

Music 270 Assignment #1

Reading and Playing Music: A Different Approach

On the two pages following these instructions is a copy of the score for *Doodling*, the piano piece I played in class on 2/1/07.

After I performed *Doodling*, I pointed out that what I played was determined by a written score.

In fact, I deliberately misused the score, and the piece. The purpose of the score was not to provide a basis for a performance for others; and *Doodling* was not to be heard by others, but only by the performer. (Note the title of the collection of pieces from which *Doodling* is taken, at the bottom of the score.)

The real point of bringing this piece into class is for you to experience the piece as a performer.

If you don't know how to read music or have no previous piano training, don't worry! You will discover that you are able to read and play this piece no matter how little—or how much—prior experience you have reading music or playing the piano.

Some mechanics: After you print these pages, put the score into a 3 ring binder so that when you open the binder on the music rack of a piano the two pages will be facing each other. (You don't want to have to turn the page while playing, and you don't want the pages to fall off the rack.)

YOUR PERFORMANCES

Sometime in the next week, take the piece into a practice room with a piano in the basement of Ives hall—or to a piano in any other location. (Any room that you can open along the outside wall of Ives basement will be a practice room; most of the open rooms will have a piano in them.)

Sit down at the piano and perform the piece for yourself at least

three times. Play sensitively and thoughtfully — don't abuse the instruments! Try to make your three performances as different from each other as possible, but make sure each performance follows the score.

YOUR RESPONSE

In an e-mail you send to me at <mailto:mus270s07@aol.com> no later than Thursday 2/8/07, answer the following questions:

1. Compare your experience of the piece as a player with your experience of the piece as a listener? Were you more involved in the piece as a performer or as a listener? Why?
2. What did you do to make your performances different from each other? What about the score allowed you make these differences?
3. Do you think you would be able to recognize this piece if you (over)heard someone else performing it? Why or why not?
4. Could you practice this piece? How would you go about it?
5. Could you perform this piece many times with pleasure? Why or why not?

DOODLING

Begin some very soft doodling with your right hand in the upper part of the keyboard. Continue the doodling as you read. Do not let your playing distract you from your reading and do not let your reading distract you from your playing. The two must accompany each other. Now, without stopping the right hand doodling, play a loud low note with your left hand, and sustain it for a moment. Continue the doodling and, whenever you feel the time is right, play another loud bass note. Do not wait too long between the loud low notes, but do not play them too close together either. Try not to worry about when you should or should not play another low note. If you become too involved with thinking about that, you will not be able to carry out your other tasks as well. Your attention should always be about equally divided between the three things: the reading, the right hand doodling and the loud low notes.

Of course, you are quite limited in what you are permitted to play at the moment, and the music might become tedious after a while to someone who was only listening. But that is immaterial since these are *Private Pieces* and are only for your own entertainment. The piece will not be tedious to you since it is not easy to do three things at once. The only way you can do all three well is by dividing your attention equally between them, so that you never ignore one of them. If you forget about the doodling, it will not sound the way you want it to sound. If you forget about the loud low notes, there will be a long awkward gap in the music. If you forget about the reading, you may miss some instruction or idea.

After another paragraph, you will be asked to play something else, but in the meantime continue playing and reading as you have been. If you find that you have been paying more attention to one of your tasks than to the other two, try to balance your attention more equally. Although no more instructions are necessary for the moment, the text is continuing in order to give you time to achieve a sense of balance between the three things, so that they seem to accompany one another. You have three more sentences in which to try to achieve the balance before going on to a new section of the piece. Now only two sentences, including this one, remain before the paragraph will end and you will be asked to do something else. This is the last sentence of this part of the piece.

Now stop playing, but continue reading. At some point during this paragraph, play a single note and sustain it. It may be loud or soft, high or low, black or white, but it must be a single note, and it must be played only once. Perhaps you may want to read more of the text before making your decision. You must, however, remain within the limits of the paragraph. So if you have not played your note by this time, you must do so soon, as the paragraph is almost finished. You may wish to pause a moment before proceeding to the next paragraph, which will be quite demanding.

Resume the doodling with your right hand as you did in the beginning of the piece, but this time it should gradually become more energetic. For a while it can be played by the right hand only, and should sound as it did at the beginning, but soon it should become faster. As it accelerates, you will probably want to use the left hand too, so you can play more and more notes in less and less time. As the doodling becomes faster, you should also let it move into a wider range. By now, the doodling should be noticeably more energetic than when you began this section. Do not let it increase too quickly, however, as there is still quite a way to go before it reaches a peak. Gradually begin to use more and more of the keyboard and let the intensity increase until it is quite furious. Do not let the tension subside, even for a moment, and continue building until you are playing as wildly as you can. You may play anything necessary to maintain the high energy level. By now you should be playing as loud and as fast as you can. You will perhaps find it more difficult to concentrate on the text now than when you were not playing so vigorously, but try to read the text as carefully as you can, and look for ways that will enable you to play even more wildly. Do not be afraid to make booming or crashing sounds, if they will fit in with what you are already doing. When you find yourself running out of ideas or energy and want to end the piece, play one enormous crash and stop. Then listen for a moment to the silence.

from *Private Pieces: Piano Music for Self-Entertainment* by Tom Johnson (1976)