation” Apr 2014
Ligeti Symposium & Festival, Florida State University
“Ligeti’s ‘Cooled Expressionism’: Watching Music from a Distance” Oct 2013
Pre-Concert Talk with Steven Schick, Paul Dresher, and Yvonne Wu, La Jolla Symphony
Mar 2013
Sommerakademie, Composition Masterclass, Schloss Solitude,
“A Little Too Much: Listening through Noise” Aug 2007
Intercollegiate Taiwanese American Student Association East Coast Conference, Yale University, “Careers in the Arts,” panelist Feb 2004

GUEST LECTURES AND JURY PANELS
jury panel for Undergraduate Composition Juries, UC San Diego Jun 2015
jury panel for Undergraduate Composition Juries, UC San Diego Jun 2014
“Chaya Czernowin’s Maim and new modes of listening,” UC San Diego May 2014
“Verdi’s operas,” UC San Diego Apr 2014
“Transcriptions of Place: my approaches to orchestral writing,” UC San Diego Jun 2013
jury panel for Undergraduate Composition Juries, UC San Diego Jun 2013
“Karlheinz Stockhausen,” UC San Diego Jun 2012
“Beethoven’s 9th Symphony,” UC San Diego Mar 2011
“16th-Century Italian Madrigals,” UC San Diego Nov 2010
“Reaching Home with Music: A young emigrant’s exploration of Taiwan’s political past,”
Taiwanese American Foundation of San Diego Culture & History Lecture Series May 2006

UNIVERSITY SERVICE AND CONCERT CURATION
Focus on Composition Committee, UC San Diego, Department of Music 2011-2012
Elected committee member
First Monday Concert Series, UC San Diego, Department of Music 2011-2012
Curator
Graduate Student Association, UC San Diego 2010
Representative for Department of Music
Yale College Composers Group, Yale University 2000-2003
Co-Founder, Co-Director, Events Organizer

SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP POSITIONS
Department of Music Graduate Student Advocacy 2014
Co-Leader
Lincoln High School Arts Project, San Diego, CA 2010-2011
Co-Leader
UCSD Graduate Student Campus Climate Coalition 2010
Member
StandUp for Kids, San Diego, CA  
*Director of Development, Leadership Committee*

WYSE (Women & Youth Supporting Each Other), New Haven, CT  
*Mentor*

ALPHA, New Haven, CT  
*Tutor, Mentor*

Strong Elementary School, New Haven, CT  
*Classroom tutor*

Yale Taiwanese American Society  
*Leadership Committee Member*

**DISCOGRAPHY**

*New Music from San Diego*, Carrier Records  
*Utterance* for string quartet, performed by Ensemble SurPlus  
2009

**PRESS**


profile article: Kari Richardson, “Student Leader Will Lead Christmas Parade,” *Daily Press, December 5, 1998*

**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

Society of Music Theory
WORK LIST & PERFORMANCES

for ORCHESTRA & CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Dreams of a Young Piano
for solo piano, two percussionists, and ensemble, 20’
May 2016: premiere of complete work (two movements)
Nov 2014: first movement, commission and premiere of by Palimpsest
University of California, San Diego, Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Transcriptions of Place
for orchestra, 10’
Mar 2013: Thomas Nee Commission from La Jolla Symphony; Steven Schick, conductor, La Jolla, California

“and then one day...”,
for two string quartets, double bass, winds, and narrator, 18’
Mar 2005: 2004 Formosa Composition Competition, Finalists Concert
Taipei, Taiwan
Apr 2003: commissioned and premiered by Timothy Dwight Chamber Players,
Mark Seto, conductor, Yale University

Flux for string orchestra, 3’
Aug 1999: reading at Aspen Music Festival

for CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Duo for Flute and Percussion
for flute and percussion, 16’
May 2014: performed in Flux Aeterna – Inaugural Gala I, San Diego, CA
Mar 2014: commissioned & premiered by Rachel Beetz, flute, and Dustin Donahue,
percussion, UC San Diego, Conrad Prebys Music Center, Experimental Theater

Four Poems of Li-Young Lee
for soprano and speaking percussionist, 14’
Jan 2013: commissioned & premiered by Jessica Aszodi, soprano,
and Bonnie Whiting, percussion
UC San Diego, Conrad Prebys Music Center, Recital Hall

Stills; edges. Five small pieces and some number of interludes and moments 2010/rev.2011
for flute/ alto fl, clarinet in Bb/bass cl, violin, viola, cello, piano, and percussion, 16’
Dec 2011: performed at UC San Diego Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

To unnamed things
for soprano, double bass and percussion, 9’
Dec 2009: premiered by Tiffany DuMouchelle, soprano, Bonnie Whiting, percussion,
and Scott Worthington, double bass, UC San Diego, Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Agua remota
for clarinet in Bb, viola, and double bass, 10’
Utterance for string quartet, 15’
Fall 2016: to be performed by MIVOS Quartet, New York City, NY
2009: released by Carrier Records on New Music from San Diego

Edgy Quartet
for clarinet, trumpet, double bass, percussion, 10’
May 2004: commissioned and premiered by Arraymusic, Toronto Canada

Undulations
for flute/picc, English horn, bassoon, trombone, harp, viola, two percussionists, 20’

"I alone am expressionless,"
for string quartet, 8’

Duo for Cello and Clarinet, 10’
Dec 1999: premiered by Yves Dharamraj, cello, and Daniel Friberg, clarinet
New Music Marathon Concert, Yale University

Duet in Magenta
for tenor saxophone and piano, 4’
May 2016: performed by Samuel Dunscombe, bass clarinet, and Todd Moellenberg, piano, UC San Diego
Feb 1999: premiered by Niels Bijl, saxophone, and Hans-Erik Dijkstra, piano, College of William & Mary

A Stack of Five Translucent Colored Stencils
for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, 11’
Aug 1999: premiered at Aspen Music Festival
Apr 1999: reading by Continuum, Joel Sachs, conducting College of William & Mary

for SOLO INSTRUMENTS

Untitled for solo harpsichord (in progress)
commission by Justin Murphy-Mancini

Relay/Replay for solo flute
commission by Rachel Beetz
Nov 2015: performed at UC San Diego, Conrad Prebys Concert Hall
Oct 2015: performed at wasteLAnd Concert Series, ArtShare, Los Angeles, CA
Oct 2015: premiered at betalevel, Los Angeles, CA

Carvings, solo for flute and voice 13’
May 2016: performed by Michael Matsuno, UC San Diego
Mar 2016: performed by Michael Matsuno, University at Buffalo
Feb 2011: commissioned & premiered by Carla Rees
UC San Diego, Conrad Prebys Experimental Theater

Étude for Cello: bow as breath, 7’
Jan 2011: recorded by Katinka Kleijn of International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE)
Piano Suite for Joanna 2001
for the young musician, 10’
May 2002: premiered by Joanna Wu
New Music Marathon Concert 2002, Yale University, Silliman College

Solo for Oboe, 9’ 1999
Dec 1999: premiered by Gary West
New Music Marathon Concert 1999, Yale University

Solo for Cello, 4’ 1999
Jul 1999: premiered by Tomoko Fujita, Aspen Music Festival
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dreams of a Young Piano

by

Yiheng Yvonne Wu

Doctor of Philosophy in Music

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Katharina Rosenberger, Chair

Scored for solo piano along with two percussionists and a nine-piece, mixed ensemble, Dreams of a Young Piano is a playful exploration of the piano’s identity. If an anthropomorphized piano had youthful ambitions, they might be to transcend its limitations and to imagine itself with the powers and properties of various other instruments. The work entertains this pipe dream, enacting a metaphorical extension of
the piano in two primary ways: mechanically—shedding its confines as a percussive instrument with fixed tuning—and acoustically—acquiring a larger instrumental body that extends across the entire stage by enlisting the forces of the surrounding ensemble. The first movement introduces the fantasy instrument, while the second continues to explore its sonic possibilities. Formally, the work demonstrates “disjunct transformation,” where a linear process (e.g. the transformation of the piano into the meta-piano) is segmented and those segments, re-ordered, abbreviated, and amplified. In the first movement, disruptions to the implied linear transformation seem to themselves exercise influence over the disrupted content.
INTRODUCTION

The first movement of *Dreams of a Young Piano* was written when Aleck Karis invited me to compose a “piano concerto” for Palimpsest at UC San Diego to be programmed along with Lei Liang’s Harp Concerto and Donald Martino’s Triple Concerto. While I knew I’d avoid the term “concerto” and allusions to the historical form, I was immediately intrigued by the problem of writing for the piano in a chamber music setting. As a pianist, I find that the solo piano is a colorful and versatile instrument, but next to other instruments, it feels more limited. How would I handle the 88 fixed pitches in equal temperament when I so often utilize glissandi and microtonal fingerings in other instruments? Also, next to the inherently more lyrical strings, winds, and brass, the piano often sounds percussive to me. I knew that this piece should not only grapple with these issues but feature them.

Scored for solo piano along with two percussionists and a nine-piece mixed ensemble, *Dreams of a Young Piano* is a playful exploration of the piano’s identity. If an anthropomorphized piano had youthful ambitions, they might be to transcend its limitations and to imagine itself with the powers and properties of various other instruments. The two-movement work entertains this pipe dream, enacting a metaphorical extension of the piano in two primary ways: mechanically—shedding its confines as a percussive instrument with fixed tuning—and acoustically—acquiring a larger instrumental body that extends across the entire stage by enlisting the forces of the surrounding ensemble.
I. Motivations: the Primary Goals of Piano Technique

Pianists of the Western classical tradition are fortunate to inherit a large body of solo repertoire. Though essential to the oeuvres of Mozart and Haydn, it wasn’t until the middle of the nineteenth century that the piano completed its physical evolution into the robust, dynamic, and timbrally versatile instrument it is today. For me, nineteenth-century literature from late Beethoven to Ravel epitomizes the expressive capabilities of the instrument, and from the study of this music, pianists acquire two missions that inform every sound they make—to turn the hammered instrument into a singing, lyrical one; and to voice the chords and textures in ways that are timbrally nuanced and can evoke various colors, often inspired by other instruments. In a sense, the pianist is constantly working to turn the piano into something else, to play it despite itself.

The endeavor for lyricism requires not only sensitive touch and great technique but also some smoke and mirrors. Example 1, from Schoenberg’s Sechs kleine Klavierstücke, Op. 19, demonstrates an extreme case of how pianists must sometimes “fake it” when it comes to the dynamic capabilities of a hammered instrument. The four hairpin crescendos in the right hand part of measure 1 are simply absurd. Crescendos within single attacks are impossible on the piano, whose sound can only decay after each hammer strike. If one forgives Schonberg’s illogical request, his intention seems simple enough: make one crescendo through the length of measure 1. It seems to follow that the pianist should simply make each note louder than the preceding one. In practice, however, this does not sound musically convincing. With the tempo sehr langsame, the piano’s resonance decays significantly even after a quarter beat and despite the forte
dynamic. For continuity, pianists usually follow a long note with a slightly softer
dynamic so as to match (or at least compensate for) the long note’s decay. To play the

right hand G on beat 2 here even as loudly as the chord on beat 1 would sound abrupt
and melodically disjunct; to play it more loudly would sound worse. Often, the smoke
and mirrors, is provided by an intervening left hand, which can help create the sensation
that the right hand is making a crescendo even when it is not. Here, however, the left
hand must remain pianissimo, which cannot contribute much to the right hand’s forte.
The decay problem is even worse with the longer note C in the right hand—a dotted
quarter note to be followed by a louder B-flat. It is basically impossible to play the B-flat
dearer without sounding unmusical, and from a brief survey of recordings,
performers tend to leave that crescendo out.

Despite the logistical issues, a performer will find a reasonable solution,
utilizing careful voicing, borrowing some resonance from the left, perhaps adding some
rubato to maintain energy on the long notes, and more. Yet as Schoenberg went out of
his way to write four separate crescendos, he intentionally underscores the piano’s
expressive limitations and makes a point of asking the piano to be some other
instrument.

While not involving smoke and mirrors, the pianist’s second endeavor, for nuanced voicing and timbre, requires complex muscular agility that is not without mystery. A simple fact of piano playing: as for any percussion instrument, the pianist can only control the attack of each note and not its sustain. A more complex twist: how one sustains and releases a note retroactively informs how one made the attack. Therefore, the nuanced muscular changes during the attack, the sustain, and the release all influence the tone quality. See Example 2, from Ravel’s *Pavane pour une infante défunte*. To give the right hand octaves in this passage a bell-like quality, the attack requires arm weight applied broadly for richness, slowly for the soft dynamic, but with firm fingertips for clarity. For the eighth-note octaves of m.67, the player integrates the drop, attack, and release into one rounded gesture. Much like striking a real bell—the striker must come away so as not to impede the resonance. To push the key forcefully or to ram into the bottom of the key produces a harsher, more piercing sound without breadth. The quarter-note octaves of m.68 are more difficult than the eighth-note octaves, as the performer must keep the keys depressed while still “releasing” the arm weight to allow for the best resonance. In other words, even though the hammer hit has already occurred, how the player holds the keys still matters.

In m.70, the accented octaves across the two hands signals a change of color. “Horns!” I tell my student. How is this timbre achieved? Impossible to explain—the student must learn to use her ears. It’s something about a change in the focus of the attack, the speed of the accent, the voicing between the two members of the octave, the
shaping of the upward gesture. A bar later, the 3-octave accented notes should perhaps evoke basses, low winds, as well as brass. Such color changes are a great source of excitement for me as a pianist—a single instrument becomes an orchestra.

[Sheet music image]

Example 2. Maurice Ravel: from Pavane pour une infant défunte, mm.67-68.

I begin my discussion with piano technique to demonstrate that, aside from learning notes, the pianist spends a great deal of energy working to transform the piano into something else. For this reason, the process of practicing can be immensely satisfying. Yet, just as a fantasy for the instrument, what if the piano did become a different instrument? What if it could shed some of its physical limitations and extend its capabilities, literally gaining the powers of strings, winds, and brass? What would the piano then do as an even larger, more colorful instrument? And so Dreams of a Young Piano was born.

II. Influences and Affinities
The composer with perhaps the most influence on my musical thinking is Gérard Grisey, whose *Périodes* from *Les espaces acoustiques* likely changed the course of my compositional voice when I first heard it halfway through college. Even fifteen years later, as I re-read Grisey’s writings, I realize how many of his ideas I have incorporated, though there are, of course, important deviations.

Grisey’s music revolves around the core concept that sound and time are essentially linked. A “sound object” cannot exist outside of time; the unfolding of time is required for the understanding of a sound. He writes, “Object and process are analogous. The sound object is only a process which as been contracted, the process nothing more than a dilated sound object.”¹ For Grisey, then, the fullest, most intimate investigation of a sound requires time to be slowed down. He says, “As a result of the extreme expansion of time, we arrive at the very heart of sound whose material is revealed by the effect of an inordinate magnification.”² Here Grisey implies that one metaphorical knob controls two variables: time and proximity—expanded time allows for a closer view of a sound, and contracted time pushes the listener away from the sound’s detail. While my own approach to sound is not so firmly correlated with the scaling of time, and in fact often includes the intentional uncoupling of these variables (see my discussion on form below), some corollaries to this concept are important in my music.

First, as implied by his term “sound object,” sound, for Grisey, is something

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with physical properties—it can be viewed, opened, unfurled, seen up close and far away to reveal different levels of detail.\(^3\) It is an object to be investigated.

Moreover, the sound object possesses an “internal dynamism.” He writes, “It is impossible to think of sounds as defined objects which are mutually interchangeable. They strike me rather as force fields given direction in time. These \textit{forces} – I purposely use this word and not the word \textit{form} – are infinitely mobile and fluctuating; they are alive like cells, with a birth, life and death, and above all tend towards a continual transformation of their own energy. There exists no sound which is static, immobile….\(^3\)” The composer’s exploration of the sound is the endeavor to investigate “the energy that inhabits it.”\(^4\)

I am equally motivated by this notion that a composer can “create” a sound entity that then has a life of its own; it becomes my task to understand it. If I were a novelist, I would create characters and then write various scenes and situations not for the novel but for a deeper understanding of the characters’ potentials. As a composer, I find that after I introduce (create) a few initial sound characters, the majority of my process is the attempt to “listen” to them, uncovering the layers of their sonic and behavioral potential, trying to hear what else they need to do.

I also feel an affinity for Grisey’s idea of sounds having an “internal dynamism.” For me, it is not only that sounds consist of inner forces but more importantly that those energies are shared across all of my sound objects. As I listen to

\(^3\) Though Pierre Schaeffer coined the term “sound object,” and since there are likely as many definitions as there are composers, I am limiting the term here to the ways that Grisey uses it.

\(^4\) Grisey, “Tempus ex Machina,” 268.
the sounds, they are fundamentally (though not always apparently) connected to a larger, ongoing vibration. In a sense, all instrumental resonance has the ability to tap into this great vibration, and indeed, the emergence of the meta-piano in *Dreams* attempts to tap into this. Two of my favorite poets, to whom “listening” is also essential to their processes, echo a similar idea. Li-Young Lee refers to a “hum” that pervades the universe and which his poems attempt to capture.\(^5\) W.S. Merwin, in his poem “Utterance” implies a moment of creative vision as hearing “the echo of everything that has ever been spoken.”\(^6\)

My tendency towards an abstract, existential oneness is countered by the surface eccentricities of my compositional materials. Like Chaya Czernowin, who has described her music as comprising “living creatures” that “want to do certain things,” I also ascribe behaviors to my materials.\(^7\) In the opening section, for example, the piano’s behavior is agitated and angular, with a fast, somewhat erratic energy. The ensemble, in contrast, at Rehearsals A, D, and E of the first movement, is staid, even cold, a behavior that returns in the second movement at Rehearsal F.

While Czernowin is explicitly interested in unknown creatures, one could say that sounds are often personified in my music in a more human way, which resonates with Elliott Carter’s approach.\(^8\) In the score of his Quintet for Piano and Winds, he describes a concept that applies to much of his music. “To heighten the dialectic


\(^7\) Chaya Czernowin, phone interview by Yvonne Wu, July 23, 2013.

interplay between the instruments,” he assigns to each a unique “musical vocabulary” and “its own type of expressivity and character.” But the characters are not merely juxtaposed; the interactions among the characters imply a social, human context. He continues, “The interplay of commentary, answer, humorous denial, ironic, supportive or self-effacing were considered as part of the musical thought and expression.”⁹ Carter goes further, bringing the musician behind the instrument into the picture. “I regard my scores as scenarios, auditory scenarios, for performers to act out with their instruments, dramatizing the players as individuals and participants in the ensemble.”¹⁰

Social dynamics and implied attitudes that certain characters might have for others, though not forefronted in Dreams, are relevant to its interpretation. Attending to the relative friction between or synergetic connectedness among characters informs my compositional choices, formally as well as locally. Again, Rehearsal A and D of movement 1 are the piano’s first attempts to provoke the ensemble. Both of these instances are relatively violent, rousing gestures, with big accented chords that follow a flurry of energy. In contrast, at Rehearsal E, the piano’s first espressivo line leads into the first extended resonant fragments in the Glockenspiel, crotales, and vibraphone. Here the ensemble is stirred again, but it is by the sweet entreaties of the vibrating metals.

II. Form and the Meta-Piano

As sectional divisions in Dreams are unambiguous, I will avoid a didactic

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⁹ Elliott Carter, Quintet for Piano and Winds (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1994).
description of the work’s formal layout and instead discuss aspects of the form that are most meaningful to me.

In a nutshell, the first movement shows the piano’s transformation, from a maximally percussive instrument in the opening—where it exchanges short, dry attacks with the two percussion—to the “meta-piano,” which has the entire ensemble on stage resonating as one instrumental body. The second movement continues to explore the capabilities of this new instrument with expanded resources.

The first movement was initially written as a stand-alone work, but after its premiere, I felt it had an introductory function and was compelled to write its continuation. I set out to write the second movement with the restriction that I would only take materials from the first and expand them. Despite that limitation, my brainstorm list of avenues for development immediately grew to an unwieldy length, and I seemed to have two options—either write an hour-long, many-movement work in an attempt to exhaust all the possibilities and address all of the meta-piano’s potential, or take the more modest approach with the realization that a comprehensive demonstration of the meta-piano concept is neither interesting nor necessary. I chose the latter.

**Disjunct Transformation**

While the concept of the piano’s transformation suggests a simple narrative from condition A to condition B, I avoid a linear progression connecting the two. Instead, a key formal concept in *Dreams*, and in much of my work, is what I call
Disjunct, or Non-Linear, Transformation. This is especially applicable when, based on the materials in the music, the listener can easily imagine a formal scheme that moves gradually from condition A to B. What is presented instead is a sectionalized form, which might include A and B but where the middle might be cut out, where an insignificant portion of the progression might be magnified, where the segments of that re-ordered progression vary in length. In short, a linear progression has a sort of Cubist technique applied to it (we see two eyes on one side of the face, a disproportionate nose, etc.). This manipulation of a simple formal progression is, I hope, more engaging for the listener as he/she asks, “How did we get here?” and compares the non-linear journey to their own imagination of the simpler one. As the composer, it allows me to dwell on certain aspects of the sounds and materials that, to my ear, require more musical time and attention.

One example of disjunct transformation: the “progression” from piano to meta-piano actually happens twice in the first movement. The meta-piano is attained by Rehearsal H (m.84-96), after which the piece begins again: Reh. J through M (mm.97-123) is a transformation of the opening piano/percussion trio material, now with the ensemble, and the second half culminates with even bigger chords from the meta-piano. The replaying of the entire progression is like a retelling of a story, with each version revealing different details and relationships among the characters.

A second example: after the first, long ensemble chord, at Reh. B (m.20) and forward, the piano/percussion trio seem to continue the material from the opening, but here, their instrumentation has suddenly changed. Their sounds are more diminished, as
the marimba and vibraphone have been exchanged for woods and Almglocken (still wood and metal), and the piano’s sprawling figuration is now confined to the top octave of the piano, where the strings are dampened by a sock stuffed with rice. The opening material is now heard through a metaphorical filter.

In movement 2, the non-linear techniques continue and even include passages with multiple materials sounding simultaneously. Reh. F through H (mm.27-47) consists of three layers. The percussion duo leads the section, presenting small waves of light, scurrying material. They maintain a relatively consistent periodicity, with local phrase fragments lasting two to six beats and larger phrase groups lasting 7 to 10 bars. The piano, bringing with it individuals from Groups 2 and 3, appears sporadically, with irregular phrase-lengths, and with pauses of two to four bars at a time. Its textures, though, seem to come out of the percussion duo. In contrast, the two flutes and one clarinet of Group 1 articulate both a different time scale and harmonic world. The microtonal tunings of partials along with their long sustains refer back to the first movement’s opening ensemble chords. More importantly, their slow articulation of pitches suggests that a slower unfolding of time is occurring alongside the other activity. The periodicity of their appearances is the slowest of the three layers.

Another passage of multiple layers occurs at the very end of movement 2, Reh. R to the end (m.131-end). Here, Groups 1 and 2 are independent from the piano, which is supported somewhat by the strings (the bass highlights some important piano pitches). In contrast to Reh. F, the two layers here utilize more similar tempi and periodicities. Still, they almost never align (except at m.135), and the particularities of
their rhythms and speeds keep them metrically detached from one another.

**Sectionalization and Shifting Perspectives**

As discussed above, Grisey couples the “zoom” level on a sound material with temporal scale, while I intentionally decouple them and try to present my materials in varying proportions and levels of zoom. The sectional breaks in my music allow for shifts in the listener’s “perspective” on a given sound. That two highly contrasting characters are presented side by side at the beginning of movement 1 is significant. The opening piano/percussion trio section is 38 seconds long (in the accompanying performance), while the first ensemble chord lasts about 30 seconds. The latter’s nearly static nature and lack of textural detail suggest a distant view of a “sound object.” In contrast, but in almost the same time frame, the opening trio presents too much detail—we feel its high energy, but its busyness seems to intentionally evade our aural gaze.

**Disruption and “Transformation by Disruption”**

The sectionalization in my work often happens as an unexpected disruption or is the border between two contrasting materials. The listener is suddenly pulled out of a particular soundscape or musical scenario, and at first, he/she might interpret the cuts as simply part of a formal scheme. However, in retrospect, the experience of the whole piece could suggest that the disruptions themselves have an impact on the content of the sections that were disrupted. For example, from the opening of the first movement through Reh. F (m.57), the ensemble disrupts the piano/percussion trio three times (Reh. A, D, and E). After the first disruption, as discussed above, the abrupt change of
instrumentation in the piano/percussion trio at Reh. B seems to be “unexplained” by the music—it simply happens. However, after the second disruption, the trio sounds its first long notes (the vibraphone in m.39 is a pivotal point), and when the trio continues to extend its sounds after the third disruption, the piece begins to suggest that, despite the apparent lack of interaction, the ensemble chords might be exerting influence on the trio. In the other direction, though the ensemble seems aloof in these three first appearances, it shifts at Reh. G (mm.71-77) and then fuses into the meta-piano, which makes its first emergence at Reh. H (mm.84-96). From the vantage point of Reh. H, the preceding process exemplifies “transformations by disruption,” where the shifts themselves instilled some sort of change that were not immediately apparent. The characters were moved by the “experiences” of having been disrupted. Here again, a personification of the materials applies.

III. Highlights of the Harmonic Design

In very broad terms, the harmonic plan of the piece is also subjected to a non-linear model. Some salient sections, though, suggest a simple harmonic trajectory. The opening piano/percussion trio is the most densely chromatic; the accented chords emphasize minor-second clusters. In contrast, the ending of the first movement emphasizes consonant intervals and even grows increasingly triadic. The middle, such as the piano “chorale” at Reh. G, bridges the extremes. Chromaticism still pervades, but here the clusters have opened up to minor 7ths and major 9ths (with fewer major 7ths and minor 9ths), and the open voicing incorporates more consonant intervals. In this way, the beginning, middle, and end outline one large-scale motion, from highly
chromatic to highly triadic.

The ending of the first movement, however, moves through a similar transformation—in a shorter amount of time and rather linearly. From Reh. P (m.144) to the end of the movement, the piano sounds its final nine chords, each presented as a rhythmically flexible arpeggio. See Example 3. Chord 1 is a fully chromatic chord, which would have Forte number 8-1—all consecutive semitones from B up to F#. Chord 9 is very triadic, containing triads of b minor, c# minor, A major, D major, E major, g# diminished. The ensemble, grouped in their three trios, highlight these triads. The intervening Chords 2 through 8 see the gradual transformation between these extremes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chord number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A A A A A A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G# G# G# G# G# G#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F# F# F# F# F# F# F# F#</td>
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<tr>
<td>F F F F F F F F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E E E E E E E E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D# D# D# D# D# D# D#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D D D D D D D D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C# C# C# C# C# C# C# C#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C C C C C C C C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B B B B B B B B B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 3. Last Nine Chords, Movement 1, Rehearsal P to end. Chord number and pitch content performed by piano.

In the second movement, much of the pitch content is derived from—and, in certain sections, even limited to—these nine harmonies. The harmonies do not occur in the same order, though, and when they recur, I use particular subsets to emphasize
distinct harmonic colors.

For the Ad Lib. piano solo near the beginning of movement 2, for example, almost all pitches are taken from Chord 7 of movement 1’s conclusion. Out of that 8-pitch group, C and D come a little later and are rarer (m.11 and forward), and E is also a special note (ending the first two “phrases”, m.9 and m.10). The most frequently used pitches belong to the bottom of the f# minor scale (F#, G#, A, B, C#). In fact, the only pitch that does not belong to the f# natural minor collection is C-natural, but since I most often couple C-natural with D-natural, the dyad provides a color that contrasts with the f# minor diatonic collection.

Later in the Ad Lib. passage, I introduce pitches outside of Chord 7—A# appears (m.12), and near the end, D# (m.14, second system). Since the pitch content in the piano part is tightly controlled here, these added pitches signal a drift in the harmonic position and indeed accompany more (possible destabilizing) activity from the ensemble.

The pitches of the high piano tremolos in movement 2 mostly come from Chord 3. This section begins at Reh. H (m.48-59) and continues at Reh J (mm.65-68) (with intervening material at Reh. I). Though Chord 3 in the context of movement 1 is relatively chromatic, its reappearance here grows increasingly consonant. By Reh. J, I feature subsets that contain major 2nds, 4ths, 3rds, and 6ths, giving this section a highly contrasting harmonic color compared to the rest of the movement.

While I don’t consider this a spectral piece, I have used some basic pitch
techniques employed by Gérard Grisey and Tristain Murail but without linking them to the formal design as either of these composers do. Several appearances of the ensemble include equal-temperament pitches which act as “fundamentals” for the accompanying microtonal pitches based on tunings of specific upper partials. In the opening three ensemble chords in movement 1, I give three different fundamentals at once. The 9-member ensemble is grouped into three trios so that the players can more readily hear each other—each trio sounds one fundamental and two of its partials. I make octave transpositions freely—the fundamental and partials are almost never as far apart from each other as they should be—but, as my goals were simple, the effect is achieved: to give the ensemble a different harmonic sound palette compared to the piano while also creating an “inherent” connection between the two groups—the fundamentals are always generated by the piano.

IV. Extending the Piano: Some Compositional Considerations

As introduced above, the metaphorical extension of the piano and its explorations comprise the primary motivations of the work. I expand the piano’s sonic and mechanical capabilities and extend its physical reach, moving its sounds and energies around the stage. Most of the ideas here are clear upon hearing the piece; others provoke questions, discussed below.

The extension of the piano’s metaphorical sonic capabilities:

- Sustained notes can be lengthened even further.
- Sustained sounds can swell (any pianist’s dream)!
- One “sound” can split into multiple layers and have independent dynamic
shapes.

- Sounds can take on various timbres.
- Sounds take on more harmonic complexity with ensemble’s microtonal capabilities.

The extension of the piano’s sound in physical space:

- Sounds move from piano via pitch identity or pitch doubling.
- Sounds move through the space as energetic waves or bursts.

I owe perhaps the largest debt to Elliott Carter’s Double Concerto, which features solo harpsichord and piano with chamber ensembles that support each soloist. Carter carefully assembled the ensembles around each keyboard soloist so as to both enhance and complement the latter’s timbral features.\textsuperscript{11} While the Double Concerto models my concept of a surrounding ensemble that enhances the sounds of a solo piano, \textit{Dreams} features the piano’s acquisition of its larger persona as the central issue and not a circumstantial one. In my work, the listener can engage in ongoing interpretive questions about the piano’s identity. How does the piano woo the ensemble? Even after they merge, there are plenty of moments when the piano is just a piano again. The second movement includes several passages where the ensemble is initially subsumed in the piano’s sound but seems to eventually overflow, as if to surpass the meta-piano’s ability to contain it. Indeed, in the conclusion of both movements, the ensemble seems to overpower the piano, which drops out.

A few passages provide, to my ear, important moments for interpreting the piano’s shifting relationship with the ensemble.

In movement 1, mm.39-40, the vibraphone chord is passed on to piano, which

\textsuperscript{11} For example, the harpsichord’s orchestra includes more brass, highlighting its metallic timbre but also boosting its volume: trombone, horn I, trumpet, and flute. As if to help its thin bass, the lower strings are allied with the harpsichord: contrabass and viola.
plays the same pitches. Since this is the first such exchange, an ambiguity arises: is it “one sound” being passed around, or is it two separate instruments/characters/personalities in agreement? How unified are these bodies at this moment? I enjoy this tension.

A similar tension occurs at movement 1, Reh. G, mm.71-83—the “chorale” with the piano and percussion trio. All the pitches in the vibraphone and Glockenspiel/chimes are drawn from the piano chords (though with octave transpositions applied freely), but each of the three has a unique, strong melodic line. Dynamically, the percussion sit just behind the piano, as if in its shadow. Here also, a friction occurs between the individuality of the part and the unity of the three.

In contrast, in movement 1, m.106: the bass clarinet and piano play together in a rare instance of exact unison. This moment suggests a deeper integration of the ensemble with the piano. The latter now has new “arms,” with more timbral potential. While the categories of piano’s sonic capabilities and its physical reach have blurred boundaries, attending to the sound in physical space raised an important question during my compositional process.

As indicated in my performance notes, I specify the spatial arrangement of the instruments. The piano is centered at the front of the stage, while the percussionists are in the two rear corners. The antiphonal exchange between the percussionists, with the piano in the middle, adds to the high energy of the opening and is, happily, audible in the stereo recording. The large triangle formed by the trio across the performance space initially acts as a skeleton for what later becomes the body of the meta-piano. The ensemble, forming a semi-circle around the piano, radiates from the piano’s body, both
symbolically and physically increasing its size by several times. The whole stage acts as the resonating chamber for the meta-piano.

Despite the importance of this stage configuration, the spatial design does not impact the listener’s experience in the way that it does in pieces like Stockhausen’s *Carré* or *Gruppen*, Xenakis’s *Persephassa*, or in most of Henry Brant’s works, where the ensemble creates an immersive experience by encircling the audience. Still, some simple concepts from these pieces apply to mine. Stockhausen and Xenakis demonstrate that temporally staggering homogeneous material, especially, with staggered crescendo and decrescendo, creates the sensation that a sound is physically moving around a space. From Henry Brant, I take his concept called “spill”—if a few spatially separated instruments play the same pitch, it will seem as if the pitch is coming from the entire space between them.

Carter’s Double Concerto, like *Dreams*, is spatially configured on stage but not interspersed among the audience, and while spatial issues are not relevant throughout the entire work, there are notable passages when sounds move very palpably. A single harmony is tossed back and forth across the two sides of the stage a few times; later, a long thread of accented notes encircles the stage, accelerating as it goes.

One commonality among most of the above works is that sound not only “moves” around a space but it does so with high speeds. The most salient moment of

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interaction among the three ensembles in *Gruppen* is the rapid exchange of short fragments, Xenakis’s *Persephassa* is a constant state of whirling ecstasy, and Carter’s most explicit passages of motion also reach high speeds. As discussed earlier about *Dreams*, the energetic potential of a sound material is a fundamental aspect of its conception—the basic impetus of the piece is that the piano attains an energetic groove with the ensemble, and the latter’s ability to augments its dynamic powers (i.e. the swells) is one of the biggest prizes. Yet as I found myself in the final climactic passages of each movement, I wondered, did my interest in activating the listener’s perception of sound moving in space obligate me to write high-energy music? In other words, “non-spatial” pieces have pitch doublings all the time, and we don’t think of them as “sound traveling.” In order to make the point, then, must the exchanges happen fast?

It is difficult to answer this question, since I establish certain behaviors from the beginning: the piano literally stirs the ensemble through big accented chords. The repetition of the arpeggio figure at the end of movement 1 reinforces the concept that the piano continues to rouse its new forces through the breadth of its gesture. Energy, after all, is a personality trait of the piano, and I listened to its needs.

To counter these high energy passages, the second movement offers some calmer passages. Two of my favorite passages are the opening of the Ad Lib. section and the high piano tremolos at Reh. H and J. Here, the piano does—for moments here and there—fuse with the others. In the relative stillness, they resonate as one body, and the piano relishes its moment of glory as it has become something else.
Dreams of a Young Piano
in two movements
for solo piano, two percussionists, and ensemble

Yiheng Yvonne Wu
2014/2016
Dreams of a Young Piano

Performance Notes

General Notes
• Score is in C.
• Accidentals apply only to the notes they immediately precede, not to the entire measure.
• The piece may be performed either as two movements or with movement 1 alone.

Instrumentation
Solo Piano (with light preparation as specified below)
Percussion 1
Percussion 2

The remaining nine players form the ensemble, divided into three groups of three. Pitch and musical materials are often related among members of the same group. The groups should not be apparent in the seating arrangement—all nine players should be evenly spaced in a semi-circle (see below).

Group 1:
   Flute in C 1
   Flute in C 2
   Clarinet in Bb 1

Group 2:
   Clarinet in Bb 2/Bass clarinet
   Horn in F
   Trumpet in Bb

Group 3:
   Violin
   Cello
   Contrabass
**Piano Preparation**
Preparation: the strings in the top octave of the piano (C to C) should be dampened so that the resultant sound is mostly the noise of the hammers. Some pitch may come through so that the perception of gesture and contour is possible, but the sound should be predominantly woody and percussive. The sound should not be metallic or “twang”-y. Effective dampening objects might include a long sock or socks filled with rice, or a heavy block of wood or some other material, wrapped with felt or soft cloth. The dampening object should be heavy enough to prevent any metallic buzzing.

**Percussion 1:**
Marimba
4 Woodblocks or pieces of wood (lowest is much lower, possibly unique in timbre)
Glockenspiel (sounds two 8ves higher)
Chimes
Crotales — lower octave (sounds two 8ves higher)

additional instruments in second movement:
3 Low/Medium Metals — medium to high resonance; preferably unpitched
Medium tam-tam
Small bass drum or large tom-tom

**Percussion 2:**
Vibraphone
2 woodblocks, , medium-high and medium
5 Almglocken, with pitches as specified
Crotales — lower octave (sounds two 8ves higher)

additional instruments in second movement:
3 Low/Medium Metals — medium to high resonance; preferably unpitched
Triangle
Small-to-medium tam-tam
Timpano (29-inch for A2)
AD LIBITUM section (beginning of movement 2)
The solo piano leads this section. Tempo is flexible, but while the dynamic is soft, there should be a foreshadowing of the energy at Reh. K, which is of the same material.

indicates a short, flexible pause. Duration is flexible but should be shorter than a sixteenth rest.

Since the breath has a durational value in addition to the durations of the neighboring notes, they should disrupt any sense of regular meter in the Ad Lib. passage.

Cues: The conductor, following the piano solo, cues entrances of the ensemble. From measures 12-14, the conductor gives one cue for each ensemble trio, who then performs their 2 bars independently from the rest. The leader of each trio leads and conducts as necessary.

Microtonal pitches
There are two categories of microtonal pitches.

1) The first set indicates quartertones, 50 cents above or below equal-tempered pitches. Very occasionally (in the flutes), arrows are attached to these quartertone accidentals. In such cases, they are to be very slightly sharper or flatter than the given quartertone and need not be more specific than that; these inflections are mostly for timbral changes.

2) “Regular” (semitone) accidentals are given but with up and down arrows; accompanied by (X, #, +/- #).

Where this notation is used, the microtonal pitches are the tunings of specific partials of given fundamentals. Shown with each partial is its fundamental pitch (given as a letter), the partial number the pitch represents, and the number of cents flat or sharp, measured from equal temperament. The accidental accompanying each partial — either a sharp, flat, or natural with up- or down-arrow — shows the equal-tempered pitch from which the number of cents should be measured and the direction (flatter or sharper). (Note that the arrow direction and the +/- are redundant.)

The example here comes from mvt 1, measure 13. This pitch is the 13th partial of a C fundamental (which is played simultaneously by the Clarinet 1. It is 41 cents sharper than an equal-tempered A flat.

To aid in tuning, each trio group of the ensemble plays partials of the same fundamental. In many (but not all) cases, one player of the group is playing the fundamental, though often in a much higher octave than the fundamental would be in relation to the given partial. Note that partials may also be octave-transposed in relation to other partials.

Notation
speed up and slow down, respectively, within given total duration

Microtonal Notation:  
- Quartertone: ± #  
- Semitone: ± ♯  

Score:

Notation:

- Duration: ♩  
- Speed up: ♤  
- Speed down: ♦  

Microtonal:pitches:

- C major (C)  
- D major (D)  
- E major (E)  
- F sharp major (F♯)  
- G major (G)  
- A major (A)  
- B flat major (B♭)
Strings

- Overpressure: extreme pressure to create severe distortion of timbre and pitch

Scr.

- Scratch tone: produced with bow friction; resultant sound should be mostly scratch noise and very little pitch. Often accompanies overpressure marking, but sometimes appears independently.

s.p.

- sul ponticello. Bow close to the bridge (though not on the bridge) so that some distortion of the timbre and pitch results (metallic sound).

p.s.p.

- poco sul pont. only a small amount of timbral distortion; no pitch distortion

m.s.p.

- molto sul pont. Bow immediately beside the bridge (but not on the bridge) so that a high degree of both timbral and pitch distortion results.

\[
\text{\begin{tabular}{c|c|c}
\hline
\text{4} & \text{3} & \text{2} \\
\hline
\text{1} & \text{2} & \text{3} \\
\hline
\end{tabular}}
\]

- x noteheads indicate the dampening of the strings with the left hand. Most often used with pizzicato. The string number is given along with the approximate pitch, which should indicate the relative position on the fingerboard for the dampening left hand.
N.B.: Accidentals apply only to the notes they immediately precede.
flickering softly, in the distance
G Slightly Slower $\frac{\text{d}}{\text{r}} \approx \text{ca.} 76$

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Bb-Cl. 1

Bb-Cl. 2

Hn.

Br. Tpt.

Vln.

Vc.

Ch.

Glk.

Vib.

Pno.

Slightly Slower $\frac{\text{d}}{\text{r}} \approx \text{ca.} 76$

Poco cresc.

Poco cresc.

Poco cresc.

Poco cresc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Bb. Cl. 1
B. Cl.
Hn.
Bb. Tpt.
Vln.
Vc.
Cb.
Vib.
Mrb.
Pno.
loco (loco)

to Clarinet in Bb
AD LIB. $\frac{3}{2} \text{ = ca. 126}$

Indistinct, blurred but not muddy

Half-pedaling throughout

Vl.

Timp. Solo AD LIB. $\frac{3}{2} \text{ = ca. 63}$ with subtle brightness in attack
Yiheng Yvonne Wu
Dreams of a Young Piano
2014
\( J \) \( \text{d = ca.} 50 \) flexible, broad, floating

\textit{rallentando\ldots}
... molto...

K 63
B. Cl.

B-Cl.

Vln.

Hn.

B-Tpt.

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Vc.

Ch.

Pers. 1

Timp.

Phn.
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