

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Contemporary Piano Repertoire:

A Performer's Guide to Three Pieces by Stockhausen, Berio and Carter

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

Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

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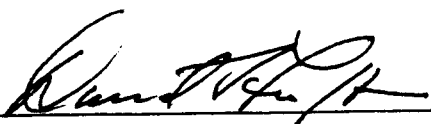
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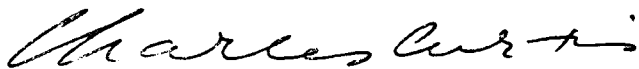
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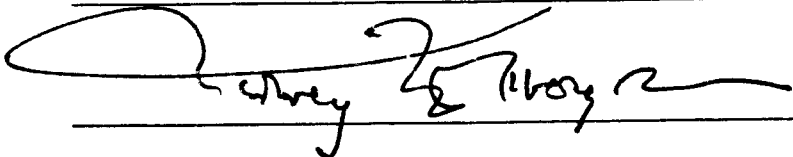
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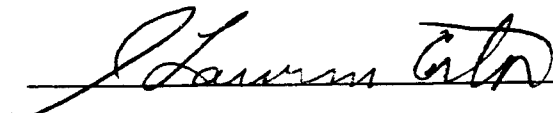
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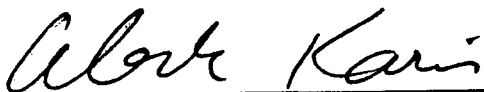
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All music which comes from the heart is modern music.

Edward Steuermann

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Contemporary Piano Repertoire:
A Performer's Guide to Three Pieces by Stockhausen, Berio and Carter

by
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Doctor of Musical Arts (Contemporary Music Performance)

University of California, San Diego, 2004

Professor Aleck Karis, Chair

This dissertation focuses on three piano pieces which had a central role in my doctoral recitals at UCSD: *Klavierstück IX* (1961) by Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Sequenza IV* (1966) by Luciano Berio, and *Night Fantasies* (1980) by Elliott Carter. I discuss here some of the challenges I faced in the process of learning these works, and provide suggestions on how to practice and perform them.

I. Introduction

I believe that there are books, films, works of art and pieces of music that have the power to change one's life. The three piano pieces that I will be discussing in this dissertation have certainly changed my life. The challenges that they offer to the performer and the listener have always been fascinating to me, and this is why I chose them to be the pivotal works of my doctoral recitals at the University of California, San Diego. Included in the solo works I have prepared and performed in the last four years are *Klavierstück IX* (1961) by Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Sequenza IV* (1966) by Luciano Berio, and *Night Fantasies* (1980) by Elliott Carter. These three piano pieces are among the most discussed and analyzed piano works of the second half of the twentieth century. I do not intend to provide an extensive analysis of them in this study; instead, the purpose of this dissertation is to discuss some of the challenges I faced in the process of learning these three major piano works, and to provide suggestions on how to practice and perform them.

Klavierstück IX by Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Sequenza IV* by Luciano Berio, and *Night Fantasies* by Elliott Carter are emphatically not sight-readable piano pieces; their notation may even intimidate some pianists. This is simply because these works require a preliminary study of the score itself, with individualized learning strategies in order to overcome the barriers imposed by their complex notation and intricacies of the musical language. These pieces are not necessarily more technically demanding than, for example, Schumann's *Kreisleriana* or a difficult Beethoven Sonata, although they require several specific techniques not used in earlier works. Among them are clusters and sustained notes, as well as musical problems related to learning and

rehearsing, such as rhythmic complexities. However, after the pianist develops a strategy to overcome the intricacies of the score, and to learn the special techniques, the practice that follows has much in common with learning a large piano work like Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit* or a Chopin Sonata. After all, it is the same instrument.

The three piano pieces discussed here were composed in the last forty years. Music composition changed tremendously during this time. New technologies were created, as well as personal compositional systems, and new techniques of producing sound were created to the extent that it was almost as if the composers were trying to "rebuild" the instruments. Indeed, after World War II, European society had to be rebuilt, and music composition, to a certain extent, had to be reinvented. Some composers extrapolated methods from previous compositional models. Many others tried to find their own system, or worked with chance operations, or avoided any system at all. Composers, whether following older compositional systems or trying to build something from scratch, were indeed struggling to find an individual voice in a postwar world, where reconstruction and rethinking of old values was viewed as a necessity. What is certain is that after the devastation of Europe through two massive wars, composers approached their task as one of reconstruction, looking simultaneously to the past for models and to the future as a new hope. They started to take a fresh look at things and places, and in that time the connections between European composers and American composers became much more reciprocal than in the early years of the century, when composers from America and from other parts of the world went to Europe to study, but Europeans would rarely have interest in studying in America. After World War II, however, many European composers began to attend music festivals in the United States, and established connections on that

side of the Atlantic. This exchange led to a shared vision of new music creation, if not a shift away from European hegemony in the field.

Composers such as Stockhausen, Berio and Carter, who were young men in the 1950s, started to take a new, unprejudiced look at the piano with such a fresh idealism that one would believe that it was the first time they had seen one. We could imagine them asking themselves:

Here we have an instrument capable of producing eighty-eight sounds with twelve evenly spaced pitches in each of seven octaves plus a couple of extras at one end, and this instrument is playable from very soft to very loud, has three foot-pedals, each of which can do a variety of things, and has a set of levers (the keyboard) arranged in such-and-such a way so that the performer can get at things easily with both hands. It does not have a swell box nor any other way to keep a given sound, once begun, from decaying in a straight line until damped. What can I do with it?¹

This unbiased look at the piano led Stockhausen, Berio and Carter, among others, to expand the limits of the instrument and revolutionize its possibilities. A high level of virtuosity is required from the pianist, although this virtuosity is not an extension of the nineteenth-century *virtuoso* tradition. Virtuosity in twentieth century piano works is inscribed in the core of the musical content. The technical difficulties brought by these composers to the piano repertoire are part of their compositional experimentation. They seemed to have used the piano as their canvas of musical explorations. Indeed, according to Charles Rosen,

music for keyboard is a traditional outlet for experimentation: it allows an immediate control over the musical idea (...); the limitation of tone-color and range is a positive advantage even for composers for whom timbre is not a compositional element clearly subordinate to pitch – the limited timbre of the piano acts as a focus. Music for piano has therefore become, starting with Beethoven, a convenient form of announcing a revolution in style: Schumann, Liszt, Brahms, Debussy and Schoenberg are the most conspicuous examples of composers who used the piano for this purpose.²

¹ Burge, 1990, p. 142.

² Rosen, 1986, p. 85.

In this dissertation I will be discussing how these three composers, Stockhausen, Berio and Carter, explored new possibilities of the piano in *Klavierstück IX*, *Sequenza IV* and *Night Fantasies*. The discussion is engaged from a performer's point of view; it is also the result of my thoughts as a performer interested in teaching. While writing the chapters that follow, I tried to ask myself what would be the most important points to present to students or peers if I wanted to advise them on what to do in order to learn these pieces effectively. Very often, in contemporary music, this communication happens in a mentor-student relationship, hence, between someone who has the expertise, usually a performer who has played the piece before, and a disciple who is trying to figure out the best way to succeed at this endeavor. This process usually entails highly personalized approaches. Although the suggestions I present in this dissertation are based primarily on my personal experience, I hope they will be of some help to pianists interested in playing these pieces in the future. Each chapter of this dissertation will focus on one of the three pieces; a brief biography of the composers will be included. The last chapter will bring a personal view of issues related to performing contemporary music.

II. *Klavierstück IX* - Karlheinz Stockhausen

A. Biography

Karlheinz Stockhausen was born in Mödrath, on August 22, 1928. He came from a family of farmers. His mother died in 1941, after seven years in a sanatorium. His father was the village schoolmaster; for this reason he had to collect party contributions during the Third Reich and was answerable to the Gestapo. The young Karlheinz would accompany his father on these errands, until 1939, when his father went to the war. Karlheinz's father died fighting in Hungary in 1945. It is worth knowing about Stockhausen's early years, so maybe his music becomes more intelligible to us, who have not lived in such extreme times. At least we can better understand "his dislike of regular rhythm, which reminds him of Nazi radio, and consequent preference for rhythms in which the 'players are floating freely'".³

Stockhausen started to learn the piano at age of six, and later the violin and oboe too. He studied at the Cologne Musikhöhschule between 1947 and 1951, and he simultaneously studied Musicology and Philosophy at the University of Cologne. During that time, in order to maintain himself, Stockhausen played for jazz groups and even toured with a magician working as an improviser-pianist. Although he was already composing during his school years, and studying composition with Frank Martin after 1950, the decisive *stimulus* came from his encounter with Olivier Messiaen's *Mode de valeurs et d'intensités* at Darmstadt in 1951. Back in Cologne, Stockhausen finished his thesis on Bartók's *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion*,

³ Harvey, 1975, p. 9.

which gave him the diploma as a secondary school teacher of music. By then, music composition started to assume more importance in his life. That was when he wrote *Kreuzspiel* (1951) and *KontraPunkte* (1952), both for piano-based ensemble. During this period Stockhausen wrote his first essay on electronic music, and in 1956 he composed his notable *Gesang der Jünglinge* for vocal and synthesized sounds on tape. He also started working on his large project of composing 11 pieces for solo piano – the *Klavierstücke*. In 1953 he lectured in Darmstadt for the first time, and since then, his influence has extended over generations of composers from various parts of the world.

In 1958 the composer made his first visit to the United States, and, partly as a result of John Cage's influence, Stockhausen's music became more relaxed in its density and notational exactitude. This flexibility also reflects the composer's interest in electronic music, which led him to hear music in a different way. From this period are *Carré* for four choral-orchestral groups (1960), *Kontakte* for piano, percussion and tape (1960) and *Momente* for soprano, choir and instruments (1964, extended 1972). Practically all Stockhausen's works written after 1970 have been thematic and with intense drama. *Trans* (1971) requires the orchestra to be bathed in violet light and seen through a veil; *Inori* (1974) has one or two mimes executing hieratic attitudes in synchrony with the orchestra; and *Sirius* (1977) is a theatrical work for four costumed musicians and synthesized tape. The composer currently lives in Kürten, near Cologne, where every year since 1998 he has held the Stockhausen Courses, where many composers and performers from around the world attend compositional classes as well as open rehearsals and concerts.

B. *Klavierstück IX*

Klavierstück IX was originally composed in 1954 and went through several revisions until its final version in 1961. Along with *Klavierstücke X* and *XI*, it closes the cycle of eleven piano pieces that represent Stockhausen's largest project at that time. During those years the composer was already very interested in electronic music, and wrote, among other works, *Gesang der Jünglinge* and *Kontakte*. *Klavierstück IX* was dedicated to the pianist Aloys Kontarsky, who premiered the piece in May of 1962.

Although for solo piano, without any technological addition, *Klavierstück IX* explores the instrument in a way that simulates electronic sounds. The work is rooted in mathematical ratios, mainly based on the formula 8×3 , expressing durations organized according to the celebrated Fibonacci⁴ sequence. The work proposes two basic musical ideas, the first one elaborating the concept of periodicity, with mechanical gestures and vertical organization, and the second, aperiodic, with music that is more lyrical, horizontal in emphasis and intuitively timed. Each of these aspects, as well as their technical difficulties, will be discussed below.

Periodicity versus Aperiodicity

The composer wrote that *Klavierstück IX* "brings together different forms of musical time: periodicity, and a whole series of degrees of aperiodicity. Rigid,

⁴ Leonardo Fibonacci, 1170-1240. The *Fibonacci sequence* is the sequence 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, 144, ... generated by the rule $f_1 = f_2 = 1$, $f_{n+1} = f_n + f_{n-1}$. In this sequence, each number is the sum of the two preceding numbers. It has proved extremely fruitful and appears in many different areas of mathematics and science. It was first introduced by Fibonacci of Pisa in a problem involving the growth of a population of rabbits. (<http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Mathematicians/Fibonacci.html>).

‘monotonous’ events are transformed into flexible, ‘polytonous’ ones; sometimes the two are abruptly juxtaposed, sometimes they intermingle in constantly fresh conjunctions.”⁵

The piece starts with a single four-note chord, formed by the superposition of two intervals of a perfect fourth (C# - F# and G - C), each a tritone apart. This chord is repeated 140 times in tempo of ♩ = 160, in a continuous *diminuendo* from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo*. The repetition of this chord represents the vertical material of *Klavierstück IX* (Figure 1). The chord, with minimal variations, reappears throughout the piece, always at the same speed.

♩ = 160

142
8

Akkord 139x in regelmäßigen Abständen:
dimin. ganz kontinuierlich ohne Rück-
sicht auf nicht ansprechende Tasten bei
geringer werdender Intensität.

ff f poco a poco diminuendo — — — — — *pppp*

I.P.

Figure 1 – *Klavierstück IX* – repetitive chords (bar 1)

Contrasting with this vertical material, a chromatic ascendant line is juxtaposed in measure 3 of the score, representing the more lyrical, horizontal material of the piece (Figure 2). The tempo changes from ♩ = 160 to ♩ = 60. It still uses an absolutely precise notation of the duration of the large notes. However, the rhythm created by the small notes is interpreted differently by each pianist, and it generates an improvisatory-like sound.

⁵ Stockhausen, in Wörner, 1973, p. 36.

This passage is indeed a transitional material between the rigid repetitive chords from the beginning of the piece, and the improvisatory material from the end of the work, between periodicity and aperiodicity.



Figure 2 – *Klavierstück IX* – horizontal line (bar 3 – ♩ = 60)

It is seemingly improvised, yet still strict in notation and performance. From the extreme periodicity of its beginning (Figure 1), *Klavierstück IX* gradually moves towards a total aperiodicity at the end, embodied in the more improvisatory disposition of fast and dynamically chaotic notes across measured time (Figure 3). One of the difficulties of the piece resides in this gradual slippage from measured to improvised gestures.

In the final section of *Klavierstück IX*, the horizontal material becomes much freer rhythmically, allowing the performer to elaborate his or her own rhythm. In the figure below, the larger notes are to be played in louder dynamics, while the small notes are supposed to be played *ppp*, *pp* or *p* (Figure 3). The small notes may be grouped by the performer *ad libitum*, but basically fast, going from more regular groups to very irregular dispositions at the end of the piece.



Figure 3 – *Klavierstück IX* – fast figurations in irregular groups (bars 141 – 147)

There is one aspect of this periodicity/aperiodicity duality that I would like to address here. The measured chords at the beginning of the piece may suggest control and organization, while the improvised gestures at the end may imply a more human, less mechanical motion. This is true if we focus only on the parameter of rhythm; however, the acoustic effect suggests the exact opposite. The repetitive chords, played over a bed of resonance created by the damper pedal that is depressed for the whole length of the passage, generate a much less-controlled field of reverberation. Sympathetic vibrations occur, as well as involuntary minor emphasis on one or another of the four notes of the chord repeated. When performing this passage I cannot help thinking of how out of the pianist's control the resulting sound actually is. Even with great evenness of attacks and control of the *diminuendo*, the 140 repeated chords in the mid-lower register of the piano bring

inherent variation and produce an idiosyncratic envelope of sound that surprises both performer and listener. This instability of acoustic effect does not happen at the end of the piece. There, the rhythm is improvised, but the notes, played on the high register of the instrument, do not generate much sympathetic vibration. It is as if a bed of resonance is cleaned away at the very end, and the acoustic “chaos” of the beginning of the piece had been transformed into an improvised, yet acoustically stable line.

Rhythmic Challenges

One of the first challenges the pianist has to face when learning this piece is chord repetition. This should be done in an exact tempo of ♩ = 160, with machine-like precision. The performer should be able to repeat the chord 140 times without changing the speed of the attacks, simultaneously managing a long and gradual diminuendo from *fortissimo* to *pianissimo*. Practicing with the metronome is the surest way to achieve the desired evenness of attacks in this passage. My choice for counting these 140 attacks was:

$$\left[13 \times \left(\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \right) \right] + \left[3 \times \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \right] \text{ then } \text{♩}.$$

Chart 1 – *Klavierstück IX* – option of counting 140 attacks in bar 1

I found it useful to count in three eighth-notes for some time so I could easily keep track of the dotted quarter that closes the first group of repetitive chords while keeping the eighth-notes even. This subdivision is only a tool for counting, and should never cause any accent on the groups of eighth-notes.

Control of dynamics and evenness of attacks are only the first challenge. The next step is to be able to alternate between 160 and 60, since these two *tempi* happen throughout the piece and are often juxtaposed without transition. In figure 4 below, we see a passage where these two *tempi* are constantly alternating. This alternation of metronomic marks may be seen as related to electronic music, which can cut precisely between *tempi* at any moment.

The musical score for Klavierstück IX, bars 79-87, illustrates the alternation between two tempi: 160 and 60. The score is written for piano and bass staves. The tempo markings are $\text{♩} = 160$ and $\text{♩} = 60$. The dynamics range from *ppp* to *ff*. The time signatures are $\frac{1}{8}$, $\frac{5}{16}$, $\frac{3}{8}$, $\frac{8}{16}$, $\frac{1}{8}$, $\frac{3}{16}$, and $\frac{4}{8}$. The score shows a complex rhythmic pattern with frequent changes in tempo and dynamics.

Figure 4 – *Klavierstück IX* – alternation between *tempi* 160 and 60 (bars 79 – 87).

The way I practiced these two *tempi* was by memorizing the unit of 120 (as half of a second), which I could easily check on my watch at any moment. I would practice this usually away from the piano. Having 120 internalized, I would subdivide it into four, or thirty-second-note = 480. By keeping the same speed, but changing the accents from groups of four (120 each accent) to groups of three, one gets $\text{♩} = 160$, as shown on Chart 2. Practicing this way made me achieve confidence when alternating *tempi* on *Klavierstück IX*.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 50px; height: 15px; display: inline-block;"></div>	= 120
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 50px; height: 15px; display: inline-block; position: relative;"> <div style="position: absolute; left: 0; top: 0; width: 15px; height: 15px; border: 1px solid black;"></div> <div style="position: absolute; left: 15px; top: 0; width: 15px; height: 15px; border: 1px solid black;"></div> <div style="position: absolute; left: 30px; top: 0; width: 15px; height: 15px; border: 1px solid black;"></div> </div>	= $480 : 4 = 120$
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 50px; height: 15px; display: inline-block; position: relative;"> <div style="position: absolute; left: 0; top: 0; width: 15px; height: 15px; border: 1px solid black;"></div> <div style="position: absolute; left: 15px; top: 0; width: 15px; height: 15px; border: 1px solid black;"></div> </div>	= $480 : 3 = 160$

Chart 2 – *Klavierstück IX* – switching *tempi* between 120 and 160

Other Musical materials

The main musical materials have been mentioned above: a mechanical, vertical musical material, which is well represented at the very beginning of the piece, and contrasting with this, a more lyrical, improvisatory horizontal material, found at the end of the piece. Besides these two musical ideas there are also sequences of polyphonic character (Figure 5), a passage with continuous trills (Figure 6), and a section with *staccato* chords played over a bed of resonance created by one chord held by the *sostenuto* pedal (Figure 7).

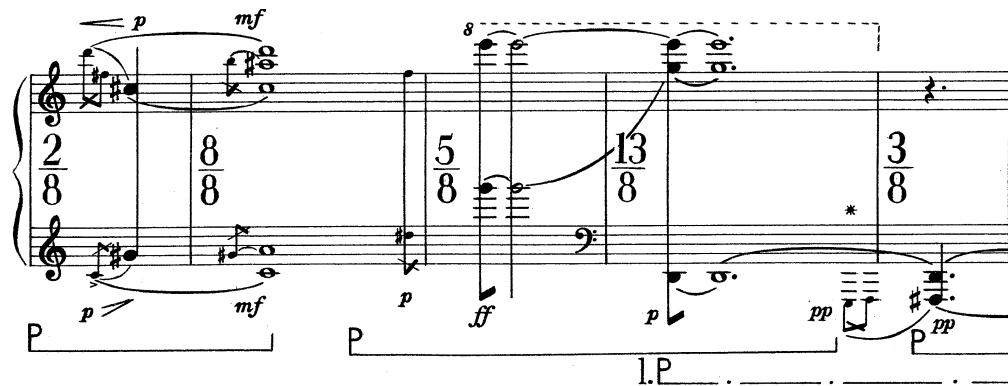


Figure 5 – *Klavierstück IX* – sequence of polyphonic character (bars 21-25)

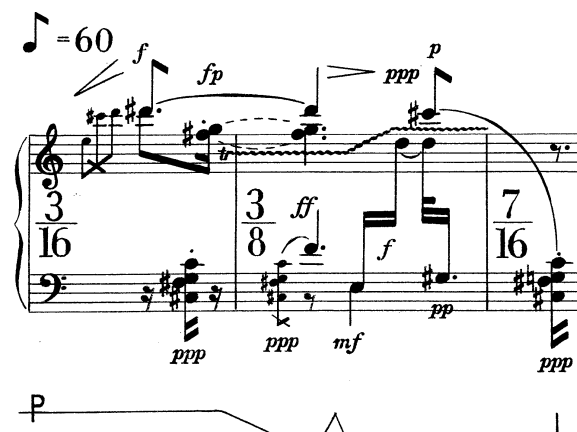


Figure 6 – *Klavierstück IX* – passage with trills (bars 64-66)

Figure 7 shows a musical score for Klavierstück IX, bars 94-104. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 8/8 time. It features staccato chords over a bed of resonance. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 60. Dynamics range from ppp to f. The score includes various time signatures: 1/8, 5/8, 3/8, 2/8, and 1/8. A cluster of notes is marked 'cluster stumm' and 'bis' with a tempo of 160. A pedal point is marked 'ossia 3. Pedal'.

Figure 7 – *Klavierstück IX* - *staccato* chords played over a bed of resonance (bars 94-104)

In all these passages the pianist needs to keep a constant internal tempo of ♩=60. They occur in alternation with the mechanical material from the beginning of the piece. Among the technical difficulties of these passages are the constant change of dynamics and register. I would practice these passages in a slower tempo, trying to prepare each note or chord as quickly as possible, while exaggerating the dynamics. This way, when playing in tempo, the hands go directly to the next attack. For the trills, I would separate the trill, work on the passage without it, and add it in a slower tempo afterwards. It is essential to develop a high level of independence of voices in one hand in order to perform these trills in the soft dynamics as suggested

by the composer. In addition to these technical difficulties, a good command of the three pedals is of extreme importance, and this will be discussed separately in the next section.

Simulation of electronic sounds

As already mentioned, Stockhausen composed *Klavierstück IX* in a period when he was working intensively with electronic music. One of his interests regarding electronic music was to find ways to change the natural characteristics of each musical sound. For example, Stockhausen was interested in changing or hiding the attack of a sound, knowing that the attack makes it possible to identify the timbre of a musical instrument. In electronic music Stockhausen could choose any timbre and be in control of the other levels of the sound envelope independently of the attack.⁶ The composer was searching for these new ways of producing sound when he wrote *Klavierstück IX*, and I believe that he was inspired by electronic sounds when he composed this solo piano piece. In it, Stockhausen prescribes a meticulous use of all three pedals on the modern piano as a tool for simulating electronic effects. These effects are not apparent from the notation, and are the result of careful decisions made by the composer. Most of them are non-traditional, and sometimes are non idiomatic, since the performer makes use of all possibilities of the piano in order to produce sounds that are unconventional. These effects can be extremely interesting (and challenging) for the performer. When “odd” sounds need to be created by the

⁶ In electronic music the properties of a sound are described as the “envelope” of the sound, consisting of the attack, decay, sustain, and release.

performer, he or she is asked to make decisions based on the listening experience, and the work itself is revealed to be more creative.

Sometimes the performer is asked to gradually add the *una corda* pedal, as in the very beginning of the piece, at the repetition of the opening chords (see Figure 1). This effect of the *una corda* added to a bed of resonance helps with the *diminuendo*, but more than that, it generates a different aura of sound, an effect of gradual filtering that may be seen as inspired by electronic music.

Another effect can be perceived in measure 16, when the fast use of the right pedal, associated with the contrasting dynamics, suggests an effect of sounds unnaturally cut off (Figure 8), and one can also relate these effects with electronic sounds. Once more, these effects are not apparent from the score, and do not consist of pianistic gestures *per se*. The resultant sound is like an attempt to create electronic sounds in an acoustic instrument.

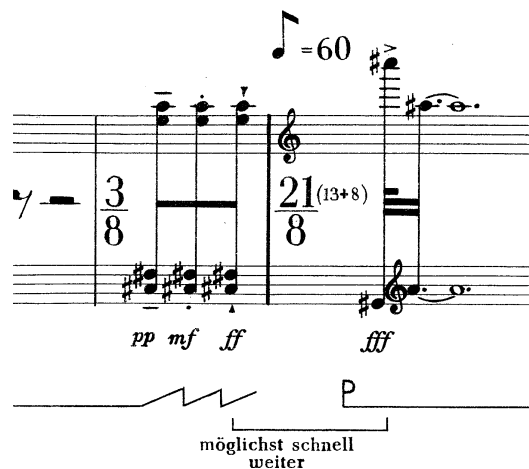


Figure 8 – *Klavierstück IX* - effect of electronic sounds created by fast change of pedal associated with contrast of dynamics (*pp*, *mf* and *ff*) and articulation (bar 16 – in 3/8)

The gradual depression and release of the pedal in bar 58 associated with the continuous trill and the *rubato* (*accel* and *rit*) on the sharp attacks of the left hand, as

seen in figure 9, create a bed of resonance that can also be related to electronic sounds. The resonance changes at each *staccato* chord, in a way that cannot be totally predicted by the pianist. This acoustical unpredictability is accentuated by the continuous trill on the right hand. In addition, the sudden cut off by the chord in *sforzando* at the end of this bar can be understood as an instrumental counterpart to sounds that are unnaturally cut off in electronic music.

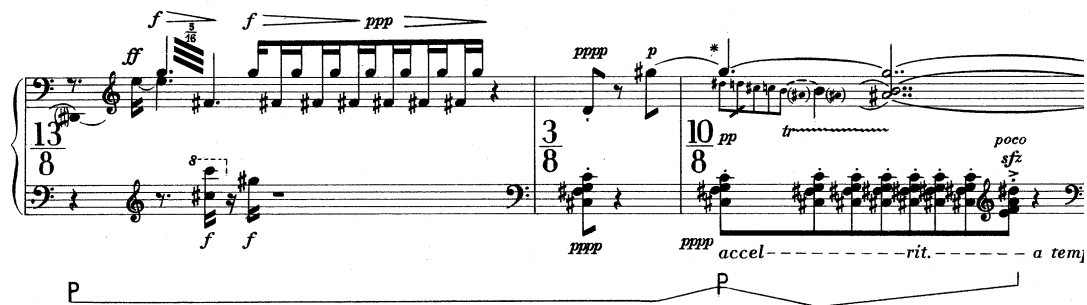


Figure 9 – *Klavierstück IX* – gradual release of pedal (bars 56-58)

In addition to effects with the *una corda* pedal and the damper pedal, the middle pedal (*sostenuto*) is often used in *Klavierstück IX* to create unusual effects of resonance that can be linked to electronic music, such as the *sostenuto* pedal holding the chord from bars 95 to 109 (see figure 7). A bed of resonance is created in both examples by a meticulous use of the pedals. This way the performer can create the illusion of electronic sounds in a work for solo piano.

Understanding the different materials present in *Klavierstück IX*, developing a level of confidence on switching back and forth between different *tempi*, keeping perfect control of the pedals, knowing about the simulation of electronic sounds and, most importantly, listening carefully to the resonance of the strings, are for me the keys to a successful performance of this piano piece by Stockhausen.

III. *Sequenza IV* - Luciano Berio

A. Biography

Luciano Berio was born in Oneglia, Italy, in 1925. Oneglia (today Imperia) is in the region of Liguria, close to the French border. During his teenage years, Berio thought of choosing a seafaring career, but he soon changed his mind and decided to follow the steps of his father and grandfather, both organists and composers, in a career of music. The piano was Luciano Berio's first instrument, and he actually had the ambition to become a concert pianist. However, a serious injury to his hand, which happened during the turbulent last months of the World War II in Northern Italy, was the end to his ambition. He then entered the Milan Conservatory, where he studied counterpoint with Giulio Paribeni, composition with Giorgio Ghedini, and orchestral conducting with Carlo Maria Giulini. It was in Milan where he met the American mezzo-soprano Cathy Berberian, with whom he had many years of successful musical collaborations.

In 1952 Berio studied with Luigi Dallapiccola at the Tanglewood Music Festival in the United States. Dallapiccola was the first Italian composer to adopt the twelve-tone method, and became a decisive influence in Berio's music. Bruno Maderna also influenced Berio, as did Pierre Boulez and Henri Pousseur, whom he met at Darmstadt International Ferienkurse für Neue Musik.

After his studies at the Milan Conservatory, Berio worked for the Italian Broadcasting Corporation from 1953 until 1960, where he and Bruno Maderna founded the *Studio di Fonologia Musicale* in 1955. "Unimpressed by the *guerre des*

bouffons that was developing between Parisian *musique concrète* and the *Electronische Musik* of Cologne, Berio and Maderna set out to incorporate the best of both into the Milan studio.”⁶

In the 1960s Berio’s career moved him from Europe to the United States. He taught at Tanglewood, Mills College, and Harvard University. From 1965 to 1971 he was a member of the Composition faculty at Juilliard School in New York City. Perhaps his most important work from this period is *Sinfonia* (1968-69), for eight voices (the Swingle Singers) and large orchestra, which was commissioned by Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic.

Back to Europe in the 1970s, he composed three operas: *Opera* (1970), *La vera storia* (1977-81) and *Un re in ascolto* (1979-84), the last two with his long-time collaborator, Italo Calvino. These works redefined the limits of opera and theater. Berio’s continuous search for a unique voice that would unite technology with his own music led him to an invitation by Pierre Boulez to direct the electro-acoustic department at IRCAM, in Paris, which Berio did from 1974 until 1980. In 1987 he created *Tempo Reale*, a research institute for the study of computer applications to music and linguistics, in Florence. Berio was the recipient of a number of internationally prestigious awards, and in 1988 he became an Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music, London. The composer spent his last years in Tuscany, and died in May 2003.

⁶ Osmond-Smith, 1991, p.12.

B. *Sequenza IV*

Luciano Berio composed fourteen *Sequenze* for solo instruments. The first *Sequenza*, for flute, was composed in 1958 and the final *Sequenza*, for cello, was one of Berio's very last compositions. *Sequenza IV* for solo piano was composed in 1966. It is Berio's largest solo piano work. In the series of *Sequenze*, the piano piece is the one in which the composer returned to conventional notation, after using spatial notation in the *Sequenze* for flute, harp and voice. *Sequenza IV* was premiered by J. de Carvalho at Washington University in Saint Louis, Missouri, in 1966. Berio revised the score in 1993.

The *Sequenze* for solo instruments maintain common characteristics across the series: all pieces are highly virtuosic and express the composer's intention of pushing the instruments towards a kind of transfiguration. For Berio, virtuosity is used to expand the limits of the instrument and its traditional techniques. In the case of the monodic instruments, Berio seems to encourage a polyphonic mode of listening. In *Sequenza IXa* for clarinet solo, for example, a group of pitches alternate with a held note of considerable duration. The repetitive alternation of these two events creates a level of familiarity that invites the listener to engage in a polyphonic kind of listening. Different strategies are used for the various *Sequenze*, each one focusing on particular technical aspects of the instrument involved, but always trying to create an aura of polyphony.

In *Sequenza IV* for solo piano, the composer had to find different ways of dealing with his initial idea of fashioning polyphony over monophony, since the piano is by its nature a polyphonic instrument. Berio stated that

The title *Sequenza*... simply refers to the fact that the piece is mainly based upon sequences of harmonic characters and types of instrumental actions; particularly in *Sequenza II* for solo harp and *Sequenza IV* for piano, one could speak of polyphony of actions.⁷

Indeed, in his *Sequenza IV*, Berio uses the piano in a unique way: he superimposes two musical layers. One, a layer of resonance of long sustained chords, held by the *sostenuto* pedal, and another, a layer represented by short *staccato* chords, arpeggios, fast note passages, and a large variety of clusters played throughout the piece. Through these different layers of sound, Berio achieves his polyphonic goal in *Sequenza IV*.

The resonance layer is created by sustained chords held in the *sostenuto* pedal. What this pedal offers is the choice to freely select strings from the damping mechanism, which allows them to sympathetically vibrate with the notes played subsequently. Although this feature existed on concert pianos since the mid-nineteenth-century, it is only in the last fifty years that it was used as an integral part of a musical composition. Berio's use of the *sostenuto* pedal in his *Sequenza IV* was indeed absolutely novel, opening a new world of possibilities for composers, and this became a new challenge to performers.

Each aspect of this polyphony of textures will be discussed below, as well as the technical challenges that they bring, and how I dealt with them during my learning process.

⁷ Berio, 1969.

Resonance layer

The layer of resonance originating from chords held by the *sostenuto* pedal creates in itself a challenge for the performer. Each chord needs to be played with great accuracy and split-second coordination between hands and feet. The pedal must be depressed very quickly, sustaining each chord until the next one in this prolonged series of “slow” harmonies, which might be found a few bars away, but could also be several pages ahead. An incorrect chord thus sustained would create a whole section of inaccuracy, since each wrong note sustained could cause the different vibration of notes played in the *staccato* chords. If one note of the *staccato* chord is among the ones held by the pedal, it would keep ringing longer than the others.

The harmonies of the resonance layer are often played in soft dynamics, *piano* or *pianissimo*, which adds an extra level of difficulty. The fast foot movement must not interfere with the delicate touch on the keys. Figure 10 shows a chord played in *ppp*, held by the *sostenuto* pedal, over which the two *staccato* chords occur. At the beginning of each bar, Berio reminds the performer of the chord that is being held by a parenthetical-type notation using smaller notes. This helps the performer by reiterating the harmonics that constitute the resonance layer.

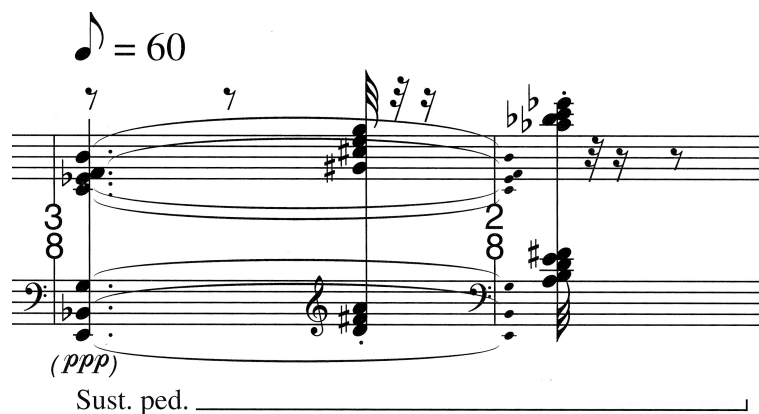


Figure 10 – *Sequenza IV* – chord held by the sostenuto pedal, on top of which two *staccato* chords are played (bars 3-4)

Sometimes the *sostenuto* pedal needs to be changed in an incredibly fast way, as we can see on Figure 11. Here the last chord of bar 8 is quickly retained by the *sostenuto* pedal, and the change for the pianist takes place in the space of only one thirty-second note (in the tempo of $\text{quarter note} = 40$). Immediately after this very fast hand-foot synchronized movement, a series of *staccato* chords are played.

At the resonance layer, sometimes the harmony is silently depressed and virtually sustained by the middle pedal. Most of times these slow harmonies are played in soft dynamics, but sometimes with loud attacks, in *sforzando*.

When practicing these held chords I would isolate them from the passage, practice each one on the appropriate dynamics, adding the *sostenuto* pedal immediately after the attack or silent depression of the chord. I believe that isolating each sustained chord from the other layers facilitates the learning process and enhances the level of accuracy and control of dynamics on the held chords, providing the performer more time to focus on the other layers of music, ultimately producing a higher level of confidence for the final result.

Figure 11 shows a musical score for *Sequenza IV*, bars 8-9. The score is in 3/8 time with a tempo marking of quarter note = 40. It features a fast change of chord held by the sostenuto pedal. The first chord is marked *sfz** and the second is marked *ppp*. The third chord is marked *pp*. The score includes a five-measure rest marked with a bracket and the number 5. The pedal markings are *Ped.* and *Sust. ped.*

Figure 11 – *Sequenza IV* – fast change of a chord held by the *sostenuto* pedal (bars 8-9)

Staccato* chords and *arpeggios

The *staccato* chords, along with the filigree passages, arpeggios, tremolos and clusters, form the other level of textural polyphony in *Sequenza IV*. The *staccato* chords should sound as short as possible. The opening two chords of the piece reveal the harmonic material of the entire work. While the first chord has a more chromatic nature, the second one is formed by a G Major chord superposed over a B-flat minor chord (Figure 12). “This opposition [chromaticism-diatonicism] is maintained through the entire piece: the chromatic group of chords generates, for example, the clusters, while the chords with consonant intervals generate the melodic gestures [filigree].”⁸ It was helpful for me to know about this connection among the different musical materials and its relation to the opening chords of *Sequenza IV*.

The attacks of the *staccato* chords are often alternated with rests of different lengths, and the constant tempo changes. These short attacks, often played on upbeats, add a syncopated feeling to the piece, an aspect that reflects Berio’s interest

⁸ Albéra in Rigoni, 1989, p. 114.

in jazz. Indeed, according to the composer, *Sequenza IV* should be “played with a touch of jazz, in a very physical way.”⁹ Already at the very beginning of the piece (Figure 12), the *staccato* chord at the last quintuplet of the second beat establishes this syncopated feeling that links Berio’s piano piece with certain jazz styles.

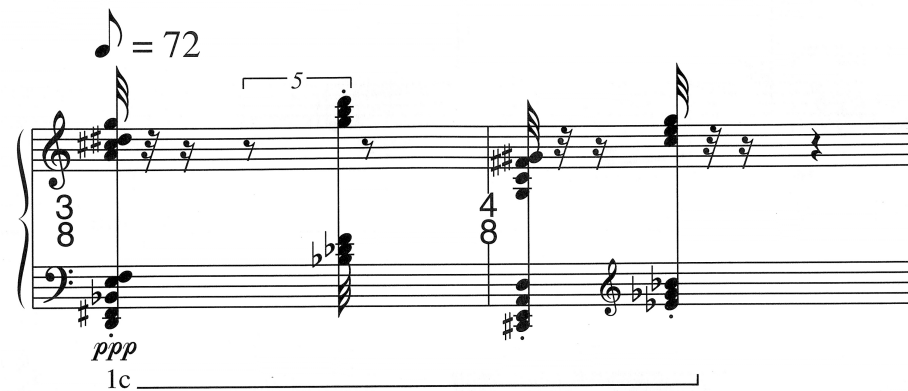


Figure 12 – *Sequenza IV* – syncopation at the beginning of the piece (bars 1-2)

I practiced these chords slowly at first, developing a muscle memory for each different chord. Then I would practice the transition between chords, so I could play each one extremely short, meaning a movement as fast as possible with immediate preparation of the following chord. I would think of relaxing in between chords, while, in fact, I was getting ready to play the next one. This way I developed confidence that I would be prepared to play the correct chords, with all notes absolutely together, in whatever dynamics the composer had chosen.

The chords also happen as arpeggios throughout the piece. These arpeggios should be played sometimes upwards, as usual, and downwards at other times (Figure 13). The arpeggios also happen in *crescendo* or *diminuendo*, as seen in Figure 14.

⁹ Berio in Stoianova, 1985, p. 405.

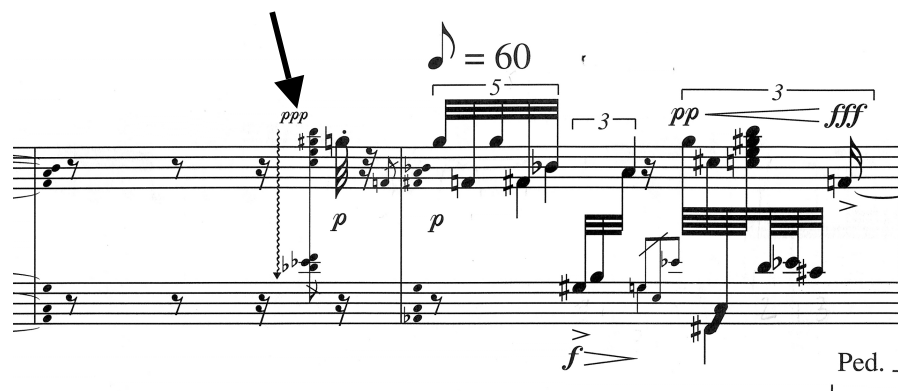


Figure 13 – *Sequenza IV* – arpeggio in descendent order of attacks (bars 119-120)

Figure 14 shows a musical score for two staves. The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 60$. The score includes dynamic markings *mf*, *ff*, *pp*, and *ppp*. There are also markings for *mf* and *ppp* with a slur. The piece concludes with a pedal point marked "Ped. _" and a sustain pedal marking "Sust. ped. _".

Figure 14 – *Sequenza IV* – diminuendo from *mf* to *pp* in one arpeggio (bars 103-104)

Filigree passages

The filigree passages, or groups of very fast notes that happen throughout *Sequenza IV*, can be seen as the melodic counterpart to the chords. These passages are often played in very fast *tempi*, assuming a lighter touch. As shown in Figure 15, the filigree passages specify dynamic contour, within a precisely notated rhythm. Despite the carefully notated score, and due to the light touch necessary to play these notes at their proper tempo, the filigree passages contribute to the improvisatory-like aspect of *Sequenza IV*.

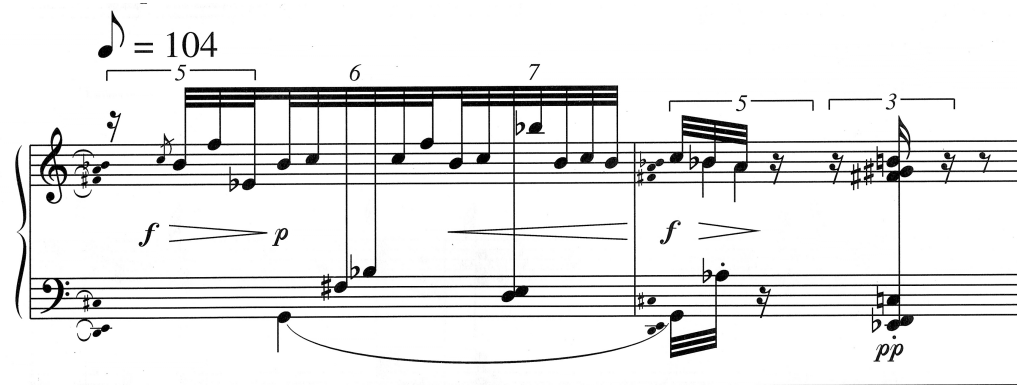


Figure 15 – *Sequenza IV* – filigree passage (bars 21-22)

The improvisatory effect of these fast passages does not imply any freedom on the choice of notes by the performer. On the contrary, because of the harmonies held by the *sostenuto* pedal, if a wrong note is eventually played, and if it happens to be part of the chord held, the mistake is actually amplified. As Berio once said, in a humorous tone, *Sequenza IV* is a piece in which “the pianist will not be able to play

Tremolos

In *Sequenza IV*, the basic harmonic material presented at the very beginning of the piece constitutes its basis for a number of transformations. The first *staccato* chords are later transformed into other gestures, like the tremolos. These happen in an obsessive manner on page 7 of the score, insisting on the notes F and D. The rhythm of the tremolos is clearly specified. There are subtle differences in the number of notes to be played in each beat, as seen in Figure 17. Here, there is an alternation between a subdivision in thirty-second-notes quintuplets and regular thirty-second-notes, and they are elaborated with rests and tied notes. The composer seems to be playing with these subtle rhythmic differences and providing some dynamic contour, which adds personality to these gestures. The tremolo on the piano repertoire has always been either a way to prolong an interval or chord, or a way to simulate the tremolos on string instruments. Considering the many piano transcriptions of orchestral works, it is natural that pianists practice tremolos and have them ready for display at any time. What Berio brings in his *Sequenza IV*, however, is a special kind of tremolo: it adds certain nervousness to the passage. The obsessive gesture of tremolos here does not stay at the background to the horizontal line elaborated by the left hand. Instead, the tremolos add a continuous tension to the passage, which is enhanced by the sudden accents and *crescendi* and *diminuendi*.

When practicing the tremolos, I would learn them separately from the other hand. First I would learn the rhythm of each group, with the suggested dynamic contour, and then play them slowly with the other line, and work on the polyrhythm formed between them. At first I would work on these passages bar by bar, or in small

sections of two to four bars, initially in slow *tempi*, than gradually getting to performance tempo.

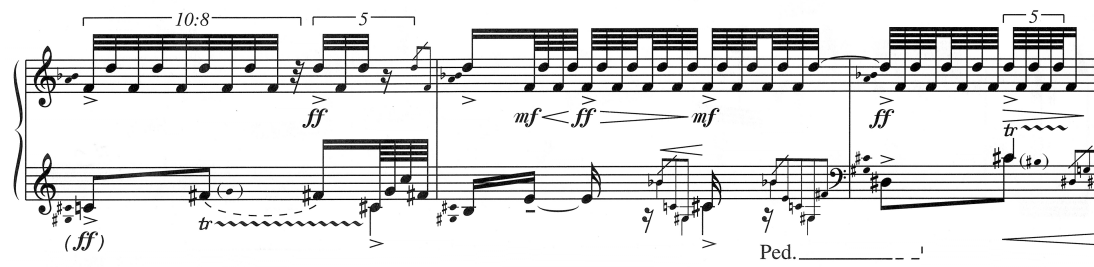


Figure 17– *Sequenza IV* – obsessive tremolo on F-D (bars 83-85)

Clusters

Berio's use of clusters in *Sequenza IV* (1966) was inspired by a work he admired, Stockhausen's *Klavierstück X* (1961). Immediately after listening to it for his first time, Berio began to think about composing a solo work for piano¹¹, which he quickly finished, hence *Sequenza IV*.

The pianist faces a new challenge when approaching the clusters of *Sequenza IV*. Instead of the usual intense attacks – as one might conceive clusters in the piano repertoire – *Sequenza IV* requires the performer to play clusters in a much more sensitive way. Quite often the clusters are played in very soft dynamics, like the ones that are part of the filigree passages already discussed. Some other times the clusters are to be played loud, either flat or rolling up or down, and also at different speeds, depending on the angle of the clusters' notation (Figure 18).

¹¹ Burge, 1990, p. 164.

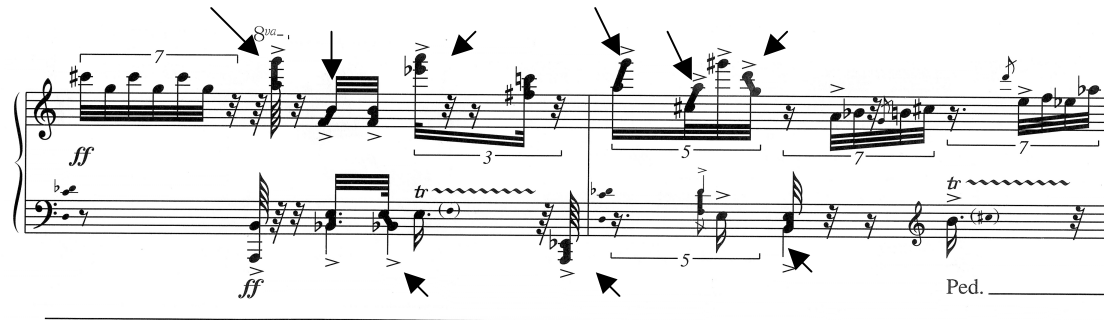


Figure 18 – *Sequenza IV* – clusters in different directions (bars 59-60)

The clusters in *Sequenza IV* are a huge challenge to the performer. In order to play clusters the pianist needs to keep hand and wrist straight, which leads undoubtedly to some muscular tension. Having one or two clusters in a section does not pose a problem, but when there are as many clusters as in this piece, the danger of getting too tense and developing muscular fatigue is high. The way I dealt with this problem was to practice the clusters slowly and in soft dynamics. Playing them in soft dynamics allows a more relaxed movement, while playing *forte* or *fortissimo* is an invitation to muscular fatigue. In addition to this practice in soft dynamics, I would also avoid repeating passages with many clusters without a long break between them. Very often when practicing a section we feel the need to repeat them, but I found that with so many clusters I had to really control myself and take long breaks between repetitions.

Tempo changes

The last technical challenge that I would like to address here is the constant tempo changes in *Sequenza IV*. On the very first page of the score one has to change *tempi* six times, in a subtle way, from $\text{♩} = 72$, to $\text{♩} = 60$, then $\text{♩} = 50$ and $\text{♩} = 40$, for example. What Berio achieved with these tempo changes is a *rallentando*

from bar to bar, but controlled by the composer: it is completely notated. When practicing these different *tempi* I would work separately with each tempo, then practice the transitions between *tempi*, and only at the end play a long section with more than 3 or 4 changes of speed.

In order to effectively learn and perform *Sequenza IV* by Luciano Berio the pianist needs to have great coordination of hands and feet, play *staccato* chords in extremely short attacks, be able to switch between different metronome indications, play fast note passages in elaborated rhythms, and play tremolos and clusters in a very sensitive way. It is indeed a work that invites the pianist to think and reevaluate technical questions of how to play the piano.

IV. *Night Fantasies* - Elliott Carter

A. Biography

American composer Elliott Carter was born on December 11, 1908 in New York City. He came from a prosperous family and his parents did not give much encouragement to his musical interests when he was a child, since they expected him to follow his father and become the head of the lace importing business that his grandfather had started. The young Elliott showed unusual musical talent from a very early age. He was able to identify and sing all the music in his family phonograph collection even before learning how to read or write. He eventually took piano lessons as a child, but the main focus of his early studies was French. Indeed, much of his childhood was spent in Europe, and he spoke French before he learned to write in English. This early training was decisive in Carter's fascination for languages and literature during his life.

In 1922 Elliott Carter entered the Horace Mann School and started to show interest in new music. In 1924 Carter met Charles Ives, whose music and ideas had a strong influence on Carter's development as a musician.

In 1926 Carter entered Harvard University, but he was soon frustrated with the music program there. He became a student of English Literature, Greek and Philosophy, and continued studying music (piano, oboe and *solfeggio*) at Longy School in Cambridge. He got a M.A. in Music at Harvard in 1932, after studying with Walter Piston and Gustav Holst. He then moved to Paris to study with Nadia

Boulanger, which he did for the next three years. Carter did not compose much during that time, since he was more interested in learning strict counterpoint.

Carter returned to New York City in 1935. During the war he worked for the Office of War Information (1943-44). Although he has held teaching positions at several Universities, his long-term position was at Juilliard School (1964-84). The composer has had extended residencies in Rome and Berlin. However, his main residence has been New York City (Manhattan) and, Waccabuc, north of New York City.

Elliott Carter has been one of the prime innovators of music for more than six decades. His music is usually characterized by its explorations of tempo relationships and texture. His early works can be considered neo-classical in style, although even there one can perceive an emotional intensity that contrasts with the light elegance of most neo-classical works. His Piano Sonata (1945-6) is Carter's first work that shows hints of his mature style.

Here, for the first time, Carter derives his musical language from the nature of the instrument, in particular its range, resonance and overtones, building a large-scale design on the contrast of very slow and very fast tempos, and merging improvisational-sounding continuity with a rigorous structural underpinning. Here also for the first time Carter revealed the dramatic scale and sweep that came to characterize many of his later works.¹²

In his Cello Sonata (1948) Carter left neo-classicism behind. Cello and piano seem in this work to be rhythmically independent. The piano plays in a steady, metronomic rigor, while the cello plays in an expressive *rubato* way. These rhythmic innovations, along with the innovative harmonies and the enormously expressive phrases, gave to Carter's music of that time a new breath and intensity that often would be found in his music afterwards.

¹² Schiff in "Elliott Carter" - <http://www.grovemusic.com>

B. *Night Fantasies*

Elliott Carter composed *Nigh Fantasies* for solo piano in 1980. It was commissioned by four pianists, Paul Jacobs, Gilbert Kalish, Ursula Oppens and Charles Rosen. In this work one finds a world containing dramatic contrasts of character, the use of all-interval chords, and a superimposition of rhythms framed by a large-scale polyrhythmic organization. *Night Fantasies* is a nearly half-hour work in one movement, with many technical challenges that will be discussed below. Despite the rigorous and detailed writing, *Night Fantasies* allows for individuality.

The unpredictable rate of change and the deliberate ambiguity of gesture are the essential elements of the music's poetic world—and they are also Carter's creative response to his commission. For *Night Fantasies* in its succession of fugitive visions creates a musical ambience that amplifies the tiniest facet of each interpreter's musical personality. The music is not a portrait of the performers, but it is composed so that each interpretation will be a self-portrait.¹³

During the months I spent trying to develop my self-portrait of Carter's piano piece, it was very helpful to read some of Carter's articles, in particular those he wrote in the same period when he composed *Night Fantasies*. From those articles I learned about his interests in literature and in the use of time. According to Warburton¹⁴:

Two important syntheses unfold in Carter's writings: a lifelong preoccupation with literature, particularly literature that confronts the nature of time, and a lifelong preoccupation with time itself. Indeed, the collected writings end with Carter's 1976 article "Music and the Time Screen"¹⁵.

Along with his interest in the question of time, Carter also expressed his concern for narrative process in literature. It seems that his preoccupation with time found a

¹³ Schiff, 1983, p. 213.

¹⁴ Warburton, 1990; p. 209.

¹⁵ Stone and Kurz (eds.), 1977. pp. 343-365.

literary correlate in Hans Castorp's search for significant temporal thought in Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain*. Also, in interviews with Allen Edwards between 1968 and 1970, Carter revealed a particular interest in the works of James Joyce, especially the technique of "epiphany" found, for example, in Joyce's *Dubliners*. The relationship between music and literature has always been of great interest to me¹⁶, and I was delighted to find out that Schiff¹⁷ had used the term "epiphanic development" to describe compositional processes found in some of Carter's works. My understanding of the *Night Fantasies* achieved a deeper level by way of this parallel with literature; and I kept looking for ways to improve my learning process of the music.

The topics that follow are an attempt to organize my ideas about the many challenges I encountered during the preparation of *Night Fantasies*, and also to discuss the tools I devised to overcome these difficulties. The challenges and the tools are organized under the following topics: juxtaposition of contrasting moods, independence of lines, wide leap melodies, texture, polyrhythms and metric modulations, background and foreground episodes, fast passages, and harmonic structure.

¹⁶ In my Masters' thesis I studied the music of German-Brazilian composer Bruno Kiefer, with focus on its relation to the poetry of Brazilian poet Carlos Nejar. See "*A Música de Bruno Kiefer: 'Terra', 'Vento', 'Horizonte' e a Poesia de Carlos Nejar.*" UFRGS, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 1998.

¹⁷ Schiff, 1983.

Juxtaposition of contrasting moods

One of the big challenges I had when approaching *Night Fantasies* was the aspect that most called my attention when first hearing the piece – the juxtaposition of contrasting moods. In the preface to the score, Carter writes:

Night Fantasies is a piano piece of continuously changing moods, suggesting the fleeting thoughts and feelings that pass through the mind during a period of wakefulness at night. The quiet, nocturnal evocation with which it begins and returns occasionally, is suddenly broken by a flighty series of short phrases that emerge and disappear. This episode is followed by many others of contrasting characters and lengths that sometimes break in abruptly and, at other times, develop smoothly out of what has gone before. The work culminates in a loud, obsessive, periodic repetition of an emphatic chord that, as it dies away, brings the work to its conclusion. In this score, I wanted to capture the fanciful, changeable quality of our inner life at a time when it is not dominated by strong, directive intentions and desires – to capture the poetic moodiness that, in an earlier romantic context, I enjoy in the works of Robert Schumann like *Kreisleriana*, *Carnaval*, and *Davidsbündlertänze*.¹⁸

Being an enthusiast of Schumann's works myself, I immediately understood Carter's words. However, playing his music accurately, with so many complexities, and at the same time achieving this level of romantic poetic moodiness seemed almost impossible to me. I knew I had a long way to go before being able to express the composer's musical intention through my performance, but since I do not believe one should learn a piece of music in layers – first the notes and rhythms, then articulation and dynamics, and finally the overall picture – I wanted to be able to play with accuracy, even if a very short passage, but with all its content. Maybe this was an extra challenge I imposed to myself; maybe there are easier ways to learn this piece, but I wanted so badly to hear the contrasting moods that during the whole process of learning the music I tried to express them, even if for just a glimpse.

¹⁸ Carter, 1982, preface to score.

For example, in the first pages, which I find the most difficult because of the fast changes of mood (and the many metric modulations that I will be discussing later), I tried to learn the music near tempo and worked on the contrasts among characters, articulations, dynamics, pianistic touch, phrases, and all other elements. In each page there are so many details that one could be tempted to leave some to solve later and go ahead with the reading. I did not. My personal reward was to feel that I could make music of each small passage, and not only overcome technical difficulties. This slow and careful process meant that it took me several months to learn *Night Fantasies*, but with the assurance that when I got to the last page I would have learned it well.

Going back to the question of juxtaposition of moods and how to make them clear, the first crucial change of mood and metric modulation happens immediately, at the beginning of the piece (Figure 19). The last two beats of bar 14 anticipate the new tempo and mood. The new section – *Fantastico* – is quite active in terms of extreme contrasts and this abruptness creates great difficulty for the pianist. The section is mainly *leggerissimo*, with soft sounds with a few moments of *crescendo* to *mezzo forte*, which constitutes another difficulty. With so much activity, it's easy to get to louder sounds, instead of keeping the general soft level as indicated by Carter. This is indeed one of the challenges of the piece as a whole—to go back to soft sounds after an intense passage. It helped me to think that after a fairly loud passage I would need to mentally rest, reduce the weight of my touch, and consequently save energy for the loud chords that would indubitably come at the end of the piece.

dedicated to Paul Jacobs, Gilbert Kalish,
Ursula Oppens, and Charles Rosen

NIGHT FANTASIES

Elliott Carter
(1980)

Tranquillo, $\text{♩} = 47-25$

UNA CORDA *pp*

TRE CORDE (*pp*) [SOST. PED. TO M. 15] (*pp*)

[RAISE PEDAL SLOWLY]

5

(short) *p* *pp* *sim pp*

8

p *pp* *pp* *p* *pp* *p>*

Figure 19 – *Night Fantasies* – contrast between the first two sections:
Tranquillo (bars 1-14) and *Fantastico* (bars 15-18).

The musical score consists of three systems of piano music. The first system, measures 12-18, begins with a piano (p) dynamic and includes a metric modulation indicated by an arrow pointing to a change in the tempo of the sixteenth notes. The second system, measures 18-24, includes markings for 'Fantastico', 'leggerissimo', and 'susc. ogg'. The third system, measures 24-30, shows a variety of dynamics including mezzo-piano (mp), mezzo-forte (mf), and piano (p).

Figure 19 (Cont.) - The arrow points to the first metric modulation, with the new speed of sixteenth notes.

Besides the juxtaposition of contrasting moods in long sections, as shown in Figure 19, the contrasts also occur on a much smaller scale, as brief interruptions in different dynamics and articulation. Figure 20 shows one of the many passages of small interruptions that happen throughout *Night Fantasies*. Here a gesture in detached articulation abruptly permeates a long line of *cantabile* in softer dynamics.

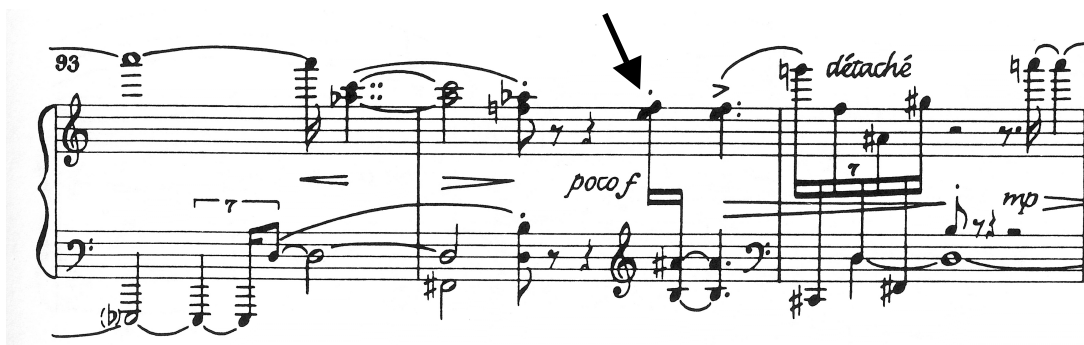


Figure 20 – *Night Fantasies* – small interruption in “détaché” (bars 94-95).

Independence of Lines (Hands)

Throughout *Night Fantasies* we can find similar gestures of two independent lines, sharing a declamatory character, but appearing in different musical contexts. I found that I could practice these sections in a similar way: for example, the declamatory gesture from bars 59-64 (Figure 21) and the *molto espressivo* passage (in a constant polyrhythm of 8 against 5) from bars 167-172 (Figure 22). While practicing these passages I would repeat each voice over and over, often with the metronome, to the point that I knew them so well separately that I was able to hear them independently when playing them together.

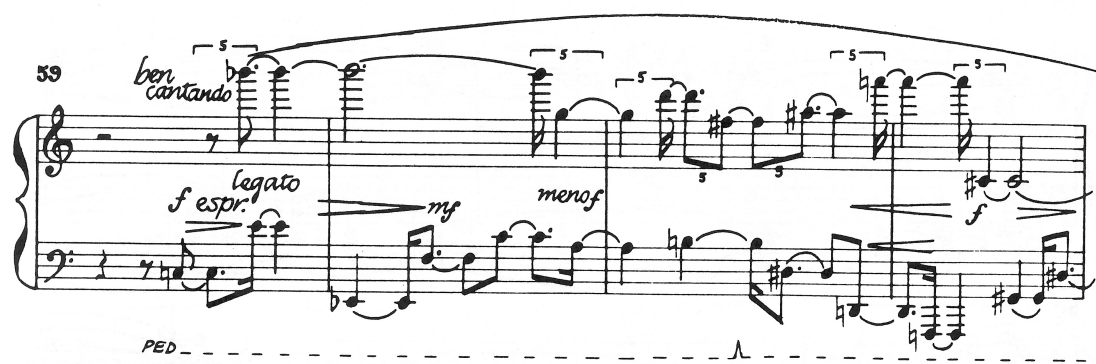


Figure 21 – *Night Fantasies* - declamatory gesture (bars 59-62). Indicatives of the declamatory character of this passage are the expressions *ben cantando*, *forte espressivo*, *legato*.

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece, specifically the 'Night Fantasies' section, covering bars 167 to 172. The score is written for two staves, treble and bass clef. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The time signature is 4/4. The music is characterized by a 'molto espressivo' (very expressive) style. The right hand features a melodic line with a 'pizz' (pizzicato) marking and a 'molto espr.' (very expressive) marking. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with a 'pizz' marking and a 'sempre legato' (always legato) marking. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like 'mf' (mezzo-forte) and 'f' (forte). The overall mood is dramatic and expressive.

Figure 22 – *Night Fantasies* - *molto espressivo* passage
(bars 167-172)

The much softer section in two voices that overlap in register, from bars 314-317 (Figure 23), offers a new challenge – opposite direction in speed – the left hand in a more constant speed while the right hand runs from quintuplets to triplets. The desired sound of these two lines getting closer and then further apart requires accuracy of attacks in both hands and total rhythmical independence.



Figure 23 – *Night Fantasies* - two voices overlapping in register (bars 314-317)

Wide leap melodies

Night Fantasies is replete with melodic writing, which one would expect after knowing about Carter's interest in capturing the romantic moodiness from works like Schumann's. Although many melodies appear in the *Night Fantasies*, "the work has no themes in the traditional sense as the melodic lines do not make a second appearance"¹⁹.

Melodies in *Night Fantasies* often occur in wide leaps, visiting all registers of the instrument, which brings a challenge to the pianist. Connecting notes from different registers requires the use of pedal, since most of time the intervals cannot be connected with one's fingers. Using the pedal, there is always a risk of causing notes other than those you are connecting to ring longer than they are written. Therefore, a precise use of pedal, plus prompt preparation of the next notes to be played, careful

¹⁹ Anderson, op. cit., p 136.

use of dynamics to emphasize melodic inflections that might be harder to notice in such wide leaps, and finally, memorization of the melodic line to keep visual contact with the keyboard instead of the score, seem to be the way to achieve the best result with the wide ranging melodies. One example of a passage that requires this treatment is given in Figure 24.

Wide ranging melodies occur frequently in *Night Fantasies*, sometimes unaccompanied, for brief moments, at times with three-note chords in another *stratum*, like in bars 304-7, or with five-note chords as at the *quasi recitativo* like in bars 377 to 386 (Figure 24).

The musical score for 'Night Fantasies - quasi recitativo' (bars 377-386) is presented in two systems. The first system begins at bar 376 and ends at bar 377. It features a treble and bass staff with a key signature of two flats (B-flat major). The melody in the treble staff is marked with *mf* and *dim.* dynamics. The bass staff has a *mf* dynamic. A tempo marking of $\text{♩} = 63$ is indicated. The second system begins at bar 378 and ends at bar 386. It continues the melodic line with *mf* and *f* dynamics. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and fingerings (e.g., 5, 8va, 7, 3). Performance instructions like *legato*, *quasi recitativo*, and *p sempre* are present. The overall texture is characterized by wide intervals and complex harmonic structures.

Figure 24 – *Night Fantasies* - *quasi recitativo* (bars 377 - 386)

380

382

384 $\text{♩} = 94.5$

380-381: *mp*, *mf*, *legato espr.*, *cresc.*

382-383: *legato*, *mf (cresc.)*

Figure 24 (cont.) – *Night Fantasies - quasi recitativo* (bars 377 - 386)

Sometimes the melodic lines move from one hand to the other, as in *sempre bien in fuori, cantando*, from bars 77 to 79 (Figure 25). They may also be found in very small interruptions, as in bars 23 and 24. Independently of the extension of the melody, it always retains a resemblance to romantic music – the *cantabile* inspired by vocal melodies – and it was helpful for me to think that I wanted to sing the lines as much as I would do in a Chopin *Nocturne*.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the piece 'Night Fantasies', specifically bars 77 through 79. The notation is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The first system (bars 77-78) features a piano accompaniment in the left hand and a melody in the right hand. The melody is characterized by wide leaps and is marked with dynamics such as *mf*, *p*, and *mf*. The second system (bar 78) continues the melody in the right hand, with a piano accompaniment in the left hand. The third system (bar 79) shows the melody moving to the left hand, while the right hand provides a piano accompaniment. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings. The text *sempre ben in fuori cantando* is written below the first system, and *marc.* is written below the third system.

Figure 25 – *Night Fantasies* - melody exchanging hands *sempre ben in fuori* (bars 77-79)

In contrast with these wide-leap melodies, there is one passage in which the melody, or expressive line, is restricted to a major second. This very expressive moment, in bars 157 to 164 (Figure 26), in soft dynamics and with a melody that stays between A and B, is highly contrasting to everything that happens before it. To me it sounds as if a wide ranging melody had suddenly been imprisoned in a major second. Even though the passage might sound ethereal to some, because of the

very soft dynamics and the middle/high register, or like a “mechanic nightingale” to Schiff²⁰, I prefer to see this section as a tense moment because of its restrictions – the melody does not go anywhere besides A and B, and the use of pedal is reduced, which does not allow much reverberation to happen. It is as if the expressive character of this melody were ready to expand in wider ranging melodies, but, because of these restrictions, it stays imprisoned in an interval of major second. Due to this “imprisoned” feeling I see this section as a tense moment that finds release at the *appassionato* of bars 168 to 172 (see Figure 22).

Figure 26 – *Night Fantasies* – melody “imprisoned” in a major second (bars 157-162).
Arrows show the attacks on As and Bs.

²⁰ Schiff, 1983, p. 214.

Texture²¹

In *Night Fantasies* the composer offers the performer an amazing exploration of textural possibilities of the piano. According to Schiff: “the performer is called upon to use a great range of dynamics and touch – from *leggerissimo* to *marcatissimo*, from *staccato* to *cantabile*. The music covers the spectrum of the keyboard in ever-changing configurations, so that the resultant tone color continually varies”.²²

As one can imagine, this exhaustive range of dynamics and touch brings new challenges to the performer. Added to the contrapunctual nature of the piece, these difficulties achieve even higher levels. The pianist is constantly asked to display subtle differences in articulation, as in bar 80 (Figure 27), where the right hand is playing septuplets in *staccato* with accents, while the left hand plays triplets with less accent. The result is that the right hand’s attacks sound a little shorter and crisper than the left hand.

A second example of different articulations resulting in a challenge to the performer is found at the *recitativo collerico* section, bars 235-243 (Figure 28), where a chordal *stratum* in soft dynamics occurs simultaneously with a series of short attacks in louder dynamics.

²¹ A term used when referring to the sound aspects of a musical structure. This may apply either to the vertical aspects of a work or passage, for example the way in which individual parts or voices are put together, or to attributes such as tone color or rhythm, or to characteristics of performance such as articulation and dynamic level. Although textural control has been a major consideration for composers since the Middle Ages, with the advent of twelve-note composition and serialism in the 20th century and the consequent breakdown of the tonal system in Western art music, texture became an even more important feature of composition. In: 'Texture', The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 10 April 2003), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

²² Schiff, 1983, p. 214.

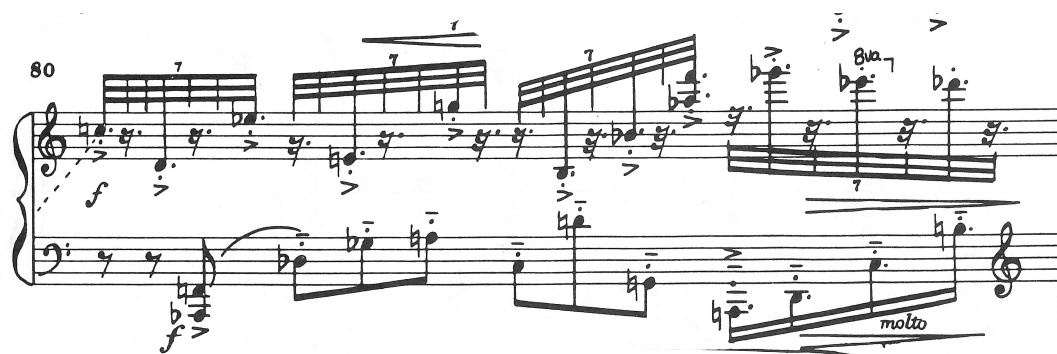


Figure 27 – *Night Fantasies* - subtle differences in articulation (bar 80). L.H. attacks in eighth-note triplets are slightly longer than R.H. attacks in dotted thirty-second septuplets.



Figure 28 – *Night Fantasies* - *recitativo collerico* (bars 235-243) – two strata: one in chords in soft dynamics, and one in short attacks in louder dynamics.

In this example, the two *strata* are played by both hands. Since the use of pedal would ruin the *staccato* layer, the pianist needs to find a way of holding the chords with fingers 3 to 5 in both hands, while the *staccato* notes with accents are played with fingers 1 and 2. It is an elaborated process to decide the best fingering for this section, but it turns out to be a quite comfortable passage in terms of technical challenges. I believe that finding a comfortable fingering is the secret, so one can enjoy the *collerico* character of the *staccato* notes in the middle layer. Moments like these three examples happen often in *Night Fantasies*, and the performer needs to listen carefully to all the subtleties.

Polyrhythms²³ and Metric Modulations²⁴

One of the biggest challenges I had when approaching the *Night Fantasies* was the polyrhythms. *Night Fantasies* is built over a system of pulses that runs from the beginning to the end of the piece: a pulse rate of MM 10.8 and another of MM 8.75, which form a polyrhythm of 216:175. The two pulses only coincide at the downbeat of bar 3 and on the final notes of the work. Although hidden, this structural polyrhythm, controls the piece.

²³Polyrhythm is a simultaneous statement of different divisions of a beat, or of a larger temporal duration. With simple polyrhythms, such as three against two, the pulses coincide often. Carter, however, often makes use of slow polyrhythms that rarely coincide (Schiff, op. cit., p. 44). *Night Fantasies*, for example, is based on a ratio of 216:175 stretched over the entire work. The basic ratio on which the work is built is known as Structural Polyrhythm.

²⁴ Metric modulation is a proportional change in tempo that happens by the renotation of a metronomic speed as in the instruction 'new half note equal previous dotted quarter'. The term metric modulation was first used by Richard Franko Goldman in 1951 to describe Carter's Cello Sonata, but the composer has been using the process as early as the Symphony n. 1 of 1942. In Carter's music, tempo modulation takes various forms. (Schiff, op. cit., p. 41). In *Night Fantasies*, metric modulations occur throughout the piece,

The relentless pulses might be compared to a clock in an insomniac's room, its ticking passing in and out of the listener's consciousness. Never before had Carter systematically composed real time into a piece of these dimensions with such absolute rigor, and never before had the contrast of clock time and psychological time been presented structurally rather than dramatically – though for the insomniac the glowing face of a clock can become the most terrifying of dramatic personae.²⁵

This underlying structure and the many metric modulations that occur throughout *Night Fantasies* created an extra challenge for me as performer. Even though I had studied and performed music that requires absolutely precise counting, I had never been faced with so much complexity in terms of polyrhythm. Once more, I decided to go slow and practice far from the instrument until I felt a little more comfortable with, for example, playing three notes against five, seven against five, five against four, and so on. Adding the music to the correct polyrhythms became an easier task. I believe that practicing away from the instrument, trying to internalize the complex rhythms, was what ultimately allowed me to be able to judge what I played, be alert to my mistakes and have them corrected in a short time.

Regarding the constant changes of tempo and meter, I have practiced the transitions over and over, to the point that I would start beating the new tempo one or two beats before the actual change. Through the metric modulations, Carter provides us with guidance on the new speed of notes, for example in bars 14 to 15 (see Figure 19), where the speed of the last sixteenths on the left hand correspond to the speed of the triplets of the next section.

One last example of the transitions: from bar 318 to 319 (Figure 29) the speed of the sixteenths is the same, while from 319 to 320, the speed of the eighth-notes is kept constant. Since the performer usually has two lines to play, with detailed

²⁵ Schiff, op. cit., p. 217.

articulation and character, a lot of attention is required in order to make sure the metric modulation occurs properly. Practicing the transitions separately gave me confidence that I was bridging to the correct tempo.



Figure 29 – *Night Fantasies* – metric modulation (bars 317-320)

The rhythmic foundation of *Night Fantasies* is a rigorous and steady basis over which flows a surface of changeable sounds. To someone not aware of this rigid underground scheme, the music might sound improvisatory. I believe that such a complex rhythmic basis functions at the performance as a safeguard, something you know is there and feel safer because of it. During the performance the flowing and improvisatory-sounding aspects of the music overcome the rigidity of the rhythmic structure, and this is to me an intriguing aspect of this piano piece.

Background and Foreground Episodes

Slow and fast episodes seem to be constantly negotiating in *Night Fantasies*. Material originally kept in the background comes to the foreground and vice-versa. I always found this to be one of the most interesting aspects of the piece, which is for me a key to what makes this nearly 30-minute work a fascinating listening experience.

Carter describes the work [*Night Fantasies*] as a fast movement interrupted (as in Schumann) by slow 'trios' that gradually turns into a slow movement interrupted by fast 'trios'. Fast and slow episodes thus gradually exchange roles of foreground and background—a difference the performer should make clear. The characters of both fast and slow music also evolve in the course of the work. Several distinct types of fast music (*fantastico*, *marcato*, *cantabile*, *leggero*, *appassionato*) are heard before the most sustained fast section (*capriccioso leggerissimo*) appears. These all return as 'trios' during the second half of the piece, with the *marcato* passages becoming increasingly prominent. Similarly the slow music changes in character from the barely audible *tranquillo* opening, floating chords, and brief, static *ostinati*, to increasingly intense lyrical utterances (...) Slow and fast materials finally merge at their points of greatest intensity with the harsh chords of bar 472 and following; from this climax of fusion the music gradually subsides.²⁶

An effective performance of *Night Fantasies* should allow the listener to follow the exchange between slow and fast sections. I wondered what I could do to emphasize this aspect. At first I tried to add more contrast between the slow and fast passages, but when I realized that I was taking the risk of losing the correct *tempi* and metric modulations that I had, with so much effort, finally learned, I decided to work with this contrast much more in my mind than to try to exaggerate them. I remembered one of the conversations I had with Aleck Karis²⁷ about this piece, from which I came to conclude that if the music is well-written and we respect all details that the composer

²⁶ Schiff, op. cit., p. 217.

²⁷ Aleck Karis, informal conversations about *Night Fantasies* and the music of Elliott Carter, 2000-2003.

is specifying at the score, two things will happen – first, we will be able to play with the maximal level of accuracy possible, and second, get close to the composer's intention. I decided to be faithful to the score and hopefully the exchange of roles between slow and fast passages will come out when I perform it.

Carter once wrote that serious music requires a more highly developed auditory memory than most popular and folk music. He also said that

it uses many contrasts, coherences, and contexts that give it a wide scope of expression, great emotional power and variety, direction uniqueness, and a fascination of design with many shadings and qualities beyond the range of popular or folk music. Every moment must count somehow, as must every detail (...). As far as I am concerned, I am always interested in a composer's phrases and their shape and content, the way he joins them, the type of articulation he uses, as well as the general drift or continuity of a large section, and the construction of a whole work²⁸.

The constant exchange of roles between fast and slow passages builds *Night Fantasies* to an extraordinary climax with the repetition of a chord (Figure 30) at the end. The repetition of very loud chords occurs after more than 20 minutes of very complex music, which is in itself a challenge to the performer. Knowing how to save physical and mental energy for those last attacks is essential to a convincing performance.

²⁸ Carter, 1967.

The image shows a musical score for two staves, piano and bass. The top staff (piano) begins at bar 473 with a 'marcatissimo' tempo marking and a 'cresc.' (crescendo) instruction. It features a triplet of eighth notes and a forte (f) dynamic. The bottom staff (bass) also starts at bar 473 with a forte (f) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. Bar 474 includes a 'raise' instruction. Bar 475 has a 'meno f' (diminuendo) dynamic. Bar 476 has a 'marcatissimo' dynamic. Bar 477 has a 'PED.' (pedal) marking. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Figure 30 – *Night Fantasies* – first of the repeated chords (bars 473-477)

The slow sections predominate at the end of *Night Fantasies*, and the music comes to an end right after the repetition of loud chords. This climactic moment at the end of the piece seems to contrast with most other works by Carter from the same period, with the exception of *Syringa* (1978), for mezzo-soprano, bass, and chamber group. In *Syringa*, a loud chord in *tutti* occurs on bar 406, immediately after the bass sings the equivalent in Greek of “be gone”. Indeed, after this chord, the instruments get louder and in articulation *marcatissimo*, the bass sings “be gone, go away, save your present” in a *molto pesante* section with loud attacks on the ensemble, and then a *Tranquillo* section starts on bar 411, a section in which a slower tempo is kept unchanged until the end.

Fast passages

Throughout *Night Fantasies* the performer encounters many passages with or without polyrhythms that must be played in a very fast tempo. The articulation is usually *non legato*, sometimes in loud dynamics with accents and *crescendo*, as in bar 32 (Figure 31), and bars 414 to 416 (Figure 32).



Figure 31 – fast passage (bar 32) - ♩ = 94.5

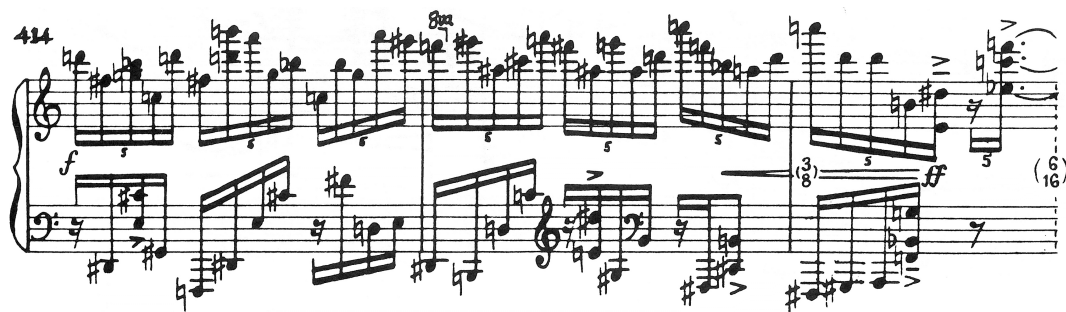


Figure 32 – similar passage (bars 414-416) - ♩ = 94.5

These examples indicate short passages in a very fast speed of attacks. The central section of *Night Fantasies*, the *capriccioso*, on the other hand, keeps the fast tempo constant. Here, instead of the stream of *marcato* sounds that are found in the previous four examples, the articulation needs to be as light as possible, only

permeated by a couple of sudden *forte* sounds with accents. Keeping a light touch facilitates the control of dynamics, articulation, and tempo, and helps the performer to build the *scherzo*-like character of the middle section of the *Night Fantasies*. The same strategy of light touch needs to be used at the *scorrevole* section from bars 347 to 354, so the beat is kept constant and one can hear the subtle *accelerando* of thirty-second notes.

Harmonic Structure

Compared to some of other pieces by Carter in which the composer clearly works with opposing protagonists (I have in mind the Second String Quartet, for example, and its main characters' distribution among the four instruments), the opposition of characters in *Night Fantasies* seems to occur in a much broader way. It would be pointless and quite impossible to reduce to a few main characters all the many kinds of music the composer wrote in this large piano piece. Indeed, early in the composition of *Night Fantasies* the composer said that he had already written fifty kinds of music and was still looking for a way to compose with them²⁹.

Eighty-eight all-interval twelve-note chords provide *Night Fantasies*' harmonic structure. Each interval is paired with its inversive equivalent around a central tritone. In other words, minor seconds are paired with major sevenths, major seconds with minor sevenths, minor thirds with major sixths, major thirds with minor sixths, perfect fourths with perfect fifths, always keeping a tritone in between them, as shown in chart 3.

²⁹ Carter apud Schiff, 1983, p. 214.

The uses Carter makes of these eighty-eight all-interval chords are many and varied. Sometimes a single class of intervals is projected, at other times three-note chords predominate. There are also moments in which Carter makes use of his seemingly favorite tetrachord (0,1,4,6). The compositional process was much more complex than only choosing some predominant intervals for each section, and an analysis of this aspect goes beyond the purpose of this paper. On the other hand, from the performer's perspective, I believe it is important to be aware of at least some strategic points in which some intervals predominate and how they are transformed into new entities. For example, I found it helpful to know that fourths and fifths predominate at the beginning, while sevenths and ninths occur more frequently at the end. Also, that at the *capriccioso* section from bar 195 on, a three-note chord predominates (0,1,5). Most of all, I found it important to be aware of the transformations the intervals undergo from one passage to the next. For example, in Figure 33, single intervals are added to form a three-note chord, and a fourth note is added to create a structural harmony of tetrachords (bar 41 on)³⁰.

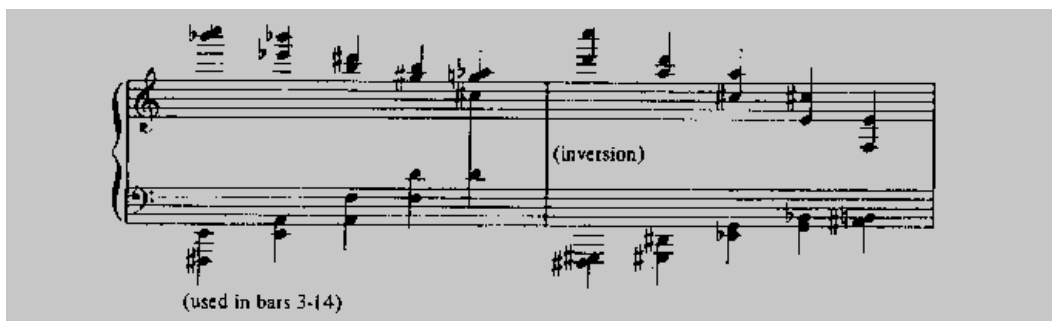


Chart 3 – *Night Fantasies* – principal one of 88 all-interval chords.³¹

³⁰ Schiff, 1983, p. 216.

³¹ Schiff, 1983, p. 214.

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with a piano (upper) and bass (lower) staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4.

- System 1 (Measures 33-34):** The piano staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature change to one sharp. It features a melodic line with slurs and fingerings (5, 5, 5, 5). The bass staff has a similar melodic line. Dynamics include *mf*, *mp cresc.*, *mf*, and *mp espr.*. A *legato* marking is present in the bass staff. Arrows point to specific notes in both staves.
- System 2 (Measures 35-36):** The piano staff continues the melodic development with slurs and fingerings. The bass staff features a more complex texture with triplets and slurs. Dynamics include *piu f* and *marc*.
- System 3 (Measures 37-38):** The piano staff shows a change in texture with slurs and fingerings. The bass staff has a more active line. Dynamics include *mf*, *p cresc.*, and *mp, legato*. A tempo marking of $\text{♩} = d. \rightarrow d. : 78-75$ is present. An arrow points to a note in the piano staff.
- System 4 (Measures 39-42):** The piano staff features a *cantabile* section with a *cresc.* marking. The bass staff has a more active line. Dynamics include *mf* and *f*. The system concludes with a double bar line and a final chord.

Figure 33 – *Night Fantasies* – transformation of harmonic structure from a single interval – third (previous section, not shown here), three-note chord with major third (bars 33-37) and finally a tetrachord (bars 38-42).

The elements presented here were helpful to my understanding and learning of this monumental piano piece by Elliott Carter. I had to work on several technical issues, as well as rhythmic problems, which were to a certain extent new for me, and probably are new for many other pianists with classical training. I found it essential to develop total control over the polyrhythms and metric modulations, as well as an absolute independence of hands, since each line is constantly elaborated in different articulation, rhythm and dynamics. After conquering these technical challenges one can be able to better show the contrasting moods, and the foreground and background episodes. There are certainly many obstacles to be overcome by the pianist who wants to perform *Night Fantasies*. The problems I discussed in this chapter are based on my personal experience, but I hope they will be of some help to other pianists who choose the adventure of learning this piece, one of the most challenging of the piano repertoire of the twentieth century.

V. Final remarks

We live in a period of constant experimentation in musical composition. New principles are created every day. Today's composer is continuously searching for an individual voice in a body of musical knowledge that does not stop growing. This experimentation on the part of composers has an immediate effect on performers who are constantly challenged to use their instruments in unusual ways, searching for new sounds. In so doing, they are invited to rethink their techniques and creativity; performers need to find their solutions in order to translate the composers' musical ideas into sounds. Anton Webern was once asked if he was sure that his melodic patterns could really be sung. He answered: "don't worry; we feel and write, they will find a way".³² Indeed, this is what performers do: find a way to solve the technical problems created by the composer's creativity. They are, however, alone in this search most of the time. Still, to this day, technical challenges brought by music from past decades are not part of the curriculum of most music schools.

A new multi-dimensional technique of piano-playing has evolved and will eventually have to be taught along with the diatonic scales and arpeggios which hitherto have formed the basic educational diet. For a new dexterity is being demanded: an asymmetry of hand and finger movement which cannot be acquired solely through conquering the symmetries of the music of a previous age.³³

With this dissertation, I intended to touch on the tip of the iceberg of contemporary piano performance. It is a world still to be studied in a more structured way, at school, as part of the curriculum. What we have so far is based primarily on personal experiences, transmitted from mentor to student. This dissertation addresses three

³² Webern in Steuermann, 1989, p. 83.

³³ Bradshaw, 1972.

important pieces of the contemporary repertoire, but they are still only three. There is a world of music out there to be discovered, studied, and performed. Each piece will bring its own technical problems, and I am concerned that few schools are preparing qualified performers to find their solutions to these matters.

The number of pieces being composed in present times is impressive. Even if we narrow this number to those for solo piano, it is simply impossible to track them. Sometimes I hear comments from students or members of the audience: “but we do not know which among these compositions will last...” I believe that, as a performer, it is not my job to make judgments as to what will or will not last. My job is to work seriously on the pieces I include in my repertoire, and perform them as well as I can.

In the previous chapters I focused on the technicalities of learning complex music for piano. I focused on individual problems, hoping to make my practice time more productive and also to make the chapters in this dissertation clearer. In a way, when we learn pieces of such complexity by breaking them into smaller passages, we make them simpler. As percussionist Steven Schick once wrote:

The act of learning a piece is primarily one of simplification, while the art of performance is one of (re)complexifying. In the learning process, rhythms must be calculated and reduced to some portable form, the turbulence of the microforces of form must be generalized, and various kinds of inane mnemonics must be employed simply to remember what to do next. An artificial skin of practical considerations must be stretched tightly across the lumps of a living, breathing piece. Performance reinflates the piece, fine tuning its formal gyroscope, revivifying polyphonic structures, and packaging the intellectual energy of the score into meaningful physicality.³⁴

The necessarily slow pace of learning pieces is complex and demanding in ways that are not particularly encouraging to novices in the contemporary music world. The input of energy, thought and practice that is essential during this process might

³⁴ Schick, 1994, p. 133.

seem too much, and the final goal of performing the piece may seem inaccessible. It is indeed a difficult path to walk, the learning path; but at the same time, when one achieves the end of this learning path, a solid architectural foundation is created, and henceforth, each performance will reinforce and make this basis stronger. In my experience learning and performing these three pieces by Stockhausen, Berio and Carter, I have created my own foundation over which I can work details, make small interpretive differences, and present my portrait of these works to audiences with confidence.

It is fascinating to notice, however, that this foundation does not lead to sterile performances. Each time I perform these works I hope to be able to balance the maturity that comes from experience with the excitement of a first performance. After all, there is always a detail to make different. In the realm of professional music, this is one of our delights, to work on details of the piece, to bring to light something new, to try something different. Even if these details are not noticeable to many ears, they still make the difference between a good performance and a mediocre one. This reminds me of something I read about Michelangelo. The story goes that the famous artist had been very carefully sculpting the back of a figure. Someone asked him why he was spending so much time on the sculpture's back, knowing that it was going to be in the corner of a church, and that nobody would ever see it from behind. "God will be able to see" was his answer. I very often find myself working on details that might pass unnoticeable by many, but this may be the step I need to take towards my best performance.

During my doctoral studies at UCSD I have worked on and performed several new compositions. I have also looked to the past, to piano pieces composed in the

twentieth century, especially some which are considered “classics” of contemporary piano music. The three works that I chose as focus of this dissertation are such pieces. *Klavierstück IX*, *Sequenza IV*, and *Night Fantasies* are among the most innovative piano compositions of the last century. Working on them, trying to understand their subtleties and the composers’ intentions behind the scores, enriched the way I think and make music today. After going through what was for me a rite of passage, I find myself able to use techniques to play not only these pieces, but also to discover new solutions to problems still to come. In other words, what I learned from the music of the past will keep illuminating my learning of the music of the future.

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