

A PORTFOLIO OF THREE COMPOSITIONS

A Thesis (Part I)

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts

by

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## A PORTFOLIO OF THREE COMPOSITIONS

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Cornell University 2021

The present portfolio consists of three works: *To the Woman Going Up The Escalator at Columbus Circle at Five-Thirty Last Evening*, *Fata Morgana* and 装配线 (*Assembly Line*).

*To the Woman Going Up the Escalator at Columbus Circle at Five-Thirty Last Evening* is a short orchestral study after a poem by Andrea Cohen. Most of the musical material is informed, to varying degrees, by the Shepard tone illusion. In addition to applying the phenomenon to the pitch material, I have attempted to translate and extend it to other parameters of the music.

*Fata Morgana* is a short work for solo piano and ensemble. The title, which refers to a type of superior mirage, was an afterthought but it captures something of the character of the music as well as its veiled or illusory quality.

装配线 (*Assembly Line*) is based on a simple idea. There are two laptops – one a mac, the other a PC – and their everyday sounds (the various system sounds, start-up sounds, crash sounds, etc.) provide the raw material of the work. Interspersed with the everyday sounds of the laptops, which are mimicked by the acoustic instruments, are sounds from inside factories where the laptops are assembled (triggered by a third laptop, offstage) as well as excerpts from Apple and Microsoft commercials.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Peter Fahey (b. 1982) is an Irish composer. His music has been performed at venues such as Carnegie Hall and the National Concert Hall Dublin by some of the leading interpreters of contemporary classical music including the American Composers Orchestra, the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, Continuum, Crash Ensemble, Ensemble Musiques Nouvelles, ensemble recherche, Ensemble SurPlus and Talea Ensemble; soloists have included Tony Arnold, Dario Calderone and Chi-Chen Wu. His music has been featured at festivals such as the Aspen Music Festival, Gaudeamus Muziekweek and Festival Música Nova, Brazil and broadcast on RTÉ (Ireland), WQXR (New York), Concertzender (The Netherlands), MDR (Germany) and elsewhere. He has been awarded the American Composers Orchestra's prestigious Underwood Commission; the Stefan Kaske Fellowship at the Wellesley Composers Conference; a Susan and Ford Schumann Fellowship from the Aspen Music Festival and School; the Robbins Family Prize in Composition from Cornell University; the Franz Liszt Stipendium from the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar; and a number of awards from the Arts Council of Ireland including a 2018 Next Generation Award. He has also received fellowships from the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, The MacDowell Colony and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and he has been a guest artist at Yaddo. Peter began his composition studies in Ireland at the Waterford Institute of Technology followed by studies at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, England and, in the United States, at Cornell University and, as an exchange scholar, at Columbia University.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my Special Committee members Professors Roberto Sierra (chair), Xak Bjerken and Benjamin Piekut. A special thank you to my composition teachers at Cornell, and at Columbia where I spent a semester: in addition to Professor Sierra, Professors Kevin Ernste, Fabien Lévy and Steven Stucky (1949-2016). I would also like to thank my family for all their support.

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Peter Fahey

**To the Woman Going Up the Escalator at Columbus Circle at Five-Thirty Last Evening**

for orchestra

(2019)

after a poem by Andrea Cohen

Full Score

#### INSTRUMENTATION

3 Flutes (II & III=Piccolo)  
3 Oboes (III=Cor Anglais)  
3 Clarinets in Bb (III= Clarinet in Eb & Bass Clarinet in Bb)  
3 Bassoons (III=Contrabassoon)

4 Horns in F  
3 Trumpets in Bb (III = Piccolo Trumpet in Bb)  
2 Tenor Trombones  
Bass Trombone  
Tuba

Timpani

Percussion (3 players)

1. vibraphone, suspended cymbal, slapstick, lion's roar, bass drum
2. chimes (sharing with perc. 3), xyloimba, China cymbal (suspended), bell tree (brass mallets), large triangle (10-12"; thick triangle beater), wind machine, tam-tam (sharing with perc. 3)
3. chimes (sharing with perc. 2), marimba (4.3 or more), tam-tam (sharing with perc. 2), side drum

Harp

Violin I (12)  
Violin II (10)  
Viola (8)  
Violoncello (8)  
Double Bass (6)

**The score is in C.**

////

#### **To the Woman Going Up the Escalator at Columbus Circle at Five-Thirty Last Evening**

by Andrea Cohen

You were holding

a fortunate orchid.

I was not

the slob standing

beside you. I

was the slob behind,

one who'd live

happily on half

an ice cube

now and again

to ascend once

to a blue

moon with you.

Score in C

Peter Fahey  
To the Woman Going Up the Escalator at Columbus Circle at Five-Thirty Last Evening  
for orchestra  
(2019)  
after a poem by Andrew Cohen

Violin I  
Violin II  
Viola  
Cello  
Double Bass  
Flute  
Clarinet  
Bassoon  
Trumpet  
Trombone  
Percussion  
Harp

Under half pressure notes ("Choir" harmonics) are sustained or wounding pitch in the score, the highest notes (one semitone higher) are given in the parts.

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This page of a musical score contains two systems of music, both beginning with a section labeled 'A'. The score is written for a large ensemble, including woodwinds, brass, strings, and percussion. The notation is dense, with many notes and rests across the staves. Dynamics such as *ppp* (pianissimo) and *pp* (piano) are frequently used. Performance instructions, such as 'Tutti' and 'Crescendo', are interspersed throughout the score. The music is organized into measures, with bar numbers and rehearsal marks visible. The page concludes with a double bar line and a final measure.

**B**

Violins I, Violins II, Violas, Cellos, Double Basses, Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets, Bassoons, Horns, Trombones, Trumpets, Percussion, and strings.

Time signatures: 4/4, 3/4, 3/8, 7/16, 2/4.

Dynamic markings: ppp, p, mf, f.

This page of a musical score is divided into two systems, each beginning with a section marked 'C'. The score is written for a large ensemble, including strings, woodwinds, brass, and a choir. The notation is dense, with many notes and rests across all staves. Dynamics such as *ppp* (pianissimo) and *pp* (piano) are frequently used. The tempo is marked *Andante*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and articulation marks. The page is numbered '6' at the bottom center.

This page of a musical score is divided into two main systems. The top system includes staves for strings (Violins I, Violins II, Violas, Cellos, Double Basses), woodwinds (Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets, Bassoons), brass (Trumpets, Trombones, Tuba/Euphonium), and percussion (Timpani, Snare, Cymbals, Tom-toms, Triangle, Gong, Chimes, Bells, Cymbals, Snare, Tom-toms, Triangle, Gong, Chimes, Bells). The bottom system includes staves for vocal soloists (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a choir (SATB). The score is marked with various dynamics such as *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *f*, and *fff*. Time signatures of 7/8, 4/4, 5/8, and 4/4 are used throughout. A large 'D' is placed above the first system, and another 'D' is placed above the second system. The page number '7' is centered at the bottom.

This page of a musical score is densely packed with musical notation for a large ensemble. The score is organized into two main systems, each containing multiple staves. The top system includes staves for Piccolo (Pic.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bassoon (Bsn.), Trumpet (Trp.), Trombone (Tbn.), Tuba (Tub.), and Snare Drum (Sn.). The bottom system includes staves for Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vcl.), Double Bass (Cb.), and various Percussion instruments (Perc.). The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and rests. Dynamics such as *ppp* (pianissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte) are indicated throughout. Tempo markings include *And. mos.to* (Andante molto) and *Alleg. mos.to* (Allegretto molto). The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, with some measures containing multiple beams of notes. The overall layout is professional and detailed, typical of a high-quality orchestral score.

**E** 4/4

Fl. I. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 222. 223. 224. 225. 226. 227. 228. 229. 230. 231. 232. 233. 234. 235. 236. 237. 238. 239. 240. 241. 242. 243. 244. 245. 246. 247. 248. 249. 250. 251. 252. 253. 254. 255. 256. 257. 258. 259. 260. 261. 262. 263. 264. 265. 266. 267. 268. 269. 270. 271. 272. 273. 274. 275. 276. 277. 278. 279. 280. 281. 282. 283. 284. 285. 286. 287. 288. 289. 290. 291. 292. 293. 294. 295. 296. 297. 298. 299. 300. 301. 302. 303. 304. 305. 306. 307. 308. 309. 310. 311. 312. 313. 314. 315. 316. 317. 318. 319. 320. 321. 322. 323. 324. 325. 326. 327. 328. 329. 330. 331. 332. 333. 334. 335. 336. 337. 338. 339. 340. 341. 342. 343. 344. 345. 346. 347. 348. 349. 350. 351. 352. 353. 354. 355. 356. 357. 358. 359. 360. 361. 362. 363. 364. 365. 366. 367. 368. 369. 370. 371. 372. 373. 374. 375. 376. 377. 378. 379. 380. 381. 382. 383. 384. 385. 386. 387. 388. 389. 390. 391. 392. 393. 394. 395. 396. 397. 398. 399. 400. 401. 402. 403. 404. 405. 406. 407. 408. 409. 410. 411. 412. 413. 414. 415. 416. 417. 418. 419. 420. 421. 422. 423. 424. 425. 426. 427. 428. 429. 430. 431. 432. 433. 434. 435. 436. 437. 438. 439. 440. 441. 442. 443. 444. 445. 446. 447. 448. 449. 450. 451. 452. 453. 454. 455. 456. 457. 458. 459. 460. 461. 462. 463. 464. 465. 466. 467. 468. 469. 470. 471. 472. 473. 474. 475. 476. 477. 478. 479. 480. 481. 482. 483. 484. 485. 486. 487. 488. 489. 490. 491. 492. 493. 494. 495. 496. 497. 498. 499. 500. 501. 502. 503. 504. 505. 506. 507. 508. 509. 510. 511. 512. 513. 514. 515. 516. 517. 518. 519. 520. 521. 522. 523. 524. 525. 526. 527. 528. 529. 530. 531. 532. 533. 534. 535. 536. 537. 538. 539. 540. 541. 542. 543. 544. 545. 546. 547. 548. 549. 550. 551. 552. 553. 554. 555. 556. 557. 558. 559. 560. 561. 562. 563. 564. 565. 566. 567. 568. 569. 570. 571. 572. 573. 574. 575. 576. 577. 578. 579. 580. 581. 582. 583. 584. 585. 586. 587. 588. 589. 590. 591. 592. 593. 594. 595. 596. 597. 598. 599. 600. 601. 602. 603. 604. 605. 606. 607. 608. 609. 610. 611. 612. 613. 614. 615. 616. 617. 618. 619. 620. 621. 622. 623. 624. 625. 626. 627. 628. 629. 630. 631. 632. 633. 634. 635. 636. 637. 638. 639. 640. 641. 642. 643. 644. 645. 646. 647. 648. 649. 650. 651. 652. 653. 654. 655. 656. 657. 658. 659. 660. 661. 662. 663. 664. 665. 666. 667. 668. 669. 670. 671. 672. 673. 674. 675. 676. 677. 678. 679. 680. 681. 682. 683. 684. 685. 686. 687. 688. 689. 690. 691. 692. 693. 694. 695. 696. 697. 698. 699. 700. 701. 702. 703. 704. 705. 706. 707. 708. 709. 710. 711. 712. 713. 714. 715. 716. 717. 718. 719. 720. 721. 722. 723. 724. 725. 726. 727. 728. 729. 730. 731. 732. 733. 734. 735. 736. 737. 738. 739. 740. 741. 742. 743. 744. 745. 746. 747. 748. 749. 750. 751. 752. 753. 754. 755. 756. 757. 758. 759. 760. 761. 762. 763. 764. 765. 766. 767. 768. 769. 770. 771. 772. 773. 774. 775. 776. 777. 778. 779. 780. 781. 782. 783. 784. 785. 786. 787. 788. 789. 790. 791. 792. 793. 794. 795. 796. 797. 798. 799. 800. 801. 802. 803. 804. 805. 806. 807. 808. 809. 810. 811. 812. 813. 814. 815. 816. 817. 818. 819. 820. 821. 822. 823. 824. 825. 826. 827. 828. 829. 830. 831. 832. 833. 834. 835. 836. 837. 838. 839. 840. 841. 842. 843. 844. 845. 846. 847. 848. 849. 850. 851. 852. 853. 854. 855. 856. 857. 858. 859. 860. 861. 862. 863. 864. 865. 866. 867. 868. 869. 870. 871. 872. 873. 874. 875. 876. 877. 878. 879. 880. 881. 882. 883. 884. 885. 886. 887. 888. 889. 890. 891. 892. 893. 894. 895. 896. 897. 898. 899. 900. 901. 902. 903. 904. 905. 906. 907. 908. 909. 910. 911. 912. 913. 914. 915. 916. 917. 918. 919. 920. 921. 922. 923. 924. 925. 926. 927. 928. 929. 930. 931. 932. 933. 934. 935. 936. 937. 938. 939. 940. 941. 942. 943. 944. 945. 946. 947. 948. 949. 950. 951. 952. 953. 954. 955. 956. 957. 958. 959. 960. 961. 962. 963. 964. 965. 966. 967. 968. 969. 970. 971. 972. 973. 974. 975. 976. 977. 978. 979. 980. 981. 982. 983. 984. 985. 986. 987. 988. 989. 990. 991. 992. 993. 994. 995. 996. 997. 998. 999. 1000.







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Flute 1, Flute 2, Oboe 1, Oboe 2, Clarinet 1, Clarinet 2, Bassoon 1, Bassoon 2, Contrabass, Horn 1-4, Trumpet 1-3, Trombone 1-3, Tuba, Percussion (vibraphone, xylophone, maracas), Snare, Viola 1-4, Cello 1-4, Double Bass.

Musical score with various dynamics (ppp, p, f, mf, ff), articulations (accents, slurs), and performance instructions (e.g., "to have clear", "to play in strings in B", "vibrato", "trill").

Section markers I and J are present. Time signatures include 3/4, 6/4, and 3/2.





















126 **S** 127 128

Picc. 1 *fff* *mp* *ppp* *mp*

Picc. 2 *fff* *p possibile* *mp* *ppp* *p*

Fl. 1 *fff* *p possibile* *ff* *mp* *ppp*

Ob. 1 *fff* *ff* *mp*

Ob. 2 *fff* *p possibile* *ff* *p*

C. A. *fff* *mp* *ff*

D. C. *fff* *p possibile* *ff* *ppp*

C. 1 *fff* *mp* *ff* *ppp*

C. 2 *fff* *mp* *ff* *ppp*

Bsn. 1 *fff* *ppp* *mp* *ff*

Bsn. 2 *fff* *ppp* *mp* *ff*

Obss. *fff* *ppp* *mp* *ff*

Hr. 1 *fff* *ff* *pppp*

Hr. 2 *fff* *ff* *pppp*

Hr. 3 *fff* *ff* *pppp*

Hr. 4 *fff* *ff* *pppp*

Trp. 1 *fff* *ff*

Trp. 2 *fff* *ff*

Picc. Trp. *fff* *ff* *Piccorno Trumpet*

Trbn. 1 *fff* *ff*

Trbn. 2 *fff* *ff*

R. Trbn. *fff* *ff*

Trbn. *fff* *mp* *ff*

Timpani *fff* *mp*

Perc. 1 *fff* [tim's roar] to bass drum *fff* [bass drum] edge *fff*

Perc. 2 *fff* to xyloimba *fff* xyloimba *fff*

Perc. 3 *fff* marimba *fff*

Hr. *fff*

Vln. I *fff* [ord.] (piccato going to staccato) *fff*

Vln. II *fff* [ord.] (piccato going to staccato) *fff*

Vla. *fff* (piccato) *mp* *fff* *ppp* *ppp* *ppp*

Vcl. *fff* (piccato) *mp* *fff* *ppp* *ppp* *ppp*

Dbl. *fff* (piccato) *mp* *fff* *ppp* *ppp* *ppp*



**T**

This page of a musical score, labeled 'T', contains 33 staves for various instruments and percussion. The score is divided into three systems. The first system includes Percussion 1 and 2, Flute 1, Oboe 1 and 2, Clarinet in A, Clarinet in Bb, Clarinet in C, Bassoon 1 and 2, Contrabassoon, Horns 1-4, Trumpets 1-2, Percussion Triangle, Trombones 1-3, Bass Trombone, Tuba, and Timpani. The second system includes Percussion III (snare drum, bass drum, cymbal), Percussion IV (xylophone), Percussion V (marimba), and Harp. The third system includes Violin I and II, Viola, Violoncello, Double Bass, and Double Basses (two). The score features complex rhythmic patterns, often with triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *mp*, *p*, *f*, and *ff* are used throughout. Performance instructions like 'near centre' and 'edge' are present for the snare drum. A large 'T' is printed at the bottom of the page, corresponding to the section header at the top.









Peter Fahey

# **Fata Morgana**

for solo piano and ensemble

2010/2012

Full Score

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First performed on April 17, 2010 in Barnes Hall, Ithaca, New York by Chi-Chen Wu (piano) and the Festival Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Cynthia Johnston Turner

Duration: approx. 4 minutes

## Instrumentation

Flute  
Cor Anglais (reed removed)  
Bass Clarinet in Bb  
Bassoon

Horn in F  
Trumpet in C (part in Bb also available)  
Tenor Trombone

Percussion (one player): **side drum**; **2 suspended cymbals** (1 Chinese); medium or low **temple block** (the wooden, rectangular kind), attached to a temple block stand; a **wooden object** with a rough-finish surface and/or a hard edge to bow on, such as a plank or sheet of wood, preferably suspended; a pair of **sandpaper blocks**; **call bell** (the type found on hotel reception desks, libraries, etc.)

Solo Piano

Mandolin (or guitar if mandolin is unavailable, but not both)

2 Violins  
Viola  
Cello  
Double Bass

## Supplementary Explanations

These explanations are in addition to those given in the score itself.

All of the relevant explanations for the players are given in the individual parts – no supplementary explanations handout is required.

### General

***ff***

dynamics in quotation marks (“action dynamics”) indicate the intensity of the action itself - the force or effort involved in producing the sound – rather than the acoustical result



*crescendo* from nothing



*decrescendo* to nothing



a gradual transition between two different modes of playing

*l. v.*

*laissez vibrer* - let the sound ring on, do not dampen



(three strokes through the stem) unmeasured, regardless of the note duration

### Flute

- toneless (finger the given notes)
- ◐ half air, half tone
- ◇ overblow to produce upper partials of the fingered notes
- ◊ lightly overblow (lower partials)

### Winds and Brass (except flute)



blow tonelessly through the instrument (finger the given notes)



key noise

### Percussion



double bass bow



wire brushes

## Strings

flaut. *flautato* – a very light, swift bowing action, using little or no bow pressure and more of the bow per bow-stroke than normal. It may be necessary to counterbalance the dead weight of the bow with the wrist. No vibrato. (Not to be confused with *flautando*, synonymous with *sul tasto*, meaning to bow near to, or on, the fingerboard.)

salt. *saltando* (down-bow spiccato) – a measured ricochet bowing



an unmeasured ricochet bowing – with a light, loosely held bow, let the bow bounce naturally on the strings

col legno e  
crini battuto

strike the strings with the bow, half wood, half hair



move the bow rapidly and loosely from side-to-side (rather than up and down), like a **windscreen wiper**, on the strings. The result, when performed on the muted strings, is a toneless brushing sound.



a **circular motion** with the bow on the strings (“swirl”). The result, when performed on the muted strings, is a toneless “swishing” sound.



lightly touch the string, as if to produce a harmonic. The written note indicates where to place the finger on the string. With the exception of the octave harmonic (second partial of the open string, notated in the usual manner), no distinction is made between “half-harmonics” (where the touched note does not occur at one of the nodes) and actual harmonics – they should be treated equally. When combined with *flautato*, the result is a rather veiled tone, and the resulting pitch and sound quality are somewhat indeterminate.



the highest note possible (or some other indeterminate high note) on the specified string



violins and viola, bow on the right-hand **corner of the bridge** while resting the lower part of the bow against the body of the instrument; cello and double bass, bow directly **on the bridge**. The result should be a completely toneless bowing sound.



bow on the inner part of one of the **tuning pegs** on the right-hand side of the peg box to produce a toneless hissing sound



an arrow extending from the stem of a note indicates that the action continues longer than the written duration, or into the next action (even if it is followed by a rest)



**mute symbol** – lightly dampen the strings with the left hand to prevent them from vibrating (an arrow extending from the symbol indicates that the strings remain muted for the following action or actions)



Bartók pizz.







④

15 **B**

(ord.)

Fl. *mf* *p* *f* *f*

C. A. *fz* *f* *f*

B. Cl. *f* *mf* *f*

Bsn. *f* *f* *f*

Hn. *fz* *mf* *pp* *f*

C Tpt. *fz* *fz* *f* *f*

Tbn. *fz* *f* *fz* *f*

Perc. **Call bell** *f* *f* *p* *fz*

Solo Pno. *mf* *p* *mf* *fz*

Mand. *mf* *mf*

(Gtr.) *mf* *mf*

Vln. 1 *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

Vln. 2 *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

Vla. *fz* *f* *p* *mf* *p*

Vc. *f* *f* *f* *f*

Db. *ppp* *fz* *mf* *ppp* *fz*

plunger

cuivre

Side drum (snare on)

rapid side-to-side brushing motion ("shake")

mute strings (pizzicato-like sound)

silently depress keys

Sos.

reed removed

(without valve trill)

to harmon mute

(Flz.)

détaché

IV flaut.

II gliss.

legno e crini battuto (ricochet)

(ord.) → sul pont. flaut.

strike strings

salt.

II gliss.

19 **C**

Fl. *ord.* *p* → *f* *p* → *f* *f*

C. A. *f* *fz*

B. Cl. *f* *pp* → *mf* → *pp* *fz*

Bsn. *f* *f*

Hn. *f* *fz* *p* → *mf* *gliss.*

C Tpt. *3:2* *p* → *mf*

Tbn. *cuivre* *f*

Perc. **Sus. China cymbal** *fz* l. v. **Wooden object** (see front matter) *f* bow rapidly on the object (toneless bowing sound)

(activates harmonics reverberation of sostenuto notes)

Solo Pno. *mf* → *f* → *mf* *Ped.* \* (Sos.) \*

Mand. *mf*

(Gtr.) *f*

Vln. 1 **C** *fz* *detaché* IV. flaut. *p* → *mf* → *p* *detaché* sul pont. III. flaut. *mf* *rapid gliss.* (not longer than written duration)

Vln. 2 *fz* *detaché* IV. flaut. *mf* *(ord.)* → sul pont. flaut. *f* *gliss.* ("swirl", muted strings)

Vla. *III* *gliss.* *p* → *mf* → *p* *gliss.* *f* → *p*

Vc. *fz* *strike strings* *f* *salt.* *f* → *3* → *f*

Db. *gliss.* *ppp* → *fz* *(natural harmonics)* IV. *pp* → *mf* → *ppp*

⑥

**D**

24

Fl. *fz*

C. A. *fz*

B. Cl. *fz*

Bsn. *fz* re-attach reed

Hn. *fz*

C Tpt. (Flz.) *fz* (harmon) *p*

Tbn. *fz*

Perc. (wooden object) *fz* *fz* *sub. "fz"* *fz*

**harmonics**  
touch the node of the string (inside the piano) corresponding to the depressed key to obtain the first overtone (octave harmonic) of the note of the depressed key. (An alternative node of a different key-and-corresponding-string may be used if necessary, as long as the sounding pitch is correct.)

Solo Pno. *f* node (1/2 way up the length of the string) sounding pitch *mf* key *senza Ped.* (sustain harmonics by keeping the key depressed, as indicated, for a more harp-like quality)

Mand. *f* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* (with a light pick, sempre sim.)

Gtr. *f* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

**D**

Vln. 1 *fz* *fz* *mf* *détaché flaut.* *mf*

Vln. 2 *fz* *fz* *p* *mf* *p* *flaut.* *mf*

Vla. *fz* *p* *mf* *p* (ord.) flaut. *mf* *pizz.* (l. v.) *fz*

Vc. *fz* *mf* *arco* *fz*

Db. *mf* *arco* *fz*

30 **E**

(ord.) → ∞

○ → 5 → ●

◆ → ord.  
(ord.) → ○

Fl. *p* < *mf* > *p* "mf" ..... (*mf*) *p* "f"

C. A.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn. *f*

C Tpt. remove mute *fz* without mute *fz* to wispa mute

Tbn. *fz*

Perc.

Solo Pno. pluck string (inside piano) (harmonic) *f* (pedal sustains both the plucked note and the harmonic) *p* < *mf* > *p* "f"

Mand. *p* *fz* with the thumb II III *pp* *mf*

(Gtr.) *p* *fz* sul pont. *pp* *mf*

Vln. 1 **E** flaut. *f* *mf* *mf* *f* IV flaut. *f*

Vln. 2 (sim.) *f* *f* *f* IV flaut. *mf*

Vla. *f* IV flaut. *mf* flaut. *f*

Vc. (ord.) IV flaut. sul pont. *p* *mf* *p* *fz*

Db. *f* < *f* >



40 (ord.) → ∞

Fl. *p* → *mf* → *p* → *f* → *p* → *f*

C. A.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn. *fz*

C. Tpt. (harmon) *p* → *fz* remove mute

Tbn. (Flz.) *fz*

Perc. (wooden object) *f*

Solo Pno. *mf* silently depress keys

Mand. *mf*

(Gtr.) *f* → *mf*

Vln. 1 *f* → *mf* → *p* → *mf* → *p*

Vln. 2 (ord.) → sul pont. flaut. *p* → *mf* → *p* → *f* → *mf*

Vla. *f* → *f* → *f*

Vc. (i. v.) *p* → *fz* → *f*

Db. *fz* → *fz*

G

ord. → ord.

ord. → ord.

silently depress keys

Sos.



51 **H**

Fl. (ord.)  $p < mf > p$  "f" 5

C. A.

B. Cl. (ord.) 6 (toneless) 3:2 remove reed "fz"

Bsn.  $f$   $p < mf$

Hn.  $p < mf$  without plunger

C. Tpt.  $p < fz$

Tbn. plunger 3  $p < fz$

Perc. Call bell Temple block

Solo Pno.  $f$  silently depress keys Sos.

Mand. 3  $mf$

(Gtr.) 3  $mf$

**H**

Vln. 1 flaut. 3 3  $p < mf$  II gliss.  $mf$  sul pont.

Vln. 2 flaut. 3 3 3  $p < mf > p$  détaché flaut. 5  $mf$  (ord.) flaut. 3  $p < mf > p$

Vla. détaché IV flaut. 5  $mf$  arco 3  $mf$

Vc. salt. strike strings  $f$  legno e crini battuto  $f$

Db.  $ppp < fz$  II flaut.  $p < mf > p$  "f"

**I** **I** **VUOTA**

ord.  


Fl.  *p* *f*

C. A.  *fz*

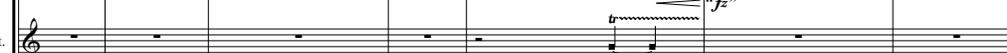
B. Cl.  *fz*

Bsn.  *fz* (reed removed) re-attach reed

Hn.  *fz*

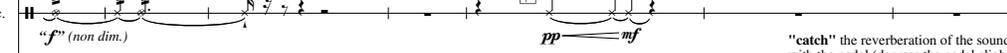
C Tpt.  *fz*

Tbn.  without plunger to straight mute *fz*

Perc.  *f* (non dim.) **Sus. cymbal (regular)** *pp* *mf* I. v.

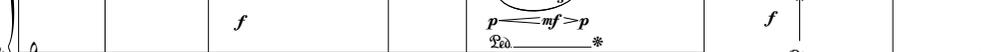
Solo Pno.  *f* *p* *mf* *p* *f* *fz* *f* *fz* *fz*

Mand.  *fz*

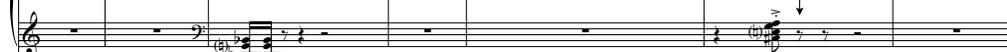
(Gtr.)  *fz*

Vln. 1  *fz* *fz*

Vln. 2  *fz* *fz*

Vla.  *fz* *fz*

Vc.  *fz* *fz*

Db.  *fz* *fz*

*(loco)* *(Sos.)* *(loco)*

*"catch" the reverberation of the sound with the pedal (depress the pedal slightly earlier or later than written if necessary - do not sustain the chord itself)*

64 **J** ord.   
 ○ → (13)

Fl. *p* *f*

C. A.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

C Tpt. **mouthpiece pop**  
strike the opening of the mouthpiece  
with the flat of the palm of the hand  
to harmon  
*f*

Tbn.

Perc. **Wooden object**  
*f* *f*

Solo Pno. *f* *mf* *f*  
3:2 3:2 3:2

Mand. *mf* *p* *f* *f*

(Gtr.) *mf* *p* *f* *f*

Vln. 1 **J** *f* *mf* *p* *mf*  
détaché flaut. 5 (ord.) → sul pont. flaut. (l. v.) pizz. (l. v.)

Vln. 2 *f* *f* *f*

Vla. *f* *pizz. (l. v.)* *mf* *arco*

Vc. *fz* *fz* *mf* *arco* (natural harmonic) *mf*

Db. *f* *mf* *pizz. (secco)* *arco* I (sounds 8<sup>ve</sup>) *ppp* *mf*

**K**

Fl. *ord.* *6* *p* *f* *p < mf > p* *ord.* *6* *p* *f* *p*

C. A. *3-2'* *f* *f* *f*

B. Cl. *f* *f* *f*

Bsn. *f* *f* *f*

Hn. *f* *f* *mf* *pp*

C. Tpt. *straight mute (ord.)* *cuivre* *remove mute* *harmon* *3* *p* *mf*

Tbn. *p* *fz*

Perc. *Side drum (snare on)* *continuous circular motions on the surface of the skin, brushes moving in opposite directions ("stirring the soup", but without accents)* *mf* *Call bell* *f* *l. v.*

Solo Pno. *(Ped)* *f* *mf*

Mand. *sul E* *mf* *sul A* *sul G (sounding pitch)*

(Gtr.) *mf*

Vln. 1 *détaché flaut.* *5* *mf* *legno e crini battuto (ricochet)* *f* *f*

Vln. 2 *I gliss.* *mf* *gliss.* *mf* *flaut.* *6* *p* *mf* *p* *f*

Vla. *flaut.* *mf* *(ord.) → sul pont.* *flaut.* *III* *(L. v.) (sounds 8<sup>me</sup>)* *détaché sul pont. flaut.* *5* *mf* *p*

Vc. *salt.* *f* *strike strings* *legno e crini battuto*

Db. *pizz. (!)* *(IV)* *mf* *ppp*

74 15

Fl. *f* *p* *mf* *f* *p* *f*

C. A. *f* *f*

B. Cl. *f* *pp* *mf* *pp* *f*

Bsn. *f* *pp* *mf* *pp* *f*

Hn. *f* *f* (harmon) *f* remove mute

C. Tpt. *p* *mf* (toneless) (Flz.)

Tbn. *f* *f* *gliss.* *f*

Perc. Call bell Side drum (snare on) *f* I. v. *f* (non dim.) (mf)

Solo Pno. a dry, percussive thud - mute the string(s) close to where the copper winding wire begins to avoid upper partials sounding *f* silently depress keys Sos.

Mand. (Gtr.)

Vln. 1 *p* *f* *p* *mf* *p* IV flaut. *f* *p* *mf* *p* détaché sul pont. flaut. *mf*

Vln. 2 *p* *mf* *p* *mf* IV flaut. *f* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

Vla. *pp* *mf* *p* *f* *mf* legno e crini battuto *mf* pizz. (I. v.)

Vc. *f* *mf* salt. *f* *mf* I

Db. *ppp* *fz* arco *gliss.*

ord.  $\circ \rightarrow \circ$

10

79 **M** **N**

Fl. *f* 5

C. A.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

C Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Solo Pno. *f* *f* *p* *mf* *p*  
(*Sos.*) \* *Sos.* \* *Edo* \*

Mand.

(Gtr.)

Vln. 1 **M** **N** *f* *f*

Vln. 2 *f*

Vla. *f* *fz*

Vc. (arco) *fz*

Db. *f*

17

85 VUOTA O

Fl.

C. A.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

C Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc.

Solo Pno.

Mand.

(Gtr.)

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

("catch" reverberation)  
*f*  $\text{Ped}$  \* silently depress keys *f*  
*Sos.* \* *p* — *mf* — *p*  
 $\text{Ped}$  \*

VUOTA O

sul tasto  
*ppp*

IV  
 sul tasto  
*ppp*

92

ord.

(Flz.)

**P**

Fl.

*p* *f* *mp*

C. A.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

*f*

without mute

C Tpt.

*f*

Tbn.

*f*

Perc.

Temple block

*f* (non dim.)

Solo Pno.

*f* ("catch" reverberation)

*f*

silently depress keys

Sos.

(senza Ped.)

Mand.

(Gtr.)

Vln. 1

*mf* *ppp* sul tasto IV *mf* *ppp* **P**

Vln. 2

IV sul tasto *ppp* *mf* *ppp* sul tasto *mf*

Vla.

*mf* *ppp* sul tasto *mf* *ppp* *mf*

Vc.

III sul tasto *ppp* *mf* *ppp* III or IV sul tasto *ppp* *mf* *ppp*

Db.



20

106 **Q** VUOTA

Fl.

C. A.

B. Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

C. Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc. (temple block) *f*

Solo Pno. *p* — *mf* — *p*  
Ped. \*  
*(Sos.)* \*

Mand.

(Gtr.)

Vln. 1 **Q** VUOTA

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

Peter Fahey

## 装配线 (Assembly Line)

2018

for laptops and ensemble

## INSTRUMENTATION

mac-keyboard/sampler 1: a MIDI-keyboard connected to a Mac running Max (or some other software for playing the samples such as Ableton Live)

PC-keyboard/sampler 2: a MIDI-keyboard connected to a laptop that a Microsoft Windows operating system typically runs on (such as a HP or Dell laptop) running Max (or some other software for playing the samples)

keyboard/sampler 3 (offstage or to the side of the stage): a MIDI-keyboard connected to a laptop (any kind) running Max (or some other software for playing the samples)

piano

clarinet in Bb

soprano saxophone

trombone (with F trigger)

violin

cello

The score is notated in C.

Duration: ca. 7' 30"

//////

装配线 (Assembly Line) was written for Claude Ledoux and LAPS Ensemble for a performance at Festival EuropArt, Brussels, March 6, 2018.

This piece was written in part at The MacDowell Colony. Thank you for your support!

## INSTRUCTIONS

Each of the three samplers has a set of pre-recorded samples that are triggered live during the performance. In order for the samples to synchronise correctly with the ensemble, it is important that the conductor maintains, as much as possible, a strict 120bpm throughout (with the exception of some shorter sections where the conductor follows the tempo of a sample). It is not necessary to use a click track to perform the piece.

The acoustic instruments should be amplified and sent, together with the samplers, to the speakers via the mixing desk. The instruments should be roughly evenly balanced with the sampler sounds.

The use of a Mac (sampler 1) and PC (sampler 2) is important only from a visual perspective, to provide a visual cue as the distinct character of each laptop; the mac triggers Apple OS sounds; the PC triggers Windows OS sounds. The Mac-keyboard/sampler 1 player should be seated centre-left of the stage (behind the ensemble) with its sound sent to speakers 3 and 4 and panned to the left (i.e. its sound coming roughly from where it is situated on the stage); the PC keyboard/sampler 2 player should be seated centre-right (behind the ensemble), sent to speakers 3 and 4 and panned to the right.

Sampler 3 triggers sounds from inside factories where Macs and PC's are assembled, as well as sounds used in Mac and PC commercials. Any type of laptop can be used for sampler 3 but it should be offstage or to the side of the stage -- not visible to the audience or at least separate from the Mac and PC. It's sound should be sent to speakers 1 and 2 (+ sub) (i.e. in front of the ensemble). (Note: some of the samples are pre-mixed/panned to the left and right.)

The samples should be played using Max or some other playback software such as Ableton Live with the laptops connected to MIDI keyboards. Each sample is assigned to a note on the keyboard (a separate diagram illustrates which samples are assigned to which keys). The key to be depressed is notated on the lower staff and a simplified transcription of the sample appears on the upper staff. Samples should be triggered precisely at the notated rhythm in order for them to synchronise correctly with what is happening in the rest of the ensemble. The samples should be triggered with a single touch -- i.e. it should not be necessary to keep the key depressed in order for the sample to continue sounding. Once triggered, samples should play through in their entirety, i.e. they should not be cut off when the same sampler triggers its next sample. The samples have a predefined dynamic and, therefore, the keyboards should be set to "not touch sensitive". (I advise including a "kill audio" key in the patch, perhaps the top key of the keyboard, to abruptly cut off the sample in necessary.)

## Supplementary Performance Notes

### General

“*f*” = (“action dynamics”) the relative amount of force or effort involved in producing the sound, rather than the resulting volume (“*f*” = approx. *p*)

 *crescendo* from nothing

 *decrescendo* to nothing

 (three strokes) = unmeasured, regardless of the note duration (also applies to finger tremolo)

### Winds

 = blow tonelessly through the instrument // the mouthpiece of the trombone should be held slightly away from the mouth

t. r. = tongue ram (trombone). The tongue is propelled forward with a strong thrust of air and stopped suddenly between the lips to produce a percussive effect (a definite pitch is audible).

breath accent (“en passant”) = holding the instrument away from the mouth, move the upper part of the instrument up and down (or side-to-side for the trombone) while continuously blowing, connecting the mouthpiece with the airstream as it passes the mouth at the indicated rhythm

### Strings

s. p. = sul pont. / p. s. p. = poco sul pont.

c. l. b. = col legno battuto

 = drop the bow, lightly and loosely, onto the string, allowing it to bounce naturally

 = harmonic fingering, for both natural and “false” harmonics

 = highest note possible

 = move the bow lightly and loosely from side-to-side - like a **windscreen wiper** - between the vicinity of the fingerboard (*axio*) and the bridge (*poiu*), “brushing” the string(s) with the hair of the bow, towards the tip. Use little or no bow pressure (counteract the dead weight of the bow). NB. A small amount of simultaneous up- or down-bow motion is necessary in order for the harmonics, however soft, to sound.

“swipe” = similar to above: a single, crescent-shaped swiping movement with the bow, like a windscreen wiper, over the surface of the strings

for *Clarinets in B-flat and E-flat* and *L-APV Ensemble*

Peter Fahey

# 装配线 (Assembly Line)

for laptops and ensemble

(2018)

Score in C

The score is written for a laptop ensemble and a wind ensemble. The tempo is marked  $\text{♩} = 120$  and the time signature is  $\frac{4}{4}$ . The score is divided into two systems, each with a 5/8 time signature. The first system includes parts for Mac-Keyboard/Sampler 1, PC-Keyboard/Sampler 2, Keyboard/Sampler 3, Piano, B♭ Clarinet, Soprano Saxophone, Trombone, Violin, and Violoncello. The second system continues the parts for B♭ Clarinet, Soprano Saxophone, Trombone, Violin, and Violoncello. The score includes various performance instructions such as "whirr", "empty trash", "single click 1", "single click 2", "sp recycle 1", "sp recycle 2", "tongue slap", "tap on keys", "multiphonie", "breath accent", "gliss.", "jeté", "p. s. p.", "c. l. b.", "on the bridge (toneless)", "jeté", "p", "mf", "ppp", "f", "ff", "fff", "pizz.", "arco", "sul ponticello", "sul tasto", "sul corno", "sul fagotto", "sul clarinetto", "sul sassofono", "sul trombone", "sul violino", "sul violoncello".

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version: 23/2/18 (EuropaAr)







23

**C**  $\frac{5}{8}$   $\frac{2}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$

Mac

single-click 1  
drag to trash  
whit  
volume amount  
slas  
sum X

PC

restore  
up recycle 2  
up recycle 1  
up balloon  
critical stop  
up recycle 2  
longphara recycle

Keyb./Sampler 3

"akay" 1  
factory 2

Pno.

**C**  $\frac{5}{8}$   $\frac{2}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$

tup on keys  
tup on keys  
p  
mf  
f

Cl.

tup on keys  
tup on keys  
mf  
p  
mf  
f

Sop. Sax.

l. r.  
breath accent  
p  
mf  
f

Tbn.

l. r.  
p  
mf  
f

Vln.

gliss.  
p. s. p.  
jeté  
mf  
p

Vc.

rub strings  
gliss.  
p. s. p.  
jeté  
mf  
p  
c. l. b.  
jeté  
mf  
p

ppp





conductor: follow tempo of recording

Mac

PC

Keyb./Sampler 3

Pno.

Cl.

Sop. Sax.

Tbn.

Vln.

Vcl.

42

44

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71  $\frac{4}{4}$  Mac

72  $\frac{4}{4}$  dialup 2

73  $\frac{5}{4}$  battery critial

74  $\frac{4}{4}$  battery low

75  $\frac{5}{4}$  w7 balloon

76  $\frac{4}{4}$  battery critial

77  $\frac{4}{4}$  battery low

78  $\frac{3}{4}$  battery low

79  $\frac{4}{4}$  Keyb./Sampler 3

80  $\frac{4}{4}$  "dialup 2" "type writer" - 400

81  $\frac{4}{4}$  factory 2

82  $\frac{4}{4}$  factory 2

Pho.  $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Cl.  $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Sop. Sax.  $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Tbn.  $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Vln.  $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

Vc.  $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{5}{4}$   $\frac{4}{4}$   $\frac{3}{4}$

(harmonics gliss.) gliss. I II (sim.) false harmonic gliss. (ad lib.) gliss. p. s. p. pizz. p. s. p. jete p. s. p. mf





97

Musical score for Mac, PC, Keyb./Sampler 3, Pno., Cl., Sop. Sax., Tbn., Vln., and Vc. The score is divided into systems with various time signatures (2/4, 5/4, 3/4) and dynamic markings (p, mf, f, ppp, fpp).

**Mac:** chimey, single click 1, single click 2, logged in, critical step

**PC:** space open program, space open program, sp chord, sp recycle 2, xp logon, ding

**Keyb./Sampler 3:** surface 1, "skay" 1

**Pno.:** [both speakers] "productivity" (120bpm) pro-duc-ti-vi-ty

**Cl.:** tap on keys

**Sop. Sax.:** strike bell

**Tbn.:** p s. p. jeté, c. l. b., p s. p. jeté, ord. (spicc.) jeté

**Vln.:** p s. p. jeté, c. l. b., p s. p. jeté

**Vc.:** c. l. b. jeté, ord. (spicc.) jeté

Time signatures: 2/4, 5/4, 3/4

Dynamic markings: p, mf, f, ppp, fpp







unconducted; discern tempo from recording

conduct from here:

$\text{♩} = 158$  (tempo of recording)

**P**  
 $\frac{12}{8}$  ( $\text{♩} = 158$ )

Mac

space open program

PC

does more 1  
"When people work together, they get more done. When people work together, they save time and money. That's why every Macintosh computer comes with networking built in. Sort of makes you wonder why other computers don't!"  
accordion

Keyb./Sampler 3

(on the beat)  $\delta^{ac-1}$   
(with accordion in recording)

Pto.

**P**  
 $\frac{12}{8}$  ( $\text{♩} = 158$ )

$\text{♩} = 158$  (tempo of recording)

Cl.

Sop. Sax.

Tbn.

Vln.

Vc.

conductor: wait for "don!" in recording then bring sampler 3 and ensemble back in (on beat three of bar 137)

The musical score is arranged in a system with 11 staves. The instruments are labeled as follows:

- Misc:** Staff 1 (Treble clef, key signature of two sharps)
- PC:** Staff 2 (Bass clef, key signature of two sharps)
- Keybo/Sampler 3:** Staves 3 and 4 (Treble and Bass clefs, key signature of two sharps)
- Pano:** Staves 5 and 6 (Treble and Bass clefs, key signature of two sharps)
- Cl:** Staff 7 (Treble clef, key signature of two sharps)
- Sop. Sax:** Staff 8 (Treble clef, key signature of two sharps)
- Tbn:** Staff 9 (Bass clef, key signature of two sharps)
- Vln:** Staff 10 (Treble clef, key signature of two sharps)
- Vc:** Staff 11 (Bass clef, key signature of two sharps)

The score begins with a conductor's instruction: "conductor: wait for 'don!' in recording then bring sampler 3 and ensemble back in (on beat three of bar 137)". A box containing the letter 'Q' is placed above the Misc staff. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. A specific instruction "[don!]" is written above the Keybo/Sampler 3 staff, with a bracket indicating it spans two measures.

























22/60

Mike

PC

Keyb./Sampler3

Pno

Cl.

Sop. Sax.

Tbn.

Vln.

Vc.

empty trash

drag to trash

restore

longhorn recycle

da vinyl 1

da vinyl 2

w7 recycle

sp recycle 1

sp recycle 2

restore

breath accent

jeté

empty trash

w7 recycle

sp recycle 1

sp recycle 2

restore

da vinyl 1

da vinyl 2

w7 recycle

sp recycle 1

sp recycle 2

restore

breath accent

jeté

empty trash

w7 recycle

sp recycle 1

sp recycle 2

restore

da vinyl 1

da vinyl 2

w7 recycle

sp recycle 1

sp recycle 2

restore

breath accent

jeté

empty trash

w7 recycle

sp recycle 1

sp recycle 2

restore

da vinyl 1

da vinyl 2

w7 recycle

sp recycle 1

sp recycle 2

restore

breath accent

jeté

VISUAL MUSIC:  
SIMON STEEN-ANDERSEN'S *RUN TIME ERROR* AND *BLACK BOX MUSIC*

A Thesis (Part II)  
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Musical Arts

by  
Peter William Fahey  
May 2021

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VISUAL MUSIC:  
SIMON STEEN-ANDERSEN'S *RUN TIME ERROR* AND *BLACK BOX MUSIC*

Peter William Fahey, D.M.A.

Cornell University 2021

Danish composer Simon Steen-Andersen is one of the most successful and widely performed composers of his generation. It is surprising then that there is relatively little serious scholarship on his music. The present thesis attempts to go some way towards addressing this scarcity of writing on the topic. After a brief introduction surveying the composer's career and achievements to date, Chapter 1 gives an overview of some of the most salient features of Steen-Andersen's music. It discusses the composer's focus in recent years on 'integrating concrete elements' into his music and on foregrounding elements of the live concert performance itself. While Steen-Andersen initially focused on the physical-choreographic elements of performance, there is a clear shift towards a more explicit focus on the visual elements of performance in works such as the *Next to Beside Besides* series and the *Studies for String Instruments*. Chapter 2 discusses *Run Time Error*, a work that develops some of the ideas introduced in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments*, but which is also more visual in conception than the earlier works. The chapter includes an extensive treatment of the inherently visual aspects of the concept, staging and set-up of *Run Time Error* as well as a consideration of its evolution since its first performances. Chapter 3 discusses *Black Box Music*, a work that represents a culmination of Steen-Andersen's exploration of the visual elements of musical performance and remains his most sophisticated exploration of the relationship between visual and sounding elements in his music. The chapter concludes with a detailed formal analysis of the same work.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Peter Fahey (b. 1982) is an Irish composer. His music has been performed at venues such as Carnegie Hall and the National Concert Hall Dublin by some of the leading interpreters of contemporary classical music including the American Composers Orchestra, the Aspen Contemporary Ensemble, Continuum, Crash Ensemble, Ensemble Musiques Nouvelles, ensemble recherche, Ensemble SurPlus and Talea Ensemble; soloists have included Tony Arnold, Dario Calderone and Chi-Chen Wu. His music has been featured at festivals such as the Aspen Music Festival, Gaudeamus Muziekweek and Festival Música Nova, Brazil and broadcast on RTÉ (Ireland), WQXR (New York), Concertzender (The Netherlands), MDR (Germany) and elsewhere. He has been awarded the American Composers Orchestra's prestigious Underwood Commission; the Stefan Kaske Fellowship at the Wellesley Composers Conference; a Susan and Ford Schumann Fellowship from the Aspen Music Festival and School; the Robbins Family Prize in Composition from Cornell University; the Franz Liszt Stipendium from the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar; and a number of awards from the Arts Council of Ireland including a 2018 Next Generation Award. He has also received fellowships from the Civitella Ranieri Foundation, The MacDowell Colony and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts and he has been a guest artist at Yaddo. Peter began his composition studies in Ireland at the Waterford Institute of Technology followed by studies at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, England and, in the United States, at Cornell University and, as an exchange scholar, at Columbia University.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

In a recent poll of music professionals from across Europe by Italian music magazine *Classic Voice*, Danish composer Simon Steen-Andersen was voted, after Austrian composer Georg Friedrich Haas, the “best living composer,” with two of his works – *Black Box Music* (2012) and *Piano Concerto* (2014) – voted among the best works composed since the turn of the millennium (second and sixth, respectively); four further works, including *Run Time Error* (2009), placed further down the list.<sup>1</sup> What is noteworthy and perhaps surprising about the results of this poll is the composer’s relative youth (Steen-Andersen was born in Odder, near Aarhus, in 1976) and the fact that he is trailed in the poll by such new music luminaries as Salvatore Sciarrino, Wolfgang Rihm and Kaija Saariaho. Whether or not the poll can be considered an accurate measure of the quality or reception of the composer’s output is debatable – the criteria for selection and definition of “best” composer and work are unclear, the meaningfulness of such a poll itself open to question – yet, since completing his studies in 2006 (in Aarhus and Copenhagen, with sojourns in Freiberg and Buenos Aires), there is little doubt that Steen-Andersen has produced a varied and impressive body of work that has established him as one of the more distinctive compositional voices of his generation. Indeed, by the time he graduated, he had already produced at least two notable works: his *String Quartet* (1999, the first of two), which already displays the novelty and kinesthetic quality of the instrumental writing that has come to characterize

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<sup>1</sup> Gianluigi Mattiotti, “Il referendum,” *Classic Voice* 212 (January 2017): 22-28. Those polled were music critics, musicologists, artistic directors and conductors. The other works by Steen-Andersen that received votes were *Amid* (2004), *Double Up* (2010) and *Inszenierte Nacht* (2013).

Steen-Andersen's more mature works; and, despite a certain superficial debt to Mauricio Kagel's *Transición II* (1959), *Rerendered* (2003, rev. 2004) for pianist and two assistants in which Steen-Andersen discovers the potential of the performance situation itself as a compositional focus in his music.<sup>2</sup> He had also begun his ongoing and frequently-performed series of "choreographic translations" entitled *Next to Beside Besides* (2005-) (discussed in Chapter 1) in which he focuses explicitly on the movements and actions of the performers, with sound conceived of as primarily a consequence of these actions.<sup>3</sup>

These student works were followed by a series of works – partly emerging from experiments with his own instrument, the guitar – in which the composer explored amplification as a compositional tool, together with what he refers to as "microscopic sounds," or very quiet sounds subjected to extreme amplification.<sup>4</sup> Steen-Andersen eventually abandoned this line of inquiry, which culminated with his *String Quartet #2* (2012), but his use of amplification to accentuate sounds that are usually hidden or suppressed in performance offered a logical extension of the explorations of peripheral, often very quiet sounds, and their attendant playing techniques, by Sciarrino and, in

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<sup>2</sup> In *Rerendered*, the two assistants perform various actions on the interior of a shared piano in a collaborative effort with the pianist similar to that of the percussionist and pianist in *Transición II*. In *Transición II*, however, there is an added element of conflict between the performers that brings a layer of theatricality not present in *Rerendered*. The scenario of *Rerendered* is also reminiscent of another of Kagel's works from the same period, *Sonant* (1960/...). Both works are concerned with the physical actions involved in producing the sounds, in particular the incongruity and physical struggle involved in performing extremely difficult instrumental actions at very soft dynamic levels, at times inaudibly.

<sup>3</sup> "Next to Beside Besides: for amplified solo instruments or ensembles +," Steen-Andersen's personal website, accessed March 7, 2021, <http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/NTBB-family-eng.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Håkon Stene, "This is Not a Drum: Towards a Post-Instrumental Practice" (Critical Reflection, Artistic Research Programme, The Norwegian Academy of Music, 2014), 47n82.

particular, Helmut Lachenmann.<sup>5</sup> The composer also imaginatively incorporated everyday objects and homemade constructions into works from this period, most memorably with his use of megaphones, first as passive amplifiers of an acoustic trio, then, gradually, as musical instruments in their own right in *On And Off And To And Fro* (2008).

An increasing focus on the inherent physical and choreographic and, in particular, visual aspects of musical performance, together with a more regular use of video, led to Steen-Andersen's 'breakout' work in 2009 with the overtly visual *Run Time Error* (discussed in detail in Chapter 2), a playful and inventive, if somewhat derivative, work in which the audience is given an audiovisual tour of the venue in which the concert takes place. *Run Time Error* was soon followed by what is still Steen-Andersen's best-known work, *Black Box Music*, which was premiered by Håkon Stene and the Oslo Sinfonietta at the Darmstadt Summer Courses in 2012. In this equally playful and idiosyncratic work, the viewer-listener's perception of, and assumptions about, the connections between the visual and sounding elements of a musical work are explored by Steen-Andersen through a parody of the tropes and conventions of the conductor-orchestra relationship. Since then, there have been a number of large-scale, increasingly ambitious works, including two further works for the Donaueschingen Festival (following *Double Up* in 2010), the *Piano Concerto* (2014) and the recent *TRIO* (2019), as well as two operas of sorts, *Buenos Aires* (2014), in collaboration with Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart (premiered at the Ultima Festival, Norway) and "*if this then that*

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<sup>5</sup> Amplification is still an important tool in Steen-Andersen's music after his *String Quartet #2* but it is no longer a major compositional focus.

*and now what*” (2016) for the Munich Biennale.<sup>6</sup> These and other works from the past decade often involve elaborate set-ups and stagings with an emphasis on spectacle and humor and an at times virtuosic display of technology: the *Piano Concerto* begins with the destruction of a grand piano, dropped from a height of eight meters (documented in a super-slow motion video); in *TRIO*, the combined forces of the SWR orchestra, big band and choir perform together with video footage of their predecessors from the SWR archives (with cameos by Sergiu Celibidache, Carlos Kleiber and Duke Ellington, among others).

While the relative artistic merits of these works may be difficult to quantify, there is little doubt that, in the past decade or so, Steen-Andersen has become an increasingly ubiquitous presence on the European new music landscape with regular performances of his music at major venues and festivals throughout Europe, and further afield, by a veritable who’s who of contemporary classical music performers. A glance at the list of performances on the composer’s personal website suggests that he is not only (as Krogh Groth and Holmboe note) “one of the most performed Danish composers of his generation,” but, thanks in part to a handful of novel, adaptable works for solo instruments and chamber combinations, surely one of the most frequently and widely performed European composers working today.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A further stage work, *Inszenierte Nacht*, was created in collaboration with Ensemble Ascolta and premiered at the ECLAT festival in Stuttgart in 2013. However, *Inszenierte Nacht* is essentially a set of arrangements of music by Bach, Schumann, Mozart, Chopin and Ravel.

<sup>7</sup> Sanne Krogh Groth and Rasmus Holmboe, eds., “Simon Steen-Andersen,” trans. Helen Clara Hemsley, Seismograph, published October 30, 2014, <https://seismograf.org/node/6338>. As Seidl notes, in an article published in December 2019, *Next To Beside Besides* has been performed over 160 times, the studies for string instruments have over 250 performances between them, while *Run Time Error* and *Black Box Music* (both requiring a greater number of personnel) have

Steen-Andersen's music and standing in the new music community have also been recognized with a number of important prizes. These include the Mauricio Kagel Music Prize and the Ernst von Siemens Composers' Prize (both in 2017); the Nordic Council Music Prize (in 2014, for *Black Box Music*); and the SWR Orchestra Prize at the Donaueschingen Festival (twice, in 2014 for the *Piano Concerto* and in 2019 for *TRIO*). In 2016, the esteem in which Steen-Andersen is held in his adopted home of Germany was officially recognized when he was elected a member of the German Academy of the Arts (having already been awarded the Academy's Berliner Kunstpreis in 2013) and, in 2018, he was appointed a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. Further recognition has come from academia with his appointment in 2018 as Associate Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus (where he has taught since 2008 and where, a decade earlier, he began his own studies) and, also in 2018, as a professor in the Composition and Music Theatre Department at the University of the Arts in Bern. He has also served as a visiting professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo (2013-14), as a guest professor at the University of the Arts in Berlin (2017) and, in a further acknowledgement of his standing in German new music circles, as a returning tutor at the Darmstadt Summer Courses (2014, 2016 and 2018). As Seidl remarks in his recent essay on Steen-Andersen's

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been performed more than 50 and 40 times, respectively (Hannes Seidl, "Musik lügt: Zur Ästhetik von Simon Steen-Andersens Musik," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 2019/6: 40). For (what appears to be) a comprehensive list of performances dating back to 2003, see "Upcoming Concerts and Broadcasts," accessed March 7, 2021, [http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng\\_aktuell.htm](http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng_aktuell.htm).

music, in professional terms Simon Steen-Andersen “can confidently be described as one of the most successful living composers of new music” (my translation).<sup>8</sup>

It is surprising then that there is relatively little written about Steen-Andersen’s music, less still that offers a serious critique of his music and is based on more than a superficial interaction with the material.<sup>9</sup> Previous writers have also fallen rather carelessly into the trap of becoming, above all, advocates for the composer and his music. The present thesis attempts to go some way towards addressing the scarcity of scholarly writing on a subject that warrants further consideration, while hopefully avoiding the propensity for rhetoric and hyperbole of some previous writers.<sup>10</sup> I will focus primarily on two pieces, *Run Time Error* and *Black Box Music*.

In an article accompanying the *Classic Voice* poll that I mentioned at the outset, which serves to contextualize the results, musicologist and critic Gianluigi Mattiotti points to the visual and performative elements of Steen-Andersen’s music, implying that the

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<sup>8</sup> Seidl, “Musik lügt,” 40.

<sup>9</sup> Seidl suggests that an ostensible “lightness” in Steen-Andersen’s music, together with its humor, has led to an assumption of a certain superficiality, which, in turn, seems to discourage deeper consideration of his work (“Musik lügt,” 40-41). This may account in part for the dearth of more scholarly writing on the subject.

<sup>10</sup> Notable contributions to writing about Steen-Andersen’s music include a 2012 portrait by Isabel Herzfeld and, more recently, Hannes Seidl’s excellent essay (2019, referred to above). Also of note is a short collection of essays, albeit of varying quality, produced to coincide with the Steen-Andersen’s appointment as composer-in-residence with French ensemble 2e2m in 2014 entitled *Musique transitive*. The collection includes a short but adept analysis of *On and Off and To and Fro* by Martin Kaltenecker and, of particular relevance to the present thesis, a good introduction to the visual dimension of Steen-Andersen’s musical language by Rasmus Holmboe. Steen-Andersen has also written various, usually short texts about his own music (and music more generally). However, these texts do not always serve to clarify matters. His most notable contribution (albeit a transcription of a lecture) is a 2016 essay entitled *Expanded music oder: Dinge, die zu mehreren Kategorien gehören*.

composer's focus on these elements accounts, at least in part, for the popularity of his work among those polled.<sup>11</sup> This turn towards the visual and performative is, Mattietti rightly notes, part of a wider trend in new music. This trend is evident, for instance, in the music of Steen-Andersen's contemporaries who also appear in the results of the *Classic Voice* poll, including Stefan Prins (b. 1979), Johannes Kreidler (b. 1980), Jennifer Walshe (b. 1974) and (though somewhat older) Michael Beil (b. 1963). However, in Steen-Andersen's music, a focus on the performative (foregrounding aspects of the performance situation itself) and, in particular, the visual aspects of music (foregrounding the inherent visibility of musical performance as well as devising works where the visual dimension is at least as important as the sounding dimension) can be regarded as the defining features of his musical language. Moreover, in works from the past decade or so, it is the visual dimension of Steen-Andersen's music that has become more conspicuous, with the focus shifting from the physical and choreographic aspects of performance to the viewer-listener's perception of these actions. It is the visual dimension of Steen-Andersen's music then that is the main focus of my examination of *Run Time Error* and *Black Box Music*.

In Chapter 1, I begin with an overview of the most salient features of Steen-Andersen's musical language, some of which I have already touched upon, together with a discussion of what is frequently referred to as the fundamental aspect of Steen-Andersen's musical aesthetic: the composer's notion of "integrating concrete

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<sup>11</sup> Mattietti, "Il referendum," 24-25.

elements.”<sup>12</sup> I attempt to understand what the composer means by “concrete elements” and how these elements are integrated into a musical work. In particular, I consider how the concept informs his foregrounding of the physical-choreographic and visual aspects of performance with reference to the *Next to Beside Besides* series and the *Study for String Instrument #1* and *#3* (2007 and 2011, respectively). The main objective of this chapter is to provide context for my lengthier discussions of *Run Time Error* and *Black Box Music* in the following chapters.

In Chapter 2, I explore *Run Time Error*. Despite being described as his “signature work,” it is somewhat atypical in the composer’s output and does not fit neatly into a narrative that one might be tempted to trace regarding the evolution of the composer’s visual language from *Rerendered* to *Black Box Music* and beyond.<sup>13</sup> Yet, it is one of his most distinctly visual works. I examine the inherently visual aspects of the concept, set-up and staging of this continually-evolving work. Instead of the kind of score-based formal analysis that I will give of *Black Box Music* (*Run Time Error* is realized according to a set of loosely-prescribed instructions rather than a precisely-notated score), I consider, among other things, the extent to which the composer’s performances

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<sup>12</sup> A short biography of Steen-Andersen on the composer’s personal website suggests his notion of integrating concrete elements is the primary focus of his music ([http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng\\_CV.htm](http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng_CV.htm), accessed March 7, 2021). This description of his musical project is frequently reproduced in concert programs and in publicity material.

<sup>13</sup> *Run Time Error* is often referred to as Steen-Andersen’s signature work, or one of his signature works, in concert programs and in publicity material. See, for instance, Spor Festival 2018, festival program, published April 20, 2018, [https://issuu.com/sporfestival/docs/sporfestival2018\\_program\\_issuu](https://issuu.com/sporfestival/docs/sporfestival2018_program_issuu). See also, back of box, *Simon Steen-Andersen: Black Box Music*, Oslo Sinfonietta and Håkon Stene, DACAPO 2.110413, DVD, 2014. The degree to which the staging and performance of the work are improvised and the composer’s central role in its realization sets it apart from most of the other works in the composer’s catalog.

of the work are informed by the conventions of two-part inventions with reference to a particular performance, one filmed at the Royal Library in Copenhagen in 2013 (the joystick performance component recorded in 2014), which, I believe, represents a typical presentation of the work.<sup>14</sup> I also consider some models and sources of inspiration for *Run Time Error*.

My discussion of *Black Box Music* in Chapter 3 is divided into two parts. In the first part, I offer a general discussion of the work including an exploration of the connection between the visual and sounding elements in the opening movement and the manner in which the composer playfully exploits the viewer-listener's perception of this relationship. The second part is dedicated to a formal analysis of the work. Unlike *Run Time Error*, *Black Box Music* is performed from a score and this affords the opportunity to indulge in a lengthy, score-based analysis of the work. As with *Run Time Error*, I examine the inherently visual aspects of the concept, set-up and staging of the work. *Black Box Music* represents the culmination of the composer's exploration of the visual dimension of his music up to that point, in particular the relationship between what we see and what we hear.

I conclude with a short discussion of how the visual dimension of Steen-Andersen's musical language has continued to evolve since *Black Box Music* and suggest that, despite an often virtuosic interplay between live and prerecorded video elements, the relationship between the visual and the sounding elements in his music has, curiously,

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<sup>14</sup> Oslo Sinfonietta and Håkon Stene, *Simon Steen-Andersen: Black Box Music*, Dacapo Records, DACAPO 2.110413, DVD, 2014.

become more conventional. I also consider the larger significance of Steen-Andersen's foregrounding of the physical and visual elements of music.

## CHAPTER 1

### **INTEGRATING THE CONCRETE: *NEXT TO BESIDE BESIDES* AND THE *STUDIES FOR STRING INSTRUMENTS***

Simon Steen-Andersen's catalog, which runs to about sixty-five distinct works, is notable for, among other things, its variety. In addition to more precisely notated works for the usual classical formations (symphony orchestra, soloist and orchestra, string quartet and so on), there are works involving improvisation to varying degrees that are staged or performed according to a sparsely notated score or set of instructions; works involving unorthodox instruments and combinations of instruments (including everyday objects and homemade constructions); works that stray towards performance art; multimedia works and works where the focus is largely on technology; occasional video works and installations; works in which the composer is the primary performer or otherwise involved in the performance or presentation of the work or indeed part of the work itself; works devised in collaboration with others (to an extent that is perhaps uncommon in classical music); and arrangements, reworkings and 'stagings' of older music as well as original works that contain little or no original music (sometimes relying heavily on samples) or indeed little or no music at all.

Yet, there are common features among these works and it is possible to speak in general terms about them. In the present chapter, I give an overview of some of the more salient features of Steen-Andersen's musical language or approach. These include a use of novel sounds and effects, repetition, extreme amplification of very quiet sounds, humor

and repurposing of older music. The aesthetic underpinning for many of these features is the composer's notion of 'integrating concrete elements' into the music. But what is meant by 'concrete elements'? How are these elements 'integrated' into the work? I turn to these questions next. In particular, I am interested in how this notion informs the composer's focus on the physical-choreographic, visual and other aspects of musical performance with particular reference to his *Next to Beside Besides* series of pieces and the *Studies for String Instruments*.

Among the more salient features of Steen-Andersen's music is a predilection for novel, even comic instrumental sounds and effects, often the result of unconventional or extended playing techniques and the heavy preparation of instruments. Typically, these novel sounds are combined with samples (both audio and audiovisual). His music often has a disjointed, stop-and-start quality. This quality is the result of a kind of rapid 'cutting' between the different sounds and effects (typically repeated verbatim) as well as the larger gestures they make up, as if the live sounds too were sampled.<sup>1</sup> Combined with a certain slapstick quality in the instrumental writing (notably a penchant for rapid glissando and arpeggio and other kinesthetic effects) the music is, at times, reminiscent of the anarchic music of Carl Stalling.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Double Up* and *TRIO* provide obvious examples of this kind of jerky, stop-and-start quality in the music. This quality is partly the result of Steen-Andersen's heavy use of samples in these pieces: *Double Up* is composed entirely of samples of everyday sounds, underscored or 'doubled' by the orchestra, while *TRIO* is made up entirely of audiovisual samples from the Südwestrundfunk (SWR) television archives that are taken up by the live musicians. The opening movement of *Black Box Music*, which does not include recorded samples, is also a good example of this disjointed quality in the music, and of Steen-Andersen's liking for novel sounds and effects.

<sup>2</sup> Stalling scored most of the classic Warner Bros. cartoons. He worked on *Looney Tunes* and its sister series *Merrie Melodies* from 1936-1958 (with orchestrations by Milt Franklyn from the

Steen-Andersen's off-kilter instrumental sounds and effects are supplemented by the incorporation of everyday objects, for example, golf balls, electric drills, PVC tubes, treadmills, balloons or, in the case of *Run Time Error*, whatever objects are found at the venue. These can also include cheap, everyday electronic items and homemade constructions, most notably the homemade amplified box in *Black Box Music*.

Technology also plays a vital role in Steen-Andersen's music. A notable feature of his work is an impressive and, at times, virtuosic display of technology combining live performance with live, pre-recorded or interactive video elements. This aspect of his work is especially evident in the recent large-scale concert works *Piano Concerto* (2014) and *TRIO* (2019) as well as the stage work "*if this then that and now what*" (2016).

Repetition is a key feature of Steen-Andersen's music. Typically, Steen-Andersen's use of repetition involves the looping of short passages of music, stretched and contracted with subtle variation. It also involves the looping of individual sounds and gestures, which are usually repeated verbatim. The effect is reminiscent of sampling, due in large part to an unchanging harmonic profile. Steen-Andersen's treatment of live, acoustic material is, in general, similar to his treatment of found and prerecorded audio and audiovisual material. His looping or 'sampling' of the material also lends the music a mechanical or robotic quality, a quality that is reinforced by the repeated, sometimes

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late 1930's). His eccentric, hyperactive scores, which relied heavily on pastiche and rapid changes of key, time signature, dynamics and style (mirroring the madcap on-screen action), remain, according to Goldmark, the model for much cartoon music today (Daniel Goldmark, *Tunes for 'Toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 10). Stalling was also fond of glissando effects, in particular a single-string viola glissando.

exaggerated physical actions involved in producing the sounds. The opening measures of *Next to Beside Besides* (2005-) and *Study for String Instrument #1* (2007) are good examples (both discussed below). The opening measures of *In Spite of, And Maybe Even Therefore* (2007) and *Pretty Sound (Up and Down)* (2008) also exhibit this robotic quality. They also illustrate the manner in which Steen-Andersen can repeat a sound or gesture, at first verbatim, then at varying rates, as if stretched and contracted. Example 1 shows a repeated “*fffff*” gesture performed by an unamplified subgroup of piano (with the lid closed), contrabassoon, double bass and percussion at the beginning of *In Spite of, And Maybe Even Therefore*. Here, we can see that the gesture, which is made up of a quasi-unison between the performers, is repeated verbatim or looped twenty-one times before being stretched or unraveled as if it were part of a larger sample. The sequence gradually becomes longer and longer as the work progresses, revealing more of the sequence. The “*fffff*” gesture in the unamplified subgroup is interspersed with fragments of a passage from Beethoven’s *Bagatelles*, Op. 126, played extremely quietly, in an amplified subgroup of flute, horn and clarinet.

The image shows a musical score for a chamber ensemble. The top section includes staves for trumpet (tr.), horn (F), and clarinet in B-flat (cl. (Bb)), all playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a 'pizzicato' (pizz.) instruction. The piano (pno.) part features complex rhythmic patterns with various articulations and dynamics. The flute (fl.) and oboe (ob.) parts have specific performance instructions regarding breath and dynamics. The percussion (pc) part includes a 'breath in' instruction. The score is divided into measures M\*21, M\*9, M\*3, and M\*5, with a 'pizz.' instruction spanning across these measures.

**EXAMPLE 1:** *In Spite of, And Maybe Even Therefore*, mm. 1-8. © Edition S. Used with permission.

Two other works written around the same time, *Chambered Music* (2007) and *On And Off And To And Fro* (2008), display the composer’s skill at devising short, arresting passages of music or ritornello-like sections that are continuously looped with subtle variation.<sup>3</sup> The looping of short sections of material (both sounding and visual) is also a notable feature of the live performance component of *Run Time Error* as well as later

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of this aspect of *On And Off And To And Fro*, see Martin Kaltenecker, “Man, Music, Machine. Notes on ‘On And Off And To And Fro,’” in *Simon Steen-Andersen - Musique transitive*, ed. Pierre Roullier (Paris: Ensemble 2e2m, 2014), 139-160.

works such as *Black Box Music*, the *Piano Concerto* and, perhaps most conspicuously, *TRIO*.

Works written towards the end of his academic studies and in the years immediately after Steen-Andersen left the Academy of Music in Copenhagen (from about 2003 to 2012) explore amplification as a compositional tool together with what the composer refers to as “microscopic sounds” or very quiet sounds subjected to extreme amplification (as if placed under a microscope).<sup>4</sup> Works in this vein include *Amongst* (2005) for extremely amplified guitar and orchestra; *In Spite Of, And Maybe Even Therefore* (2007), in which he divides the ensemble into two subgroups, one amplified and one unamplified (as we have seen); and *Difficulties Putting it into Practice* (2007), where the performers themselves are amplified. In these and other works from the same period Steen-Andersen explores sounds that under normal circumstances are too weak to be heard – incidental sounds that are more or less concealed or suppressed in performance such as the sound of a string player changing hand position, the sound of a pianist depressing and releasing the keys or pedals of their instrument or, as in the case of *Difficulties Putting it into Practice*, bodily sounds such as inhaling and exhaling. These are often sounds that, like those explored by Salvatore Sciarrino, straddle the threshold between sound and silence. Unlike Sciarrino, however, many of the sounds Steen-Andersen explores are by-products of prescribed actions (as opposed to the

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<sup>4</sup> Håkon Stene, “This is Not a Drum: Towards a Post-Instrumental Practice” (Critical Reflection, Artistic Research Programme, The Norwegian Academy of Music, 2014), 47n82. Of his published works, *Rerendered* is the first to call explicitly for amplification as part of the work. However, according to Stene (“This is Not a Drum,” 44), the now unavailable *Amongst (Unattended Ones)* (2002), scored for two percussionists, involves amplified objects controlled with volume pedals.

realization of a described result in the score) and draw attention to the physical conditions in which the sounds are produced: the mechanics or physical materials of the instruments (or objects) he employs, the physical actions involved in producing the sound and other aspects of the performance situation. In this way, Steen-Andersen's music of this period is closer to that of Helmut Lachenmann, who, beginning the late 1960's, built an entire musical vocabulary out of peripheral sounds that draw attention to or 'describe' the conditions involved in their production based on his concept of *musique concrète instrumentale*.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as Stene astutely observes, Steen-Andersen's extreme amplification of very quiet sounds that draw attention to the manner in which

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<sup>5</sup> Lachenmann developed his concept of *musique concrète instrumentale* in works such as *temA* (1968), *Air* (1968/69), *Pression* (1969) and *Kontrakadenz* (1970/71). He introduced the term in a brief commentary on *Pression*, written a few years after its first performance, in which he refers to *musique concrète instrumentale* as "a music in which the sound events are chosen and organized so that the manner in which they are generated is at least as important as the resultant acoustic qualities themselves. Consequently those qualities, such as timbre, volume, etc., do not produce sounds for their own sake, but describe or denote the concrete situation: listening, you hear the conditions under which a sound- or noise-action is carried out, you hear what materials and energies are involved and what resistance is encountered." (Helmut Lachenmann, "Pression für einen Cellisten (1969/70)," in *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung*, ed. Josef Häusler (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1996), 381. I have used the translation as it appears in *Grove Music Online*, s.v. "Lachenmann, Helmut," by Ulrich Mosch, accessed October 16, 2018, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000015776>.) Although the concept of *musique concrète instrumentale* continues to inform his music, since the mid-1970's, Lachenmann has directed his attention beyond the sound material and the physical-mechanical conditions of its production. For Lachenmann, the focus has become what he calls the "aesthetic apparatus" or (what Nonnenmann describes as) "the totality of the aesthetic practice of a society with which any musical work is inevitably confronted" including aspects of "interpretation, distribution, reception, communication, commentary, etc." (Rainer Nonnenmann, "Music with Images--The Development of Helmut Lachenmann's Sound Composition Between Concretion and Transcendence," trans. Wieland Hoban, *Contemporary Music Review* 24, no. 1 (2005): 8.) In short, aspects of the social mediation of a work. This has led him to the (perhaps inevitable) reintegration and exploration of traditional or 'familiar' elements of music (traditionally expressive gestures, tonal allusions, even quotation and other direct references to the history of classical music) combined with the less (if increasingly) familiar sounds associated with *musique concrète instrumentale* (though he never entirely avoided conventional or familiar sounds and playing techniques).

they are produced can be considered a logical extension or elaboration of the *musique concrète instrumentale* of Lachenmann.<sup>6</sup>

A further connection with the music of Lachenmann is the manner in which Steen-Andersen treats whatever instrument he works with as, first and foremost, a kind of noise-maker. In works such *Pression* (1969) for solo cello, Lachenmann treats the instrument (as Jahn explains) in its “most original, non-artistic way: as a resonating body for realizing its basic sounding potential.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Steen-Andersen approaches an instrument as a raw object with the potential to produce sound, in much the same way that he approaches the everyday items he incorporates into his music. Like

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<sup>6</sup> Stene, “This is Not a Drum,” 55-56. Lachenmann’s concept of *musique concrète instrumentale* is itself an extension or elaboration of *musique concrète*, as developed by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry. Lachenmann attempted to apply the ideas associated with *musique concrète*, as he understood them, to instrumental music. As Lachenmann explains: “The original *musique concrète* [...] uses life’s everyday noises or sounds, recorded and put together by collage. I tried to apply this way of thinking, not with the sounds of daily life, but with our instrumental potentialities.” (Paul Steenhuisen, “Interview with Helmut Lachenmann – Toronto, 2003,” *Contemporary Music Review* 23, nos. 3-4 (2004): 9.) However, as Craenen notes, Lachenmann’s use of the term *musique concrète instrumentale* with reference to *musique concrète* may have been based on a common misconception or “incomplete interpretation” of what Schaeffer (who coined the term) actually meant by ‘concrete’ (Craenen, “Composing Under the Skin,” 84). Schaeffer used the term ‘concrete’ to refer not to everyday sounds or even the sounds themselves but to the manner in which the composer worked directly or ‘concretely’ with the sound material (recorded sounds), as opposed to using an indirect or abstract system of notation to represent the sounds. Unlike Lachenmann, whose sounds are intended as signifiers of their mechanical origin, Schaeffer intended the sounds he used to be heard abstractly as a purely sonic event, independent of any meanings associated with the source or cause of the sound, a way of listening Schaeffer referred to as *écoute réduite* or ‘reduced listening’ (Craenen, “Composing Under the Skin,” 80). It should be added that Lachenmann proposes a somewhat idiosyncratic notion of sound (or perhaps, more specifically, musical sound) as both “a characteristic result [the sound] *and* signal [description] of its mechanical origin” (italics mine) (Nonnenmann, “Music with Images,” 7). If we take the signification of a sound’s origin as part of a sound, one could say that Lachenmann is also (technically) working directly with sound. Regardless of whether or not Lachenmann’s concept is based on a misinterpretation of Schaeffer, both composers are concerned with extracting or ‘emptying’ their sound material of its preexisting connotations or cultural baggage.

<sup>7</sup> Hans-Peter Jahn, quoted in Henrik Friis, “Objective: The Object,” *Seismograph*, published May 5, 2015, <http://seismograf.org/en/tyskland/object/english>.

Lachenmann, Steen-Andersen's approach is partly an attempt to get away from the established identity of an instrument – an attempt to approach an instrument naively, as if it were newly invented, devoid of its history and repertoire.<sup>8</sup> Steen-Andersen gives the example of a cello: “I see it as a box with some strings that has some sounding possibilities.”<sup>9</sup>

Steen-Andersen's exploration of microscopic sounds remained a major focus in his music up until *Black Box Music*, at which point he largely abandoned the project.<sup>10</sup> The culmination and finest examples of this line of inquiry in his music are the *String Quartet #2* and *Im Rauschen*, both from 2012. In *String Quartet #2*, the musicians' bows rather than their instruments are the focus of the work. The bows are prepared and

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<sup>8</sup> Simon Steen-Andersen, lecture, “A musical approach to audio/visual composition: Implicit AV aspects of musical performance, AV-objects and musical excuses ...,” delivered December 5, 2018, <https://www.ircam.fr/article/detail/les-cours-de-lircam/>. Accessed April 29, 2020. Lachenmann discusses his approach to instrumentation, and composition more generally, in his essay “Über das Komponieren” and elsewhere in his collected writings (Helmut Lachenmann, “Über das Komponieren,” in *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung*, ed. Josef Häusler (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1996), 73-83).

<sup>9</sup> “Simon Steen-Andersen – Interview,” YouTube video, 2:16, posted by “Ensemble 2e2m,” March 7, 2014, [https://youtu.be/XMdHd\\_e6YIc](https://youtu.be/XMdHd_e6YIc) (unlisted). Friis also notes how Steen-Andersen shares “some of the same aesthetic considerations as Helmut Lachenmann,” in particular his treatment of musical instruments as if they were objects. Friis implies that these aesthetic considerations come via Steen-Andersen's former teacher, Mathias Spahlinger, a former student of Lachenmann, with whom Steen-Andersen studied in Freiburg (Henrik Friis, “Objective: The Object,” *Seismograph*, published May 5, 2015, <http://seismograf.org/en/tyskland/object/english>).

<sup>10</sup> According to Steen-Andersen, *Black Box Music* was originally going to involve a continuation of his exploration of microscopic sounds. The initial idea for *Black Box Music* was to create an acoustic space (the sound insulated box of the title) where he could explore even more extreme amplification of the “tiny sonic and gestural events” he had been exploring in his previous works, while overcoming the limits imposed by feedback in live settings (Stene, “This is Not a Drum,” 47). However, in the process of creating *Black Box Music*, the work became more about the staging and set-up (which determines much of the content of the piece) to the point where it “barely exploits the amplification-aspect that originally inspired the setup” (Stene, “This is Not a Drum,” 47n82).

heavily amplified (via contact microphones) and, in a reverse of the normal procedure, activated by the strings. In *Im Rauschen*, described as three “conceptual arrangements” of music by Schumann for wind trio, the performers use their instruments to filter sounds that are projected into them by miniature loudspeakers.<sup>11</sup>

Broadly speaking, Steen-Andersen’s music can be described as playful, witty, often exuberant and, at times, unabashedly entertaining (all notable features of *Run Time Error* and *Black Box Music* discussed in the following chapters). The playfulness in his music often involves gently poking fun at the practices and conventions of classical music or exposing some perceived ridiculousness in these practices and conventions, for instance, the conductor-orchestra relationship in *Black Box Music* or the operatic voice in *Buenos Aires*.<sup>12</sup> His music is also uncommonly direct. It is often characterized by an explicit or unrefined presentation of its musical material (repetition plays a role) and exhibits an unambiguous or literal interpretation of an underlying concept or theme. By deliberately exaggerating certain features of a work, aided by the use of amplification and video, its *raison d’être* is rarely in doubt. Examples of this kind of direct approach include the composer’s explicit, even crude focus on the physical actions of the performers in *Next to Beside Besides*; his “literal readings of the classics” in *Inszenierte*

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<sup>11</sup> Simon Steen-Andersen, *Im Rauschen* (Copenhagen: Edition S, 2015), front matter.

<sup>12</sup> This poking fun at aspects of the practices and conventions of classical music is related to the composer’s foregrounding or ‘amplifying’ of aspects of the performance situation, discussed below. Despite an occasional gesturing towards the political (for e.g., the muffled or ‘locked up’ voice, coming from a speaker inside the piano, reading excerpts from Nelson Mandela’s prison diary in *Chambered Music*; the stretched recording of a Mao Zedong speech in *Ouvertures*; or the use of megaphones in *On And Off And To And Fro*), and despite a certain directness in the music, it is unclear if the playful quality of Steen-Andersen’s music masks a deeper or underlying seriousness or indeed aesthetic purpose or if it is just lighthearted fun.

*Nacht* (2013),<sup>13</sup> which includes a techno version of the famous Queen of the Night aria (“*Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen*”) from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* sung by a drag queen; and the literal obstruction of the performers’ ability to play their instruments with various physical restraints (bungee cords, a half-gallon jug of water, prepared bows and so on) in *Obstruction Study #1-3* (2012). In *Buenos Aires* (2014) the composer similarly restricts or mediates the voices of the singers with various objects or devices (masking tape, an air pump, an electrolarynx, a computer voice generator) and this ‘resistance’ imposed on the singers is presented as an unsophisticated metaphor for censorship and artistic resistance.<sup>14</sup> Steen-Andersen’s direct approach is also apparent in the relationship he establishes between the sounding and the visual elements in his music. This is primarily a one-to-one relationship with the sound typically mickey-mousing the visual action (on- and offscreen). Occasionally, however, as we will see in relation to the *Studies for String Instruments* and *Black Box Music*, the composer actively undermines and manipulates the listener-viewer’s experience of this direct, one-to-one relationship.

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<sup>13</sup> Spor Festival 2015, festival program, published April 29, 2015, [https://issuu.com/sporfestival/docs/spor2015\\_program](https://issuu.com/sporfestival/docs/spor2015_program).

<sup>14</sup> *Buenos Aires* is an underdeveloped allegory for artistic censorship and repression during the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (National Reorganization Process) period of military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983). Steen-Andersen’s analogy between, on the one hand, the notion of ‘resistance’ as a means for artistic expression (through the literal physical obstruction or mediation of the singers’ ability to sing) and, on the other, censorship and repression as a positive force for creativity might be viewed as poorly judged given the various human rights abuses committed during the *Proceso* period. The concept of the work appears to be based, at least in part, on ideas presented in an academic paper by Timothy Wilson (University of Alaska), excerpts of which are incorporated into Steen-Andersen’s work. Wilson claims that, paradoxically, some artists, in their negotiation of censorship during the *Proceso* period, “benefitted from censorship” and even “flourished under the military repression” (Timothy Wilson, “Starmakers: Dictators, Songwriters, and the Negotiation of Censorship in the Argentine Dirty War,” *A Contracorriente* 6, no. 1 (2008): 50-75). His thesis is based on the questionable assumption that the work of artists who lived through the period of repression would have been of a lesser quality had they had greater artistic freedom.

Steen-Andersen routinely invokes tropes or stereotypes associated with the instruments he employs and other aspects of the music as part of the work. This appeal to or affirmation of common associations further contributes to the direct quality of the music.<sup>15</sup> Examples include the connection Steen-Andersen makes between the bellows of the accordion (often described as the ‘lungs’ of the instrument) and human lungs and breathing in *Asthma* (2017, the connection unambiguously alluded to in the title); his (culturally insensitive) use of kung fu film sound effects, with (in)appropriate actions by the soloist in *Ouvertures* for guzheng (a Chinese plucked zither) and orchestra; and the stereotype of a conductor as a kind of authoritarian dictator in *Black Box Music*. In *History of My Instrument* (2011), a short, inconsequential work for prepared harp and video, the very basis of the work is an exploration of various tropes associated with the harp. Steen-Andersen also appeals to tropes and conventions from popular media and culture, such as film, cartoons and video games, which further reinforces the direct quality of the music.

Humor plays a significant role in Steen-Andersen’s music, increasingly so in the past decade. This reliance on humor accounts in part for the music’s entertainment value. To some extent, the more subtle playfulness exhibited in earlier works has been supplanted

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<sup>15</sup> This appeal to the tropes and conventions of a given instrument would seem to contradict Steen-Andersen’s attempts to negate the established identity of an instrument in relation to its sounds through preparation and so on. Paradoxically, Steen-Andersen attempts to both affirm and deny the preconceived identities of the instruments he uses.

by a propensity for madcap, slapstick comedy and, at times, cheap gags.<sup>16</sup> That said, the humor can occur unexpectedly at moments of surprising inventiveness. This is epitomized in the *Piano Concerto* (2014), when in a moment of bona fide musical comedy, an anthropomorphized piano (onscreen) dances to the accompaniment of an ‘out of tune’ Scott Joplin piano rag performed by the soloist. Indeed, Steen-Andersen’s destruction of a piano in the *Piano Concerto* appears to have more in common with Laurel and Hardy’s *The Music Box* than George Maciunas’s liberal interpretation of Philip Corner’s *Piano Activities* in Wiesbaden in 1962.

In the past decade or so, there has been a noticeable shift in Steen-Andersen’s music (and in high modernist circles generally) toward works that contain little or no original music and, occasionally, little or no music at all. Increasingly, the repurposing of pre-existing music (often well-known works of classical music) has become a feature of Steen-Andersen’s work. In addition to his stagings of older music in *Inszenierte Nacht* (2013) (music by Bach, Schumann, Mozart, Chopin and Ravel) and the upcoming *sACRE* (billed as a staging of the piano four hands version of Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*), pre-existing music features prominently in his original works, notably in the stage works *Buenos Aires* (2014) and “*if this then that and now what*” (2016).<sup>17</sup> *Buenos Aires* (2014), a collaboration with Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart, is largely composed of (what appears to be) loosely scripted dialogue between the singers. With

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<sup>16</sup> Examples of cheap gags include the soloist-conductor’s repeated ‘middle finger gesture’ with a censor bleep in *Black Box Music* and the opening scene of *Buenos Aires* where the singer is instructed to swear during the pauses in the music.

<sup>17</sup> “Upcoming Concerts and Broadcasts,” Steen-Andersen’s personal website, accessed March 22, 2021, [http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng\\_aktuel.htm](http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng_aktuel.htm).

the exception of a small amount of mostly electronic-based incidental music and one short section of (presumably) notated original music in the opening scene, the only music in *Buenos Aires* involves the wholesale incorporation of (the aptly chosen) “*Mi manca la voce!*” (“I miss the voice!”) from Gioachino Rossini’s *Moses in Egypt* (the kind of musical pun Carl Stalling would be proud of!) and the 1946 Spanish-language song *Mi tango triste*, both used diegetically.<sup>18</sup> In “*if this then that and now what*” (2016), the sounds of the non-instrumental choreographed actions of the actors (footsteps, the opening and closing of doors and so on) are underscored by the onstage musicians while the most conspicuous passages of ‘music’ (in an admittedly conservative sense) are based on a relatively obscure sarabande by André Campra. Similarly, in his concert works, distorted quotations of Beethoven (the A major *Piano Sonata*, Op. 101) and (as mentioned earlier) Scott Joplin (*The Cascades*) feature at key moments in the *Piano Concerto*, while in *TRIO*, the rapid succession of audiovisual samples taken from the SWR television archives contain a multitude of excerpts from rehearsals and performances of works from the classical canon (by Beethoven, Debussy, Handel, Ravel and many others) that are taken up by the live musicians.<sup>19</sup> *TRIO* is also

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<sup>18</sup> *Mi tango triste* was written by Aníbal Troilo with words by José María Contursi. The dreamlike atmosphere and stage design (by Steen-Andersen) of the ‘secret tango club’ scene in *Buenos Aires*, in which Guillermo sings a pitch-shifted version of *Mi tango triste*, is strongly reminiscent of the Club Silencio scene from David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* (2001) in which Rebekah Del Rio sings an *a cappella* version of *Llorando* (a Spanish-language version of Roy Orbison’s *Crying*).

<sup>19</sup> The repurposing of older music is not entirely new in Steen-Andersen’s work. Two earlier examples include the aforementioned *In Spite Of, And Maybe Even Therefore* (2007), in which an amplified trio slowly reconstructs a passage from Beethoven’s *Bagatelles*, Op. 126 while, at the same time, taking their instruments apart until, at the exact point where the music coalesces, the instruments have been completely dismantled; and his three ‘conceptual arrangements’ of Schumann, *Im Rauschen* (2012), where, in the first movement he takes a ‘noise’ (the onomatopoeic German word ‘rauschen’) from the original Lied as his material, projected into and filtered by the instruments. Curiously, some earlier works exhibit a more sophisticated interaction with their source material.

an example of recent works that rely heavily on ‘found’ audio and audiovisual material. In another recent work, *Asthma* (2017), an accordionist performs a live soundtrack to a muted video projection made up of samples gathered from various sources (medical instruction videos, yoga videos, television clips, YouTube videos and so on) combined with prerecorded video clips that appear to be recorded with an iPhone. At times the video in *Asthma* (and, to a lesser extent, *TRIO*) resembles a gag reel. Steen-Andersen’s heavy use of audiovisual samples assembled collage-like in these works, and audio samples in the earlier *Double Up* (2010), call into question the distinction between sound or video editor and composer.<sup>20</sup>

In recent works, there is also a notable tendency for Steen-Andersen to conceive of music as, above all, spectacle with the effect of a work, and much of its content, determined by an elaborate set-up and staging. This conception of a work was already evident (though perhaps to a lesser extent) in *Run Time Error* and *Black Box Music*. Among more recent works, the *Piano Concerto*, which begins with the destruction of a piano, and *TRIO*, for the combined forces of the SWR Symphony Orchestra, Big Band and Choir, are perhaps the most conspicuous examples, not to mention Steen-Andersen’s ever more elaborate parkour set-ups in recent presentations of *Run Time Error*. Steen-Andersen’s foregrounding of his video material in recent years is related to this conception of music as spectacle (and his more explicit focus on the visual

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<sup>20</sup> The manner in which Steen-Andersen edits samples together to create original work would, at times, seem to have more in common with pop music production than ‘classical composition.’ Sampling, which has its roots in *musique concrète*, is a common feature of pop music, notably hip-hop. There is little doubt that sampling is a legitimate means to creating original work. Nonetheless, the question remains, at what point does simply editing samples together (repeating and rearranging them) become composing?

dimension of his music). There is also an ostensibly new and rather banal exploration of the notion of self-reference, most evident in the more recent of his stage works “*if this then that and now what*”, which is essentially a two-hour lecture in German (despite the English title) on the topic of self-reference delivered by four actors dressed in identical lounge suits reminiscent of Kagel’s *Sur scène* (1959-60).<sup>21</sup>

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I have tried so far to give an overview of some of the more salient general features of Steen-Andersen’s music. The next topic I want to consider is Steen-Andersen’s focus on ‘integrating concrete elements’ into his music, a notion that underpins many of the features I have been discussing. A frequently reproduced biography of Steen-Andersen, presumably written by the composer himself, suggests that integrating concrete elements into his music has been the primary focus of his work for the past decade or more.<sup>22</sup> What does Steen-Andersen mean by ‘concrete elements’ and how does he go about ‘integrating’ these elements into his music?

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<sup>21</sup> Like “*if this then that and now what*”, *Sur scène* contains a theoretical lecture, performers wandering around the stage and little or no music. More recently, in Patrick Frank’s ‘Theorieoper’ *Freiheit – die eutopische Gesellschaft* (2015), which premiered along with Steen-Andersen’s *Piano Concerto* at the 2015 Donaueschingen Festival, an academic lecture on the topic of freedom is integrated into the performance and delivered by a changing roster of academics (including Slavoj Žižek in a performance in Zürich). Steen-Andersen’s earlier opera, *Buenos Aires*, also contains excerpts from an academic lecture (as already mentioned).

<sup>22</sup> Steen-Andersen’s personal website, accessed March 20, 2021, [http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng\\_CV.htm](http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng_CV.htm). This characterization of Steen-Andersen’s musical project also appears on the website of the composer’s publisher (“Simon Steen-

Steen-Andersen's use of the word 'concrete' implies a contrast between, on the one hand, concrete elements and, on the other, abstract elements. It also implies the existence of a largely abstract musical language or works into which concrete elements are integrated. Indeed, when discussing his music, and music more generally, Steen-Andersen often draws this distinction between concrete elements and abstract elements, seemingly in Platonic terms. In a 2012 interview, Steen-Andersen characterizes concrete elements as elements belonging to the "real world" or "reality" whereas abstract elements belong to or exist in an (what he refers to as) "abstract parallel universe" or, more idiosyncratically, a "detached magical world."<sup>23</sup> In an interview from 2013, Steen-Andersen invokes the same distinction when he says that musical works occupy a "parallel, abstract, fantasy world" (the "music world") as opposed to the "real world."<sup>24</sup> Steen-Andersen appears to understand concrete and abstract elements then as distinct elements belonging to two separate 'worlds.' The view is reminiscent of Plato's belief in a separate world of abstract Forms existing independently of the world of everyday experience (and of which the world of everyday experience is merely a copy). However, inverting the Platonic picture (if we consider the famous Allegory of

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Andersen," Edition S, accessed March 20, 2021, <http://www.edition-s.dk/composer/simon-steen-andersen>) and is frequently reproduced in concert program notes, publicity material and elsewhere.

<sup>23</sup> "Thinking Inside a Box," Edition S, published December 6, 2012, <http://edition-s.dk/news/thinking-inside-a-box>.

<sup>24</sup> "Simon Steen-Andersen," interview by Daniel Veza, *Composer Conversations*, March 6, 2013, <https://composer-conversations.netlify.com/#/25>. Steen-Andersen expresses the dichotomy between the abstract and concrete in similar terms in interviews with Rasmus Holmboe in 2014 ("I am a composer," *Seismograf*, October 30, 2014, <http://seismograf.org/interview/i-am-a-composer>), Arnbjörg María Danielsen in 2015 ("Magma Chamber: An Interview with Simon Steen-Andersen," February 23, 2017, Streamsound TV, <http://www.streamsound.dk/tv/index.php/video/90/magma-chamber-an-interview-with-simon-steen-andersen/#>) and elsewhere.

the Cave in Plato's *Republic*), Steen-Andersen understands concrete elements as belonging to the 'real' world and abstract elements as belonging to a the 'unreal' world. (For Steen-Andersen, the objects of everyday experience – the shadows on the wall of the cave – are the true reality.) The composer's comments may appear naïve but they help us to understand the conceptual framework he is operating within.

Holmboe would seem to confirm the emerging picture of Steen-Andersen's view of abstract and concrete elements, while adding that, according to Steen-Andersen, abstract elements are those that, in some sense, relate only to one another. According to Holmboe, Steen-Andersen

understands the abstract as all the elements that only pertain to intramusical matters – that is, where music only refers to itself. The abstract thus also represents what distinguishes music as an art form from its surroundings; its opposite, the concrete, is understood as the more tangible aspect or all that relates to the world outside the music.<sup>25</sup>

Holmboe's comments appear to be based, at least in part, on a conversation he had with the composer in 2012 in which Steen-Andersen speaks about the abstract nature of music.<sup>26</sup> The composer describes how music often “only speaks about intra-musical content and hence its main reference is to itself or to other music.”<sup>27</sup> Steen-Andersen

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<sup>25</sup> Rasmus Holmboe, “Out of the Box,” liner notes to Simon Steen-Andersen, *Black Box Music*, Dacapo 2.110413, DVD, 2014, 4.

<sup>26</sup> At times, Steen-Andersen speaks as if the distinction between concrete and abstract elements is a completely general one. On other occasions, he gives the impression that the distinction is restricted to musical works.

<sup>27</sup> Rasmus Holmboe, “Have You Seen the Music?” Edition S, April 8, 2014, <http://www.edition-s.dk/news/have-you-seen-the-music>.

echoes this sentiment (and appeals once more to a Platonic notion of the abstract) in a short behind-the-scenes documentary about *Run Time Error* filmed in 2013 where he describes music as occupying a “fixed position as a form of abstract parallel universe where things only have a meaning pertaining to themselves.”<sup>28</sup>

If abstract elements are elements that ‘pertain to intramusical matters,’ and music refers only to itself, or other music, we might infer, as Holmboe does, that concrete elements are those that pertain to ‘extramusical’ matters, or elements that, when integrated into the music, refer to something outside of or beyond the music. For Steen-Andersen then, it seems that concrete elements are those elements in the music that, in some sense, look or point outwards. Comments made by Steen-Andersen in a further discussion with Holmboe, in 2014, would seem to confirm this view. Steen-Andersen refers to the concrete as an element in the music that, combined with the abstract, or tied into “an abstract structure,” allows the music to refer to something beyond itself.<sup>29</sup> In other words (according to Steen-Andersen’s view) concrete elements are those elements that point to or signify something outside of or beyond the music itself.

Further comments made by Steen-Andersen in the same 2014 conversation with Holmboe shed a little more light on the topic. Steen-Andersen refers to the “abstract qualities” in music as its “inner structures.”<sup>30</sup> Abstract elements, or elements that have an abstract quality, we can infer, are the elements that make up these inner structures. In

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<sup>28</sup> *Run Time Error – Behind the Scenes*, filmed and edited by Ida Bach Jensen, trans. Malene Hollnagel on *Black Box Music*, DVD (Copenhagen: Dacapo Records, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Steen-Andersen, “I am a composer.”

<sup>30</sup> Steen-Andersen, “I am a composer.”

other words, they are structural elements (or what are commonly considered to be the structural elements of music) such as melody, harmony, rhythm and (to the extent that the music refers to itself) how these elements exist or relate to one another.<sup>31</sup> These structural elements might also be referred to as ‘purely musical’ elements – elements that are part of and only concerned with the music itself. Concrete elements then, in addition to pointing to or signifying something outside of the music are, according to Steen-Andersen’s view, non-structural elements or ‘non-purely musical’ elements (or, simply, ‘non-musical’ elements). In Holmboe’s words, they are elements that are “outside the realm of ‘pure’ music.”<sup>32</sup>

However, this characterization of concrete elements would seem to cast a rather wide net, capturing anything that is *not* melody, harmony, rhythm and other elements commonly considered to be part of a work’s structure. In other words, concrete elements include ‘everything else.’ However, Steen-Andersen’s actual focus has, for the most part, been limited to elements related to, what the composer refers to as, the “performative side” of music or the performance itself and the context of the performance (the concrete performance situation).<sup>33</sup> In particular, as we will see, Steen-Andersen is concerned with those things that “are unique to the situation of a live

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<sup>31</sup> This characterization of elements that are commonly considered part of the structure of a work, to which we could add timbre, dynamics and durations, takes a rather conservative view. It includes all the aural properties of a work. However, this view is consistent with Steen-Andersen’s general conception of his project. This should become clear as the discussion continues.

<sup>32</sup> Holmboe, “Have You Seen the Music?”

<sup>33</sup> Steen-Andersen, “Magma Chamber: An Interview with Simon Steen-Andersen.”

concert” (translation mine) such as the aforementioned physical and visual aspects of instrumental performance.<sup>34</sup>

The question remains, how does Steen-Andersen integrate these elements into the structure of the work? Put simply, he does so by actively treating them as musical parameters or as the material of the work. In other words, like the more traditional abstract musical elements mentioned above, by *prescribing* them (usually in the score).<sup>35</sup> In this way, the work is made up of both abstract and concrete elements or elements that point only to each other (melody, harmony, etc.) *and* point outwards (physical-choreographic elements, visual elements and so on).<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, by integrating elements that are part of the concrete performance situation into the abstract structure of the work, the work points not just outwards but, in a self-referential turn, to its own performance.<sup>37</sup> In practice, this amounts to emphasizing or foregrounding elements of the live concert situation. Much like his exposure of already-present yet largely concealed microscopic sounds through extreme amplification, here he

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<sup>34</sup> Simon Steen-Andersen, “Junge Komponisten II,” *Positionen: Texte zur aktuellen Musik* 84 (2010): 38.

<sup>35</sup> Unlike the aural properties of a work, physical-choreographic, visual and other aspects of the performance situation are not usually prescribed. If we take a Mozart piano sonata for instance, the sound is prescribed; the actions of the performer and visual aspects of the performance may be inferred from Mozart’s notated prescriptions in the score, even implied, but they are not prescribed.

<sup>36</sup> In his 2014 conversation with Holmboe, Steen-Andersen also refers to elements of his music “that are both abstract and concrete at the same time” (Steen-Andersen, “I am a composer”). Steen-Andersen appears to understand concrete elements that are integrated into the abstract structure of the work as thereby becoming abstract, or as both abstract and concrete.

<sup>37</sup> Through their integration into the work, previously non-structural concrete elements can be understood as becoming structural elements. It is worth noting that, although they become part of the abstract structure of the work, concrete elements retain their concrete status. An abstract structure (or entity) can consist of concrete elements. To take a simple analogy, a brick can become part of a wall, and still be a brick. Nor does an abstract structure become somehow concrete because it contains concrete elements (a wall is still a wall).

“strengthen[s] and intensif[ies]” or “amplif[ies]” elements that are, in a sense, already there albeit not explicitly prescribed.<sup>38</sup> By “tak[ing] control of” or “compos[ing] with” these elements (as Steen-Andersen puts it), they become not merely byproducts of (or, more precisely, prerequisites to) the realization of the sound but they “become as important in the composition as the sound.”<sup>39</sup> Occasionally, as we will see, they even threaten to overwhelm the sound.

Steen-Andersen’s concern with integrating concrete elements was initially focused primarily on the physical and choreographic elements of performance. He had already begun to draw the listener-viewer’s attention to the relationship between sound and the physical-mechanical conditions of its production in his exploration of microscopic sounds. But the focus in these works was (like that of Lachenmann) still primarily on sound. There was also a tentative consideration of the visual aspect of the production of sounds with the addition of a *non-obbligato* live video element in *Rerendered* (2003, rev. 2004). However, by the time we come to *Next to Beside Besides* (2005-), Steen-Andersen’s focus is explicitly on the movements and actions involved in producing the sounds. Steen-Andersen continued to explore microscopic sounds in other works written around the same time as *Next to Beside Besides* but even in these works, such as *Chambered Music*, *In Spite Of*, *And Maybe Even Therefore* and *Nothing Integrated* (all

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<sup>38</sup> Steen-Andersen, “Junge Komponisten II,” 38; Steen-Andersen, “A musical approach to audio/visual composition.”

<sup>39</sup> Steen-Andersen, “Magma Chamber: An Interview with Simon Steen-Andersen.”

from 2007), it is clear that his focus is gradually shifting towards the physical-choreographic and, increasingly, the visual elements of the performance situation.<sup>40</sup>

*Next to Beside Besides* is a series of transcriptions, or what the composer describes as “choreographic translations” for various instruments that are designed to be played individually as solo pieces, consecutively or simultaneously (in unison) in any combination, from duo to large ensemble. The transcriptions are all based on a work for solo cello called *Beside Besides* (2003, subtitled ‘Next to Beside Besides #0’) composed a couple of years before Steen-Andersen made the first transcription in the series for double bass (*Next to Beside Besides #1*, 2005). *Beside Besides* is in turn derived, in slightly modified form, from a cello solo at the end of *Besides* (2003, rev. 2010), a chamber work for amplified flute, violin and piano and muted string trio (that can be counted among Steen-Andersen’s works exploring microscopic sounds). In the transcriptions, instead of transcribing the aural properties or “sound idea” Steen-Andersen transcribes the physical movements or choreography of the original cello work so that largely identical movements are transferred from one instrument to the next.<sup>41</sup> The focus of the work is primarily the movements of the performer, which are foregrounded, with sound conceived of as primarily a consequence or byproduct of the prescribed actions.<sup>42</sup> Describing the work, the composer says, “the relationship between

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<sup>40</sup> *Next to Beside Besides* is conceived as an ongoing series of compositions but the existing works were all composed between 2005 and 2008.

<sup>41</sup> “‘Next to Beside Besides’ – a re-cycle,” Steen-Andersen’s personal website, accessed June 8, 2020,

[http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng\\_art-nexttobesidebesides.htm](http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng_art-nexttobesidebesides.htm).

<sup>42</sup> This focus on the physical actions involved in the production of the sound in Steen-Andersen’s music brings us back to the *musique concrète instrumentale* of Lachenmann. However, there is an important distinction to be made. In Lachenmann’s music, the focus is still

action and resulting sound” is inverted, so that the movement is no longer simply a means to realizing “a sound idea,” “and therefore a ‘product’ of a sound composition” but, rather, “the sound is the product of a movement composition,” whereby the movement is not a means but the “objective.”<sup>43</sup> The material or content of the work is primarily the physical actions or choreography of the performer, which Steen-Andersen actively treats as a compositional parameter, rather than the sound.<sup>44</sup>

This focus on the performer’s movements is reflected in the notation of the transcriptions (underlining the prescribed nature of these elements). According to Steen-Andersen, he uses “action-notation” or “notation showing what to do rather than what should sound,” as opposed to “result-notation” or notation that describes or represents the sound to be realized.<sup>45</sup> However, these two types of notation are not mutually exclusive (notated music is almost always a combination of both) and, in practice, what we find in *Next to Beside Besides*, and in other works where Steen-Andersen focuses on the movements of the performers, is a hybrid of the two, though oriented more towards the former. If we consider a short passage from *Next to Beside Besides #1* for double

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primarily on sound, with sound signifying the physical-mechanical action involved in its production. Indeed, Lachenmann understands sound as a signal of its own production. As mentioned above, in *Next to Beside Besides*, Steen-Andersen’s focus is explicitly on the physical actions involved in producing the sound – the actions themselves, which are foregrounded – with sound understood, not as a signal, but merely as a byproduct of these actions.

<sup>43</sup> “‘Next to Beside Besides’ – a re-cycle.”

<sup>44</sup> In ontological terms, the work can be understood as a ‘movement structure’ (or ‘sound structure + movement structure’) rather than a ‘sound structure.’

<sup>45</sup> Simon Steen-Andersen, “Behind Next to Beside Besides (2005-2009),” in *RTRSRCH* 2, no. 1 (2010): 56.

bass, Example 2, we find this combination of “action-notation,” or tablature, combined with more traditional (“result”) notation.

**EXAMPLE 2:** *Next to Beside Besides #1*, mm. 23-29. © Edition S. Used with permission.

Here we find, in m. 23, an action in which the double bassist exerts heavy bow pressure on the scordatura open lowest string (the given low E indicating the string on which the action is executed rather than the pitch), which produces a percussive effect as a result of the detuned string slapping against the wood. This action is followed, in m. 24, by an action that combines bowing on the body of the instrument by the right hand with pressing the lowest string against the fingerboard with the left hand (to produce a ‘click’ sound). These two actions are then alternated, followed by a left-hand pizzicato note (the given note B presumably indicating the placement of the finger on the fingerboard, as well as the desired pitch). The previous actions alternate once more in m. 25 before a touch-minor-third harmonic figuration from earlier in the piece is reintroduced, notated

in the normal manner. And so on. Additional verbal instructions are provided elsewhere in the score itself and in the front matter.

An obvious question arises that exposes a potential flaw in the design of the work.

Steen-Andersen's focus on the choreography of the performer in *Next to Beside Besides* is reflected in the score, but how does the unassuming listener know that what has been transcribed or transferred from piece to piece is not the sound of the work but the choreography? Steen-Andersen addresses this question by attempting to direct the attention of the viewer-listener to the movements of the performer, and the underlying concept in the transcriptions, in various ways. One of his primary strategies for increasing an awareness of the performer's physical movements is to employ a rather limited number of movements. These movements are repeated insistently and at times almost to the point of obsession and alternated with one another. Steen-Andersen also prescribes movements with an inherent kinesthetic even visual quality, for example, the repeated bow strokes on the scordatura lowest open string at the beginning of *Next to Beside Besides #1* (and comparable actions in other versions), enhanced by the use of heavy bow pressure, as illustrated in Example 3. There is also a general use of extreme dynamics (usually very loud or very soft) that serve to exaggerate the kinesthetic quality of the movements. Together, these elements lend a mechanical, almost robotic quality to the performer's actions (often deliberately exaggerated by the performers). The instruments are also prepared in various ways, usually involving a dampening or muffling of the sound (mirroring the dampening of the cello with a practice mute, played *fff*, in the original version for cello). While Steen-Andersen's preparation of the

instruments may suggest a concern with sound as not just a consequence of the prescribed actions, the intention is, as the composer explains, to negate or obscure the “individual sound characteristics of each instrument” and instead to focus the listener-viewer’s attention on the choreography or physical actions involved in producing the sound.<sup>46</sup> However, Steen-Andersen’s main strategy to flag up the choreographical nature of the transcriptions for the listener is his suggestion that different versions of the work should be performed simultaneously, in unison, either by multiple performers performing together live or by performers playing together with pre-recorded video projections of themselves.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, despite the various other means employed to draw attention to the movements of the individual performer, it is really only when two or more transcriptions are played simultaneously, with the players performing largely identical movements in unison (such as the repeated side-to-side movement at the beginning) that it becomes apparent to the listener-viewer that it is primarily the physical movements of the performers (and not how the music sounds) that have been transferred or translated to the different instruments.<sup>48</sup> In other words, it is necessary for the listener-viewer to *see* the simultaneous actions of the performers in order to understand the underlying concept of the piece.

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<sup>46</sup> Jennie Gottschalk, *Experimental music since 1970* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 78.

<sup>47</sup> Versions in which performers perform together with video projections of themselves are called *Self-Reflecting Next to Beside Besides*. Steen-Andersen’s instruction for different versions of *Next to Beside Besides* to be performed simultaneously may have been something of an afterthought.

<sup>48</sup> The composer also recommends that when two or more versions are played simultaneously, the instruments should sit in a line to emphasize the ‘parallel’ movements of the performers (Simon Steen-Andersen, *Next to Beside Besides #13* (Copenhagen: Edition S, 2017), front matter).

♩ = 60 4th string is to be tuned down until a percussive continuous slapping of the string against the wood occurs when playing *-mf* or louder (with relative hard bowpressure)...

(V)

*fff*

*ppp*

**EXAMPLE 3:** *Next to Beside Besides* #1, mm. 1-7. © Edition S. Used with permission.

The viewer-listener’s grasp of the underlying concept of *Next to Beside Besides* is complicated by the formal design of the original work for cello (*Beside Besides*), which is then mirrored in the subsequent transcriptions. The original work is, according to the composer, “designed in such a way that the first half is conceived as sound and the second half as movement” (translation mine).<sup>49</sup> The transcriptions mirror the form of the original: in the first half, it is the sound that is transcribed, in the second half, the movement. However, in practice, this distinction is not apparent to the listener-viewer. The composer admits that in *Next to Beside Besides*, this formal design becomes apparent only when two or more versions of the work are performed simultaneously and the audience experiences what the composer describes as “the transition from a sounding unison between the different instruments to a visual or movement unison at the end” (translation mine).<sup>50</sup> However, even when two or more versions are performed

<sup>49</sup> Isabel Herzfeld, “‘Radikal und unmittelbar’: Ein Porträt des dänischen Komponisten Simon Steen-Andersen,” *MusikTexte* 135 (2012): 5.

<sup>50</sup> Herzfeld, “‘Radikal und unmittelbar,’” 5.

simultaneously, the formal design and the distinction between, on the one hand, a sounding unison and, on the other, a visual or movement unison is by no means clear since a sounding unison, like a visual or movement unison, involves the performers performing similar actions in rhythmic unison.<sup>51</sup>

A perhaps serendipitous byproduct of the simultaneous performance of multiple transcriptions (by an individual performer with video or by multiple live performers with or without video) is the presence of a subtle counterpoint between different versions of the same movements. Because of the inherent discrepancies between the different versions of the work, and especially in performances involving video, the performers appear to go in and out of sync with one another giving rise to a kind of staggering effect (as in a streaming video or video game). Whether by accident or design, this aspect of the work tends to become the primary focus of the viewer-listener's attention (and may be the source of inspiration for *Study for String Instrument #3*, discussed below).

Steen-Andersen continues his exploration of physical and choreographic elements of instrumental performance in his *Study for String Instrument #1* (2007) for solo or multiple string players performing in unison. As in *Next to Beside Besides*, Steen-Andersen's focus in *Study #1* is primarily on the physical movements of the performer. However, in *Study #1* he treats the physical-choreographic elements as a compositional

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<sup>51</sup> In performances I have seen of this work, there is also a tendency for performers to exaggerate their movements regardless of whether they are performing a sounding unison or movement-unison.

parameter in a more active way. He also develops further some of the ideas related to physical-choreographic elements that he stumbled across in *Next to Beside Besides*, notably the idea of a counterpoint between the movements of the performer or performers. Furthermore, having grasped the inherently visual nature of the performers' movements in *Next to Beside Besides*, and that the listener-viewer's appreciation of the underlying choreographical concept of the work is inextricably tied to the visual aspect of these movements, Steen-Andersen also begins to treat the *visual* elements of performance as themselves a distinct compositional parameter.

In his program note for *Study #1*, Steen-Andersen describes the work as “a kind of dance, accompanying itself.”<sup>52</sup> The composer is alluding to the fact that, during performance, the impression is created that the movements of the performer and the sound are somehow separate: that the actions involved in producing the sounds are not in fact their source and that the sounds are mimicking the actions. In other words, the sounds seem to mickey-mouse the movements of the performer.<sup>53</sup> The effect is achieved

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<sup>52</sup> Simon Steen-Andersen, *Study for String Instrument #1* (Copenhagen: Edition S, 2011), front matter.

<sup>53</sup> Mickey-mousing describes a technique found in film music where there is a direct, one-to-one relationship between the sound or music and visual elements. Typically, the music appears to imitate or describe the visual elements (or vice-versa). Goldmark gives a quintessential example: “Think of someone skulking down a dark street, pizzicato bass strings marking his every step” (Daniel Goldmark, “Introduction,” in *The Cartoon Music Book*, eds. Daniel Goldmark and Yuval Taylor (Chicago: A Capella Press, 2002), xiii-xiv). The term, which is often used pejoratively, refers to the use of the technique in early Mickey Mouse cartoons where it highlighted the capabilities of the newly-established possibility of synchronized sound. Although traces of the technique can be still found today in some Hollywood movies, especially in action movies, its use is somewhat anachronistic and the direct relationship between music and visuals is considered simplistic. It is still commonly found in cartoon music. Two of the most overt examples of mickey-mousing in Steen-Andersen's music are the dancing piano section of the *Piano Concerto* and the recurring stinger chords in the opening movement of *Black Box Music*. Notably, in both instances, it is used to comic effect and, indeed, very effectively. However, Steen-Andersen's more general use of the technique leaves his music,

in part by the choice of physical movements. The work is primarily based on a glissando gesture, a gesture that has an inherent kinesthetic value as well as visual quality. It is a gesture that, when performed on a string instrument, especially larger string instruments, in a sense, sounds how it looks.<sup>54</sup> (This impression is enhanced when multiple performers play together in unison.)

The mickey-mousing effect is reinforced with the introduction of physical movements that produce very quiet or inaudible sounds. This incorporation of movements into his music that are primarily visual in effect is something the composer had already begun to explore in other works from around the same time, including *Chambered Music* and *Next to Beside Besides #10* (2007), a silent, purely visual transcription for miniature camera.<sup>55</sup> In *Study #1*, these almost purely visual movements sit alongside the sound-

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especially his music involving video, open to some of the same criticisms that are made in relation to film music, in particular that the relationship between the sound and visual elements is crude and underdeveloped. (The kinesthetic, stop-and-start quality of Steen-Andersen's music means that, even in his music that does not involve video or explicitly draw attention to the visual aspects of the music, one often has the impression that the music is accompanying some unseen onscreen action.) Yet, it is in keeping with a general directness in Steen-Andersen's and, as mentioned earlier, Steen-Andersen does occasionally exploit this one-to-one relationship between the sounding and visual elements. It also allows Steen-Andersen to establish a more or less equal relationship between the sounding and visual elements and helps prevent the visual elements from overwhelming the sounding elements.

<sup>54</sup> It is a paradoxical feature of the exaggerated glissando gesture as it appears in *Study #1* that, rather than strengthening the sense that the observed action and the sound are interconnected – that the action is the source of the sound – we are given the impression that they are somehow separate. This impression may be accounted for by the fact that the physical action involved in producing a sound does not usually match the sound in such an obvious or exaggerated way. After all, classical musicians are usually trained to be as efficient or economical as possible in their physical movements. Steen-Andersen's analogy with dance is apt. Like in a dance, the physical movements in *Study #1* appear to move with the music.

<sup>55</sup> *Chambered Music*, which premiered earlier the same year as *Study #1* (2007), includes what the composer describes as a "movement cadenza" in the middle of the piece in which most of the ensemble performs a "visual unison" ("*Chambered Music* (2007)," Steen-Andersen's personal website, accessed March 22, 2021, [http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng\\_descrip\\_chambered-music.htm](http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng_descrip_chambered-music.htm)). In *Next to Beside*

producing gestures of the exaggerated *fff* glissando gestures and serve to undermine the perceived relationship between the sound and the physical actions involved in the glissando. Presenting physical movements that do not produce sounds also undermines the general perception of a connection between movement and sound or the assumed cause and effect relationship between what we see and what we hear (a perception Steen-Andersen would exploit to a much greater degree in *Black Box Music*). The achieved effect also shifts (or redresses) the balance between the physical-choreographic and visual elements and the sounding elements of the musical work. Unlike *Next to Beside Besides*, in *Study #1*, the sound is not perceived as merely a byproduct of or subservient to the performer's movements but, rather, is promoted to equal pegging with the visual. Indeed, an inherent feature of the mickey-mousing technique is that it draws attention to the sound (one of the reasons why the technique is largely avoided in live-action film music).<sup>56</sup>

The mickey-mousing effect is reinforced even further by the introduction of a counterpoint between the movements of the left and right hands. The glissando gesture is similar to the repeated bow strokes on the detuned open string at the beginning of

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*Besides #10* (also 2007), the transcribed movements are performed with a miniature camera and flashlight combined with mirrors, a sheet or text and a 'strobe guiro' (a rippled piece of paper) (Simon Steen-Andersen, *Next to Beside Besides #10* (Copenhagen: Edition S, 2017), front matter). As Steen-Andersen explains, "The composition is exactly the same, but instead of a sounding result, the result is purely visible [*sic*] and shown on a television next to the player" (Steen-Andersen, "Behind Next to Beside Besides (2005-2009)," 59). However, *Next to Beside Besides #10* is primarily intended to be performed simultaneously with other transcriptions to enhance the movement element of the work rather than by itself. The only versions that the composer recommends playing solo are the original cello version (*Beside Besides* or #0) and #1 for double bass (Steen-Andersen, *Next to Beside Besides #13*, front matter).

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Goldmark, "Drawing a New Narrative for Cartoon Music," in *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*, ed. David Neumeier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 230.

*Next to Beside Besides* (#0 and #1, with comparable gestures in other versions) but with the addition of the left hand glissando movement (which sets up the potential for a counterpoint between the two hands later in the piece). After establishing a certain synchronicity between the actions of the left and right hands in the earlier part of the piece, as the piece progresses a counterpoint is added between the actions of the individual hands, which gradually become independent of one another. The glissando gesture is repeated over and over and, as the composer explains, “is slowly broken down in [*sic*] its individual elements.”<sup>57</sup> As Agneta observes, “The form is a kind of deconstruction of a glissando, where the movements of the two hands slowly take on a life of their own and eventually detach themselves completely from each other” (translation mine).<sup>58</sup> The left hand produces sounds that are not dependent on the right hand activating the string (and vice-versa) such as striking the strings. Similarly, in the right hand, we find more percussive gestures involving the bow that are not dependent on the left hand for their execution. This counterpoint or autonomy between the two

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<sup>57</sup> Steen-Andersen, *Study for String Instrument #1*, front matter.

<sup>58</sup> Agneta Mei Hytten, “Det modern projekt lever videre,” *Seismograf*, March 17, 2010 (updated May 3, 2020), <https://seismograf.org/artikel/det-moderne-projekt-lever-videre>. The *Study for String Instrument #2* (2009) for string instrument and ‘whammy’ guitar pedal follows a similar course. To begin with, the physical movements of the string player and whammy pedal (the latter often operated separately by the composer) occur in tandem with one another (creating a visual unison). But, as the piece progresses, the string instrument and connected pedal begin to move in opposite directions. Ultimately, the whammy pedal achieves a kind of independence from the instrument to which it is attached and becomes an instrument in its own right, indeed the primary instrument (similar to the manner in which Steen-Andersen treats the megaphones, first as passive amplifiers of an acoustic trio, then, gradually, as musical instruments in their own right in *On And Off And To And Fro*). In both works, the effect of the counterpoint is primarily a visual one. Indeed, in *Study #2*, when Steen-Andersen performs the pedal part himself (the pedal can be operated by the string player or separately), the pedal is attached superfluously to a plank of wood, placed atop a table and operated, ostentatiously, with both hands, emphasizing the physical actions involved in executing the part and indeed the visual dimension of the work. *Study for String Instrument #2* is primarily an exploration of various novel sounds that result when a string instrument, usually a violin or cello, is amplified via a contact microphone and fed through a whammy guitar pedal.

hands is reflected in the score, with one staff for the bow hand and one staff for the string hand (see Example 4, below).<sup>59</sup>

Having autonomized the movements of the left and right hands, Steen-Andersen then creates a situation in which the independent actions of the left and right hands begin to interact with one other in a new and explicitly visual way. One hand appears to give impetus to or excite the movements of the other or (as described in the score) act like “two objects exchanging kinetic energy” (see Example 4, m. 154).

(hard bow pressure, pure noise)

150

bow

str.

(the hands practically touching each other, as if two objects exchanging kinetic energy...)

(percussive sound by hitting the strings hard)

**EXAMPLE 4:** *Study for String Instrument #1*, mm. 150-159. © Edition S. Used with permission.

Steen-Andersen’s exploration of physical and choreographic elements of performance continues in *Study for String Instrument #3* (2011) for prepared cello (or guitar) in which the performer (usually a cellist) performs a duet with a prerecorded video

<sup>59</sup> The string instrument and the connected pedal are similarly notated on separate staves in *Study #2*.

projection of themselves. With the notable addition of video as an *obbligato* element, Steen-Andersen's focus on the visual aspect of the performer's movements becomes even more explicit. Indeed, the visual dimension of the work threatens to overwhelm the sounding dimension. In *Study #3*, a prerecorded video of the performer is projected, life-size directly onto the body of the performer.<sup>60</sup> The work is essentially a duo for two cellists, one live and one virtual; here, Steen-Andersen is elaborating on the idea of a live performer performing with a virtual double that he introduced in *Self-Reflecting Next to Beside Besides* (and will take much further in his *Piano Concerto*).<sup>61</sup> Initially, the live cellist and their virtual counterpart perform the same movements in unison (repeated bow strokes on a dampened string, see Example 5, below). At this point, it appears to be a single performer against a screen (or even a projection of a performer) but the live and virtual parts soon begin to deviate from one another (after eight measures). The parts go in and out of sync with one another, first through deviating bow movements, then by both performers altering the positions of the instruments, playing

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<sup>60</sup> Steen-Andersen employs the same technique of projecting a video image directly onto the performer and their instrument in *History of My Instrument* (a life-size video projection of the famous harpist and pedagogue Mildred Dilling), composed in the same year as *Study #3* (2011). The visual effect of *Study #3* is reminiscent of Nam June Paik's *TV Cello* (1971), devised in collaboration with Charlotte Moorman, in particular the manner in which video of the performer is projected (or fed) onto the performer. In *TV Cello*, Charlotte Moorman performs on a cello sculpture composed of three television sets stacked on top of one another with a bridge and strings attached. Closed-circuit video showing a live view of the performance is displayed on the screens together with prerecorded video footage and a live feed of a local television broadcast. The video feeds are distorted by the audio signal from Moorman's live performance via a synthesizer. The effect in *TV Cello* is also that of two performers, one live and one virtual (with the onscreen performer appearing to mime the live performer). The noisy, non-pitched quality of the sound in *TV Cello*, which is largely subordinated to the visual dimension, also connects it with *Study #3*. It is reasonable to assume that *TV Cello* provided a model or point of departure for Steen-Andersen's work.

<sup>61</sup> In addition to the *Piano Concerto*, where the soloist operates their virtual double (performing on the reconstructed piano) with a midi controller, in *Run Time Error* the live performer (the composer) operates not one but two onscreen virtual doubles with a joystick.

the cello guitar-like on its side, rotating it in the opposite direction and turning it upside down. The deviating actions of the live and virtual performers produce a strange optical effect. It is as if the cellist has four (even six) arms and two (or more) bows. When the performers rotate their instruments, the visual effect is of a kind of single super-instrument. The image is confused further by the shadow of the live player and their instrument on the screen, an inevitable byproduct of projecting the video directly onto the performer, which gives the impression of the presence of a third cellist. As the piece progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between the live and virtual elements.

As in *Study #1*, the counterpoint that Steen-Andersen sets up between the synchronous and asynchronous physical movements of the performer is conceived primarily as a visual counterpoint. Like *Study #1*, this visual counterpoint is reflected in the score to *Study #3* (see Example 5, below). Whereas the score in *Study #1* reflected the counterpoint between the left and right hands, with separate staves for movements involving the bow and movements involving string (and, in *Study #2*, separate staves for the string instrument and pedal), in *Study #3* there is one staff for the live performer and one staff for the virtual performer or prerecorded video.

damp strings with left hand (or 12 straight dotted quarters in tempo 130.9091)

REPEAT 8\*

LIVE

VIDEO

(sound and video fading in during the first 4 repetitions)

3

3

9

9

The image displays a musical score for 'Study for String Instrument #3', measures 1-15. It is divided into two parts: LIVE and VIDEO. The LIVE part starts with a 6/8 time signature, followed by a repeat sign and a 3/8 time signature. The VIDEO part starts with a 6/8 time signature, followed by a repeat sign and a 3/8 time signature. The score includes various time signatures (5/8, 4/8, 3/8, 2/8) and annotations such as 'damp strings with left hand' and 'REPEAT 8\*'. The tempo is indicated as 130.9091. The score is written for a string instrument, with notes and rests on a five-line staff.

**EXAMPLE 5:** *Study for String Instrument #3*, mm. 1-15. © Edition S. Used with permission.

Example 5 shows the opening measures of the work. Here, we can clearly see the delineation of the two parts. Taking a closer look at this example, we can see how in m. 3 the movements of the bow have already begun to deviate. By m. 11, the rhythmic unison, and consequentially the visual unison, begins to break down before more significant deviations between the parts are gradually introduced as the piece progresses. Here, Steen-Andersen appears to be developing the staggering effect from

*Next to Beside Besides* which was produced by slight variations between the movements of the performers performing different versions of the work, in particular performances involving, like *Study #3*, a live performer performing together with an onscreen virtual double.

\*

In the current chapter we have seen how Steen-Andersen integrates elements of the concrete performance situation into his music by actively treating them as compositional parameters and foregrounding them in the work. Initially, this focus was primarily on the physical-choreographic elements of instrumental performance but in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments* we saw a shift towards a more explicit focus on the visual elements of performance. In Chapter 3, we will see how Steen-Andersen further develops some of these aspects of his work in *Black Box Music* with his playful exploitation of the perceived connection between the observed physical gestures of the soloist-conductor and the sounds produced by the ensemble. Before that, however, in Chapter 2, I want to discuss *Run Time Error* (2009), a work written between the existing versions of *Next to Beside Besides* and *Study #1* and *#2* but before *Study #3*. Although *Run Time Error* develops some of the ideas introduced in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments*, notably with a more extensive and explicitly visual counterpoint between different version of the same

material, as we will see, *Run Time Error* is a very different kind of work (or, more precisely, collection of works), developing as it did from a video installation and including improvisatory elements.

## CHAPTER 2

### **PARKOUR FOR COMPOSER: *RUN TIME ERROR***

In July 2020, with almost all live music canceled or moved online due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Simon Steen-Andersen and the singers and musicians of the cancelled Bayreuth Festival gathered in the vacant Festival Hall to document a performance. In the labyrinthine backstage areas of the famed venue, the composer had erected an elaborate, makeshift obstacle course running from the basement to the rooftop furnished with whatever objects he could find lying around and taking in the fixtures and other aspects of the unique architecture of the building. With a beater in one hand and a microphone in the other, the composer navigated his way, parkour-style, through the completed course, followed closely by a cameraman. The composer struck, scraped and otherwise interacted with the various objects and fixtures he encountered – treating them as makeshift percussion instruments – and, aided by the Bayreuth singers and musicians, set objects in motion and created a series of elaborate chain reactions. For all intents and purposes, the Festival Hall was transformed into a giant Rube Goldberg machine. Along the way the supporting cast of singers and musicians, who were part of the ‘machine,’ appeared and reappeared, providing fragments of Wagner’s music. The composer also interrupted his parkour to chat nonchalantly with the Festival Hall staff about the history of the festival. The ghost of Wagner was felt throughout. The tour came full circle as a roving camera – a proxy for the composer – made its way back to Rehearsal Stage 3 from where the composer’s parkour began. But not before the

Festival Hall fire alarm was set off by a smoke machine underneath the stage and (we are led to believe) the fire brigade was called.

This was only the latest iteration of *Run Time Error*, a site-specific audiovisual installation or performance that Steen-Andersen has been staging for the past decade or so, in which the composer himself performs. Described as his ‘signature work,’ *Run Time Error* was originally an experimental video work conceived during a residency at HOTELbich in Brussels and premiered there in 2009.<sup>1</sup> It has since evolved into “a concept that can be adapted to almost any site” with an added live performance dimension.<sup>2</sup> A playful and entertaining series of performances, *Run Time Error* has been presented dozens of times in the past decade.<sup>3</sup> The inherent flexibility of its underlying concept has enabled it to be presented in a variety of venues and contexts – with and without the live performance component – often involving collaborations with ensembles. As *Run Time Error* continues to evolve, presentations of it have become increasingly ambitious and it has been adapted and incorporated into specially curated programs or ‘staged concerts’ alongside or interwoven with other works.

In the previous chapter, we saw how Steen-Andersen integrates elements of the concrete performance situation into his music by actively treating them as compositional

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<sup>1</sup> Although described as his signature ‘work’, *Run Time Error* is more accurately described as a collection of works or performances unified by a basic concept (discussed below).

<sup>2</sup> “Run Time Error (2009),” Edition S, accessed March 29, 2021, <http://www.edition-s.dk/music/simon-steen-andersen/run-time-error>.

“Next to Beside Besides: for amplified solo instruments or ensembles +,” Steen-Andersen’s personal website, accessed March 7, 2021, <http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/NTBB-family-eng.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> “Upcoming Concerts and Broadcasts,” accessed March 7, 2021.

parameters and foregrounding them in his work. In *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments*, we saw a shift in Steen-Andersen's work from a focus on the physical and choreographic elements of instrumental performance to a more explicit focus on its visual elements. In the current chapter, I will discuss *Run Time Error*, one of the composer's most overtly visual works. Although it is, in some respects, a very different kind of work to those discussed in Chapter 1, developing as it did from a video installation (and largely improvised), in *Run Time Error*, as we will see, Steen-Andersen continues to explore some of the ideas introduced in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments*. I will offer an extensive discussion of the work, including the inherently visual aspects of its concept, set-up and staging. I will also discuss an important precedent and source of inspiration for *Run Time Error*, Fischli's and Weiss's *Der Lauf der Dinge*. Finally, I discuss how *Run Time Error* and its underlying concept have continued to evolve over the past decade.

I turn my attention first to the set-up and staging of *Run Time Error* together with its underlying concept. The process begins with the documentation of a performance.<sup>4</sup> The documented performance component is recorded on site in advance of the concert.<sup>5</sup> As with the Bayreuth performance, the composer begins by setting up a sort of obstacle course in the venue – including its backstage area, lobby, corridors, staircases, toilets and so on – made up of various 'found' objects as well as objects already in situ and the

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<sup>4</sup> The documented performance from the Bayreuth Festival Hall, with the title *The Loop of the Nibelung*, was streamed online at the end of July 2020. It was originally planned to include the usual live performance component of *Run Time Error*, with live musicians, but this was canceled.

<sup>5</sup> The work is occasionally performed using video that has not been recorded on site. Screenings of the work without the live performance dimension may also use video that is not recorded on site.

fixtures and other features of the architecture of the space itself. Anything that has the potential to produce sound may be included. The final video of the performance shows the composer moving swiftly through this course – parkour-style, beater in one hand (usually a plastic brush or rod) and handheld microphone in the other – striking, scraping and otherwise interacting with or ‘playing’ the various objects and fixtures as he goes to create a succession of sonically-related sounds. He also sets objects in motion, often prompting a succession of finely choreographed Rube Goldbergesque chain reactions in which the objects appear to move of their own volition, temporarily replacing the composer as the subjects of the piece.<sup>6</sup> The composer records the sounds of his actions with the microphone while an assistant follows closely behind with a video camera to document the tour.

Steen-Andersen (usually) only uses objects he finds at the venue to fill his often-elaborately constructed courses: everyday objects such as tables, chairs, fans, boxes, crockery, vacuum cleaners, musical instruments or whatever he can find in the space.<sup>7</sup> The exception is a golf ball, in addition to the beater, which he usually brings with him to the venue.<sup>8</sup> He also incorporates sounds that already exist within the space. For instance, in a video performance of *Run Time Error* recorded at The Black Diamond (The Royal Library) in Copenhagen in 2013, the composer holds the microphone to a

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<sup>6</sup> A Rube Goldberg machine is a device or apparatus designed to carry out a simple task in an overcomplicated and often comical way, usually involving a series of chain reactions. It is named after an American cartoonist who depicted these machines.

<sup>7</sup> For a performance at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London in 2014, Steen-Andersen used materials he found in the huge storage rooms at the Southbank Centre. (“Meet Simon Steen-Andersen,” London Sinfonietta comp card for performances of *Black Box Music* and *Run Time Error* at Queen Elizabeth Hall, March 12, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> “Run Time Error – Behind the Scenes.” The significance of the golf ball is unclear.

clock on a wall, incorporating the sound of its ticking into the soundtrack of the performance.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Steen-Andersen incorporates the sounds of objects found at the venue such as fans and vacuum cleaners that already produce sound. This incorporation of the venue itself, and the everyday objects found in situ, into the work can be considered part of Steen-Andersen's larger project of integrating elements of the live performance situation into his work. Here, that concept is expanded beyond elements of the performance itself such as the physical-choreographic and visual elements in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Study for String Instrument #1* to include the physical context in which the performance takes place.

Though owing much to Swiss art duo Fischli and Weiss (discussed below), Steen-Andersen's set-ups are often clever and inventive, especially those parts that involve the composer following the course of an object (often the golf ball) or objects set in motion. Steen-Andersen describes these set-ups or predetermined routes as "compositions" that he "plays through" (albeit in a quasi-improvisatory manner).<sup>10</sup> The composer effectively transforms the venue into a giant percussion instrument or, what the composer describes as, a "Klang Bastel-Parcours" ("sound activity-course").<sup>11</sup> As Holmboe notes, "The building itself and its sounds are turned into the musical material of the composition."<sup>12</sup> The site-specific nature of the work means that each new venue provides Steen-

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<sup>9</sup> Oslo Sinfonietta and Håkon Stene, *Simon Steen-Andersen: Black Box Music*.

<sup>10</sup> "Meet Simon Steen-Andersen," comp card.

<sup>11</sup> "'The Way Sounds Go' Behind the Scenes – Interview mit Simon Steen-Andersen," Vimeo video, 3:33, posted by "KunstFestSpiele Herrenhausen," accessed March 29, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/266717495>.

<sup>12</sup> Holmboe, "Out of the Box," 6.

Andersen with a new instrument, and a point of departure for a new “composition” or “compositions.”<sup>13</sup>

There is no score for *Run Time Error*. Rather, it is what Steen-Andersen describes as a “concept,” the basis of which is a set of instructions or “dogmas” that guide or provide a framework for the composer when producing the video portion of the work.<sup>14</sup> The dogmas are as follows:

1. Only objects and instruments found at the location can be used.
2. Each object or instrument can only be used once.
3. Each sound/action must have an immediate point of association with its neighbouring sounds/actions.<sup>15</sup>

In an informal discussion in a ‘behind the scenes’ feature included on Dacapo’s DVD release of the work (together with *Black Box Music*), Steen-Andersen elaborates on this short manifesto-like set of rules. In the first instance, the concept is “site-specific,” as the first rule implies. “If at all possible,” Steen-Andersen says, he strives “to make a new composition or map out new routes at the place where the work is performed.”

Expanding on the site-specific nature of the work, the composer adds, “For the production of the work, I’m only allowed to use objects found at the place. I can’t bring any instruments. The only thing I usually bring is a golf ball. Everything else is dictated

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<sup>13</sup> “Performer/Composer Panel,” Seismograf, May 31, 2017, <https://seismograf.org/node/9215>. The composer occasionally performs more than one version of *Run Time Error*, involving different routes/pre-recorded videos, in the same concert.

<sup>14</sup> “Run Time Error – Behind the Scenes.”

<sup>15</sup> “Run Time Error (2009).”

by what I can find on [*sic*] the location and what ideas you get for using these objects and elements.”<sup>16</sup> About the second rule, Steen-Andersen says: “Then there’s another dogma: Each object may only be used once. So when you use 3-400 different objects, they of course have to be staggered. You can’t play in the same spot and out of that idea naturally arises that the composition is also a set-up you have to walk through.” In relation to the third rule, the composer says, “there has to be a strong sense of linearity” in his navigation of the set-up, adding that, “there has to be a connection between one sound and the next. This makes it linear, almost like a scale.” To the three dogmas Steen-Andersen adds a stipulation that the video “should form a loop. I have to end where I started.”<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that Steen-Andersen’s use of the word ‘dogma’ is somewhat misleading. Rather than as a set of strict rules, they are more accurately understood as a loosely-prescribed set of instructions or guidelines for producing *Run Time Error* (this is especially true as the performances have evolved). As already noted, Steen-Andersen sometimes brings objects with him to the venue (breaking the first rule), such as the golf ball (sometimes more than one), which can feature prominently in some set-ups, as well as a beater (though the beater is not part of the set-up). Objects and other sounding materials are sometimes reused (breaking the second rule) and, as we know, the video is not always produced at the location where the work is presented (even if the composer strives to do so). However, characterizing his guidelines in this way would seem to be a conscious effort on the part of the composer to associate his conception of the work

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<sup>16</sup> “Run Time Error – Behind the Scenes.” As already noted, Steen-Andersen also brings a beater to the venue.

<sup>17</sup> “Run Time Error – Behind the Scenes.”

with the ‘Dogme 95’ manifesto promoted by a number of prominent Danish film directors including, most notably, Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg.<sup>18</sup> This manifesto, which was “sworn to” and signed by von Trier and Vinterberg in March 1995, was a reaction against what the directors saw as the artifice of modern cinema and outlined a set of ten “indisputable” rules or “dogmas,” referred to, oddly, as “The Vow of Chastity,” that film directors should adhere to. I list von Trier’s and Vinterberg’s dogmas here in full:

1. Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).
2. The sound must never be produced apart from the images, or vice versa. (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot.)
3. The camera must be hand-held. Any movement or immobility attainable in the hand is permitted. (The film must not take place where the camera is standing; shooting must take place where the film takes place).
4. The film must be in colour. Special lighting is not acceptable. (If there is too little light for exposure the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera).
5. Optical work and filters are forbidden.
6. The film must not contain superficial action. (Murders, weapons, etc. must not occur.)

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<sup>18</sup> In his review of a performance at the Southbank in London in 2014, Ivan Hewett notes this connection, observing that the “presiding spirit” behind much of the performance “was surely the Danish director Lars von Trier.” He also noted how the “idea that film-making should be guided by a set of strict formal ‘dogmas’ was actually mimicked in Simon Steen-Andersen’s programme note, which set out his own ‘dogmas’” (“London Sinfonietta, Queen Elizabeth Hall, review,” *The Telegraph*, March 13, 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/classicalconcertreviews/10695886/London-Sinfonietta-Queen-Elizabeth-Hall-review.html>). The program note Hewett refers to was probably a reproduction of text used on a comp card issued by London Sinfonietta in advance of the concert in which Steen-Andersen outlines the “rules of the game” (“Meet Simon Steen-Andersen,” comp card).

7. Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now.)
8. Genre movies are not acceptable.
9. The film format must be Academy 35 mm.
10. The director must not be credited.<sup>19</sup>

On the face of it, Steen-Andersen and Dogme 95 may seem like a strange pairing – ‘chaste’ is not a word one would use to describe Steen-Andersen’s music. Yet, Steen-Andersen’s so-called dogmas clearly echo those of Dogme 95, in particular Dogme 95’s first rule, which seems to have informed Steen-Andersen’s conception of a work that is site-specific and only uses objects that are found on site. Other aspects of Dogme 95’s manifesto also seem to have informed – or, at least, chime with – Steen-Andersen’s general conception of *Run Time Error*, and indeed aspects of Steen-Andersen’s work more generally: the interdependent relationship between sound and image proposed in the second rule; the stripped-down, low-tech and often low-budget approach proposed by Dogme 95 through the use of hand-held (rather than fixed) cameras; and the ban on special lighting or other technical gimmicks. Steen-Andersen’s work often exhibits what might be termed a low-tech or lo-fi aesthetic (even if it misses the spirit of Dogme 95 and its denial of superfluous or artificial elements). In *Run Time Error* this low-tech aesthetic is evident in the often low production value of the documented performances (especially in earlier presentations), including the manner in which the videos are shot (for instance, the use of cheap handheld cameras in earlier productions, shaky camera

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<sup>19</sup> Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, “Dogme 95: The Vow of Chastity,” in *Technology and Culture, the Film Reader*, ed. Andrew Utterson (London: Routledge, 2005), 87-88.

work and, occasionally, the cameraman creeping into view); the often cheap-looking everyday objects that populate the makeshift obstacle courses as well as the natural shabbiness of the backstage areas of many of the venues where the performances are presented; and the general slapdash quality of many of the documented performances, which are sometimes produced in a matter of days.<sup>20</sup>

However, Steen-Andersen's dogmas are used to different ends than those of his Dogme 95 compatriots. Steen-Andersen is, of course, not producing a dramatic film but a video installation or documented performance to be used later as part of a live concert performance. In some respects, *Run Time Error* would even seem to be at odds with the Dogme 95 aesthetic. For instance, the composer's manipulation of the video in the live performance component of the work (discussed below), and his incorporation of more elaborate camerawork as the work has evolved, could be seen to conflict with Dogme 95's rejection of modifications of the film in post-production and the use of other

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<sup>20</sup> Steen-Andersen's low-tech approach is evident elsewhere in his work in his use of everyday electronics and obsolete or 'retro' hardware: in addition to his use of a joystick in *Run Time Error* (discussed below), the now obsolete fourth generation DigiTech whammy pedal in *Study #2* and *Next to Beside Besides #7* (2006) and the discontinued Velleman M25SFM megaphones in *On And Off And To And Fro*. This low-tech approach is also evident in Steen-Andersen's use of 'cheap' everyday items (for instance, plastic cups, streamers and balloons in *Black Box Music*) and materials (masking tape and other craft shop paraphernalia used to prepare instruments and so on); the low quality of some of his repurposed audiovisual material (which appears to be ripped from YouTube or shot using an iPhone); and the generally low production value in the staging of *Buenos Aires* and other works. However, Steen-Andersen's low-tech approach belies the fact that his incorporation of cheap electronics, everyday items and so on is often combined with the use of more sophisticated hardware and the works are realized using up-to-the-minute audio and video software. Many of his works, especially more recent works, are the product of considerable support and resources and include large production teams (for instance, the composer had six assistants in the production of *TRIO*). The low-tech quality of some of Steen-Andersen's earlier works may have been partly attributable to practical necessity but in more recent works it appears to be primarily an aesthetic consideration.

technical gimmicks or “trickery.”<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the Dogme 95 manifesto appears to have provided Steen-Andersen with a conceptual model for *Run Time Error*. As Rebhahn observes, in *Run Time Error*, “Steen-Andersen builds on the constructive self-restraint of ‘Dogme 95,’” establishing his own set of dogmas which the composer describes as “not negative dogmas, but positive tools that pave the way for expressive access.”<sup>22</sup>

I now turn to the live performance component of *Run Time Error* which uses the video of the documented performance as its raw material. For this additional performance layer of the work, in which the audience is treated to an audiovisual tour of the concert venue, the pre-recorded video of the composer’s tour, together with its soundtrack, is duplicated and projected onto a two-panel split screen. The composer, onstage, seated behind a technology desk, manipulates the videos with two video game joysticks (the left-hand joystick controlling the left panel video, the right-hand joystick controlling the right video panel).<sup>23</sup> The composer scrolls forwards and backwards through the identical videos independently of one another, together with their corresponding soundtracks, stopping and starting and speeding up and slowing down as he goes to create a kind of two-part audiovisual counterpoint. With the joysticks, the composer can control the speed and direction of the videos, loop segments and even skip between points in the

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<sup>21</sup> Von Trier and Vinterberg, “Dogme 95,” 87.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Rebhahn, “Simon Steen-Andersen – Run Time Error,” accessed March 29, 2021, Musicacademy, <https://www.musicacademy.de/index.php?id=3319>.

<sup>23</sup> Joysticks were commonly used as video game controllers in the 1970’s and ‘80s, for arcade games and home consoles such as the Amiga 500. With the exception of flight simulator and other niche games, it was largely replaced by the ‘game pad’ or ‘joypad’, which became the de facto controller for video games after it was bundled with home consoles such as the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) during the mid-1980s.

video. Although the performance is largely improvised, here we find Steen-Andersen exploring some of audiovisual ideas introduced in earlier works. The most notable of these is an extensive and explicitly visual counterpoint in *Run Time Error* that, like *Self-Reflecting Next to Beside Besides* (versions of the work in which the performer plays together with a prerecorded video of themselves) – and, later, *Study #3* – is based on different version of the same material. We also find Steen-Andersen exploring further the idea of live performer plus a virtual double, here in the form of a live performer and two virtual onscreen doubles.

The visual effect of the composer scrolling back and forth through the pre-recorded video at various speeds resembles that of a ‘scrub tool’ in sound and video editing software, a tool that allows an editor to scroll through a video and its corresponding soundtrack with the mouse (or trackpad), while manually controlling the speed of the scrolling, in order to quickly zoom in on a precise point in time in the video. At times, the visual effect of Steen-Andersen’s manipulation of the video panels also resembles what happens when a runtime error occurs while operating a computer, as alluded to in the title. Common symptoms of a runtime error, which usually occur right before a runtime error message appears, are a system noticeably slowing down, software freezing or a program abruptly being exited. In his slowing down, staggering, stopping and starting and, occasionally, switching on and off of individual panels, these are all effects that the composer appears to mimic in the process of manipulating the videos. In *Run Time Error* the effects can be considered an extension of the staggering effect that occurs in *Next to Beside Besides* (especially *Self-Reflecting Next to Beside Besides*). In

addition, the composer's stretching and staggering of the video and repeating short segments of it is reminiscent of experimental filmmaker Martin Arnold's deconstruction of 'found footage' in works such as *Pièce touchée* (1989) and *Passage à l'acte* (1993).<sup>24</sup> Arnold's distinct style is characterized by an obsessive sampling of very short film sequences taken from old Hollywood movies from the 1930's to the 1950's and, since 2010, from classic American cartoons featuring characters such as Mickey Mouse, Daffy Duck and Tom and Jerry. Arnold's focus is as much on sound as it is on image as his videos expose hidden yet unintended meanings in otherwise mundane or unremarkable scenes. Steen-Andersen effectively acknowledges the influence of Arnold on *Run Time Error* by incorporating *Pièce touchée* (together with excerpts from Fischli's and Weiss's *Der Lauf der Dinge*) into an expanded version of *Run Time Error* entitled *The Way Sounds Go* (discussed below). The influence of Arnold can also be found in Steen-Andersen's treatment of video material in later works such as the *Piano Concerto* and *TRIO*, while the disembodied hands of cartoon characters in a series of works by Arnold based on classic American cartoons including *Soft Palate* (2010) and *Haunted House* (2011) may have inspired the visual elements of *Black Box Music*. Steen-Andersen's use of black and white in the original *Run Time Error* video created at HOTELbich may also have been an attempt to mimic the style of Arnold's films based on old black and white movies.

A very different model for the live performance component of *Run Time Error* is two-part inventions. According to a description on the website of Steen-Andersen's

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<sup>24</sup> The raw footage for *Pièce touchée* and *Passage à l'acte* comes from *The Human Jungle* (1954) and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, respectively.

publisher, presumably written by the composer, *Run Time Error* is “loosely constructed in the form of a kind of two part invention (with theme, retrogrades, augmentations etc.).”<sup>25</sup> Since there is no score for *Run Time Error* and the composer’s performance is improvised, the description implies that his performance is realized, however loosely, according to the principles of a two-part invention. The most obvious model in this respect would be the formal two-part inventions of J. S. Bach – the works with which the term is most often associated – in particular the first fifteen pieces from his *Clavier-Büchlein vor W.F. Bach* (BWV 772-786).<sup>26</sup> However, despite Steen-Andersen’s reference to form in his description, in these works by Bach, each of which is unique, we find that the two-part invention is not a form *per se*. Some follow a fugue-like structure, such as the C Major Invention (BWV 772), while others exhibit fugue-like elements, but there is no one form common to all of the inventions.<sup>27</sup> Yet, the two-part invention (and the invention generally) implies certain features or compositional devices, even if those devices are not peculiar to the invention. The predominant feature of a two-part invention is imitative counterpoint between the two voices while typical contrapuntal devices of the invention – and its more sophisticated cousin, the fugue – include augmentation (slowing down the subject by increasing its note values), diminution (speeding up the subject by shortening its note values), inversion (stating the subject upside down) and stretto (restating the subject in an alternative voice before the

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<sup>25</sup> “Run Time Error (2009).” Elsewhere on the Edition S website, the original HOTELbich video is described as “strictly constructed in the form of a two part invention” (“Run Time Error,” Edition S, accessed March 29, 2021, <http://www.edition-s.dk/media/run-time-error>).

<sup>26</sup> Bach originally called the first fifteen pieces in the set ‘preambulum’ but later gave them the title ‘invention.’ Other keyboard works in two-part counterpoint by J. S. Bach are sometimes casually referred to as inventions such as the four *duettos* from the *Clavier-Übung*, part iii (BWV 802-805).

<sup>27</sup> The fifteen *three*-part inventions from the same *Clavier-Büchlein* set are predominantly fugal.

first statement has been completed). Steen-Andersen mimics (or creates something analogous to) these features of the invention in his improvised manipulations of the video material, most obviously in the imitative contrapuntal effect that he establishes between the two video panels (or ‘voices’) and their corresponding soundtracks and through his stretching, compressing, accelerating, slowing down and reversing of the content of the panels.

Although the video panels are manipulated independently of one another (the left joystick controlling the left panel, the right joystick controlling the right panel with the panels analogous to the left and right hand lines of the piano), they generally remain in close proximity to one another in time and are always controlled and perceived in relation to each other (often producing a staggering effect). A good illustration of this relationship between the video panels can be found if we consider the very beginning of the first of two performances of *Run Time Error* recorded at The Black Diamond in 2014, which represents a typical presentation of the work.<sup>28</sup> The performance begins fugue-like with the right video panel edging forward in time by a few seconds while the left panel remains still. The left panel then follows the right one (at 0:18 in the DVD), ‘answering’ the ‘theme’ or ‘subject’ introduced by the right panel by advancing the same short sequence of time in its identical video (moving slightly beyond the right video in time), at a slightly faster pace, while the right hand panel freezes or ‘rests’.

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<sup>28</sup> “Run Time Error @ The Black Diamond #1” on *Simon Steen-Andersen: Black Box Music*, Oslo Sinfonietta and Håkon Stene. An alternative performance of *Run Time Error* on the same DVD, “Run Time Error @ The Black Diamond #2,” is a less typical (if more successful) presentation of the work. It begins with an introductory section in which the panels are not in close proximity to one another in time. Instead, they contain short samples taken from different parts of the video (with the piece proper beginning at ca. 1:03 in the video).

Once the left panel has completed its answer, the two panels meet again at roughly the same point in time. After a brief pause, this process is twice repeated (beginning at 0:22 and 0:31) before the two panels begin to move forward together in counterpoint for the first time (beginning at 0:39), the right panel beginning to move again before the left panel has completed its answer to the right panel's previous statement. This leads to a series of continuously unfolding, freely contrapuntal statements and imitations – perhaps analogous to the episodes of a fugue – as the videos push ever forward and the panels, continuing to remain in close proximity, occasionally moving almost in unison.

As the videos progress, we also notice that the composer tends to manipulate the videos forwards and backwards in short bursts, highlighting small sections of the videos. This focus on small sections of the videos helps to create the impression of a succession of short audiovisual subjects, sometimes even emphatically melodic ones, that the composer is treating or working with in a 'composerly' way (according to a set of principles) and not simply scrolling forwards and backwards through the videos willy-nilly. In addition to imitation, Steen-Andersen's subjects are treated in a variety of ways that are analogous to the contrapuntal compositional devices typically encountered in an invention. Of the contrapuntal devices listed above (augmentation, diminution, inversion and stretto), inversion is the only one for which an obviously analogous device cannot be found in Steen-Andersen's treatment of the video material: 'slow motion' corresponds to augmentation; 'fast forward' corresponds to diminution; stretto can be seen in the manner in which the composer repeats or imitates sequences of the video in an alternative panel before the initial statement of that sequence has finished;

while a further device, moving the video in reverse (i.e. rewind), corresponding, of course, to retrograde, is also frequently employed.

At times, the visual dimension of *Run Time Error* threatens to overwhelm the sounding dimension, due in large part to the foregrounding of the video element, which is foregrounded to a much greater extent than before in Steen-Andersen's work. Yet, the visual elements of the work are always connected to the sounding elements. (To some extent, watching the documented performance without the added live performance component is no different, and indeed no more visual, than watching a video of any percussion performance.) However, a large part of the appeal of *Run Time Error* is that it is immediately apparent to the audience what is happening 'musically' from the visuals, even if the treatment of the audiovisual material is by way of (by analogy) 'learned' contrapuntal compositional devices. This 'immediate' quality is in keeping with a general direct quality or approach that, as we saw in the previous chapter, is characteristic of Steen-Andersen's music. As Holmboe notes, in the composer's "stretching, stopping, compressing and reversing" of his video material, "the compositional principles of the classical invention are evident from the start – even for an audience not familiar with classical forms."<sup>29</sup> Griffiths and Rebhahn both echo Holmboe's sentiment. Griffiths observes that Steen-Andersen's "thoroughly non-classical" audiovisual material makes the "classical techniques" he uses "unusually apparent, since they operate on the visual plane as well as the aural."<sup>30</sup> Rebhahn adds that, "While the recognition and comprehension of the structural characteristics of the

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<sup>29</sup> Holmboe, "Have You Seen the Music?"

<sup>30</sup> Paul Griffiths, "Opening Night: Run Time Error," concert program, Miller Theatre at Columbia University, September 17, 2015.

invention requires a trained ear, the treatment of the music-and-image material here is always completely transparent and immediately discernible” (translation mine).<sup>31</sup>

Holmboe gives the example of one of the panels moving in retrograde to highlight the immediate comprehensibility of the compositional devices that Steen-Andersen apparently employs – a device that, under normal circumstances, is perhaps the least readily comprehensible of the compositional devices Steen-Andersen employs.

According to Holmboe, in *Run Time Error* the technique is “immediately and humorously obvious” to the viewer-listener, even to those “not familiar with classical forms” as “sound and image simply roll backwards.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, it is immediately apparent when one of the ‘voices’ is operating in retrograde or imitation even when the audiovisual material has been stretched or compressed, and its relationship to its neighboring panel, which may also be stretched, compressed or otherwise manipulated, even exposing a different point in time to its neighbor. Thanks to the visual dimension of the work, the manner in which the various audiovisual subjects are treated and compositional devices employed, as well as the relationship between the two parts, is always easily discernible. The overall circular structure of the work (recall, the video “should form a loop”) is also crystal clear, with the composer-performer ending up back where he started – the final audiovisual subject is almost identical to the original subject (9:49 in the Black Diamond performance, Steen-Andersen emerges from behind and circles a pillar), analogous to the return to the main key towards the end of an invention.

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<sup>31</sup> Rebhahn, “Simon Steen-Andersen – Run Time Error.”

<sup>32</sup> Holmboe, “Out of the Box,” 6.

Before turning my attention to Fischli's and Weiss's *Der Lauf der Dinge*, it is worth considering whether *Run Time Error* is best described as a single work or as a collection of performances or works (something I have alluded to earlier). Although there are similarities between the various presentations of *Run Time Error*, the variety of presentations suggests that it is not a single work but, rather, a collection of performances or works unified by a basic concept in the form of a set of loosely prescribed instructions or guidelines that provide a framework for the documented performance component, while the live joystick performance portion is informed and unified by the composer's intention to create a kind of two-part invention through the use of contrapuntal devices. As *Run Time Error* has evolved (as we will see), it is clear that the already loosely prescribed instructions have evolved too, underlining the nature of *Run Time Error* as a collection of independent works with each performance a new work. (The live performance portion of the work continues to be informed, to some extent, by the intended connection with two-part inventions.) Indeed, the uniqueness of each presentation of *Run Time Error* is a built-in part of the basic concept underlying the documented performance portion with each presentation shaped by the particular place (the concert venue) where it is presented. Multiple presentations of *Run Time Error* in the same venue also underline the uniqueness of each presentation. There can be considerable variety between different set-ups in the same venue and between documented performances involving the same set-up, as well as between live joystick performances using the same documented performance material.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> This variety between different presentations involving the same venue is evident in the two Black Diamond performances on the commercially available Dacapo DVD (Oslo Sinfonietta and Håkon Stene, *Simon Steen-Andersen: Black Box Music*).

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An obvious precedent for *Run Time Error* is *Der Lauf der Dinge* (*The Way Things Go*) (1987) by Swiss artist duo Peter Fischli and David Weiss. *Der Lauf der Dinge* is a half-hour long film that involves a precarious, seemingly continuous seventy-to-a-hundred feet long Rube Goldberg-like structure composed of a multitude of common objects (kettles, chairs, bottles, ladders, wooden planks, old shoes, a sweeping brush and so on) set up in a warehouse. At the beginning of the film, the structure is set in motion and a remarkable series of chain reactions ensues – involving deflating balloons, rolling tires, draining liquids, melting candles, falling objects, fuses burning and wheels spinning – variously determined by fire, water, chemical reactions and the laws of gravity. *Der Lauf der Dinge* took a year to produce and evolved out of an earlier work, *Stiller Nachmittag* (*Quiet Afternoon*) (1984-85), a set of photos featuring precariously balanced everyday objects.<sup>34</sup>

Having seen Fischli's and Weiss's iconic work, one might question the extent of the originality and inventiveness of Steen-Andersen's much-acclaimed work.<sup>35</sup> Like the famous Honda 'Cog' advertisement, which was also inspired by *Der Lauf der Dinge*, the appeal of *Run Time Error* relies heavily on the Rube Goldberg-like structure of

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<sup>34</sup> Robert Silberman, "Fischli and Weiss. Minneapolis and Philadelphia," *The Burlington Magazine* 138, no. 1124 (1996): 771.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, Anderberg describes *Run Time Error* as "perhaps the most fascinating and original work by a Danish composer since the turn of the millennium" (translation mine) (Sune Anderberg, "Fem højdepunkter fra årets Spor Festival," *Seismograf*, May 23, 2018, <http://seismograf.org/artikel/stort-fem-hoejdepunkter-fra-aarets-spor-festival>).

Fischli and Weiss and the manner in which its succession of actions and reactions is executed.<sup>36</sup> *Run Time Error* also relies on the inherent novelty and humor of Fischli's and Weiss's structure, which, in *Run Time Error*, extends to the composer's interactions with the structure. However, given the inherent slapdash nature of the construction of Steen-Andersen's makeshift obstacle courses, which are often conceived and put together on site in the days leading up to the concert, Steen-Andersen's less elaborate structures might be considered a kind of 'Fischli and Weiss lite' for concert audiences, even if the often low production value of Steen-Andersen's courses is intended to be in keeping with the Dogme 95 aesthetic that the composer appears to subscribe to. Steen-Andersen's chain reactions are also less spectacular – there are no pyrotechnics or chemical reactions for instance – and they lack the attention to detail as well as the dual element of precision and precariousness of *Der Lauf der Dinge*. The cause and effect relationships in Fischli's and Weiss's work often teeter on the edge, as if the props hesitate to contemplate their actions before completing them. In short, Steen-Andersen's structures in the documented performance component of *Run Time Error* lack the lyricism and charm of the earlier work.

However, Steen-Andersen's structures diverge from Fischli's and Weiss's construction in a number of respects and, ultimately, they serve a different purpose (or perhaps, more precisely, an additional purpose) to that of his precedent. Many of the key differences are determined by Steen-Andersen's so-called dogmas. For instance, the site-specific

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<sup>36</sup> 'Cog' was a 2003 cinema and television advertisement for Honda involving a Rube Goldberg-like structure made up of parts from a disassembled Honda Accord. Fischli and Weiss accused the producers Wieden+Kennedy of plagiarism, including the "simplification of their film's content" (Lionel Bently, Jennifer Davis and Jane C. Ginsburg, eds., *Copyright and Piracy: An Interdisciplinary Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 329).

nature of Steen-Andersen's work and the composer's incorporation of distinct features of the space, including its architecture and (according to his first dogma), "objects and instruments found at the location" is unique to *Run Time Error*. It also gives Steen-Andersen's work the added novelty of the audience getting a peek 'behind the scenes' of the concert venue. The indistinct warehouse in which Fischli's and Weiss's chain reaction is set up could be any warehouse, while the props they assemble for their structure were brought in from the outside. In addition (in accordance with his second dogma), Steen-Andersen (usually) only uses an object once in his set up while Fischli and Weiss, whose film was shot in sequences and edited together (allowing them to set up the structure in phases), reused some of their props such as an orange board and an air mattress. More importantly, however, if we look beyond the spectacle of Steen-Andersen's parkour, we can see that, unlike Fischli and Weiss, whose deconstruction of everyday objects is firmly on the objects themselves (and their interactions), Steen-Andersen's focus is ultimately on the sounds that are produced as a consequence of the interactions of, as well as his interactions with, the objects. As Cummings notes, in *Run Time Error*, "despite occasional appearances to the contrary, the composer's interest is emphatically on sound."<sup>37</sup> The relationship between the objects is expanded beyond the physical actions and reactions of *Der Lauf der Dinge* (and the visual result of those interactions), to the relationships or connectivity of the sounds that occur as a result of those observed interactions. As outlined in his third dogma ("each sound/action must have an immediate point of association with its neighbouring sounds/actions"), the point of association between neighboring actions is not just the action but also (and primarily

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<sup>37</sup> Simon Cummings, "New releases: Simon Steen-Andersen, Monty Adkins & Stephen Harvey, Jennifer Walshe," *5:4*, April 13, 2015, <http://5against4.com/2015/04/13/new-releases-simon-steen-andersen-monty-adkins-stephen-harvey-jennifer-walshe/>.

in effect) its sounding result. In other words, Steen-Andersen adds an additional ‘effect’ to the cause and effect relationship of the actions, reorienting Fischli’s and Weiss’s structure towards a musical-aesthetic function. Steen-Andersen also adds an extra layer to the work with the live performance component. As we have seen, Steen-Andersen’s Fischli-and-Weiss-like structure and the documentation of his journey through it is merely the raw material of the work in presentations of the work that include this live performance dimension.

The most profound difference between *Der Lauf der Dinge* and *Run Time Error*, however, is the manner in which the composer inserts himself emphatically into the work. The composer is a vital part of his Fischli and Weiss-like structures and their chains of actions and reactions. Indeed, the composer is usually responsible for setting the objects in motion – he is the ultimate ‘cause’ in the chain of cause and effect relationships between the objects. Consequently, whereas in *Der Lauf der Dinge* we follow the course or ‘flow’ of the *objects*, which are the ‘performers’ in the work and seemingly moving of their own volition, in *Run Time Error* we follow the route of the composer-performer, who is the star of his own work, with the focus shifting only occasionally to the objects.<sup>38</sup> The composer intervenes in the process in a way that robs the anthropomorphized objects of their autonomy, which is ultimately what gives the earlier work its charm, elegance and lyricism. This intervention in the process by Steen-Andersen also extends to the performance component. The live component gives an

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<sup>38</sup> The usual English translation of the title of Fischli’s and Weiss’s work, *The Way Things Go*, loses the sense of ‘flow’ expressed by the word ‘Lauf’ in the original German title.

additional layer to the work for sure, but the composer's manipulation of the video playback further relegates the role of the objects to mere bit parts.

That said, Steen-Andersen's participation in the work might be considered a novel updating of Fischli's and Weiss's work. The composer's tour through the building while navigating the obstacles en route represents a sort of parkour. Steen-Andersen was surely influenced in his conception of the piece by this mid-to-late '90's fad that spread mainly through videos on the internet.<sup>39</sup> (The title of *Run Time Error* is possibly an allusion to freerunning.) Described in publicity material as "an action-packed audio-visual video-parkour," visually, Steen-Andersen's jaunt through his makeshift obstacle course is reminiscent not just of the activity itself but of the general style of YouTube videos dedicated to the activity that are primarily responsible for popularizing it.<sup>40</sup>

These videos typically show a 'traceur' navigating a terrain with a colleague following close behind with a hand-held camera (or phone) giving an 'over-the-shoulder' view, a

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<sup>39</sup> Alec Wilkinson, "No Obstacles: Navigating the World by Leaps and Bounds," *The New Yorker*, April 9, 2007, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/04/16/no-obstacles>.

Parkour, also known as free running, is a gymnastics-like activity or sport that developed from military obstacle course training where the objective is to move rapidly and effectively through a complex physical (usually urban) environment using only the natural strength of one's body. The activity began among a group of school friends in the Paris suburbs in the 1980s (Dan Glaister, "Inside the Daredevil World of Parkour, Britain's Newest, Gravity-Defying Sport," *The Guardian*, January 14, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/jan/14/parkour-daredevil-britain-newest-sport-calculated-risk-free-running>). It principally involves running, jumping and climbing. Although Steen-Andersen's parkour represents an updating of the Fischli and Weiss concept, this aspect of *Run Time Error* has also come to date it within a relatively short period of time.

<sup>40</sup> Spor 2018, festival program, 20. Parkour was increasingly popularized during the 2000s through films (including an elaborate parkour sequence at the beginning of the 2006 James Bond film *Casino Royale*), documentaries, video games and high-profile advertisements featuring some of the originators of the activity. However, it is the contemporaneous rise of YouTube that is widely credited with helping spread the popularity of the activity and promoting it to a mainstream, global phenomenon (Tom Sims, "The Sport of Parkour Gets a Growing Following," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/24/sports/24iht-athlete24.html>).

style that is seemingly mimicked in *Run Time Error* (particularly in earlier presentations). Steen-Andersen's parkour is certainly not as daring or acrobatic as those seen on YouTube – after all, there is the added complexity of having to ‘play’ the obstacles that fill the course as he goes – but it captures the spirit of a parkour in its energy, playfulness and, perhaps especially, the attitude and ingenuity of a parkour in its use and negotiation of an environment and its obstacles.

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One of the most notable features of *Run Time Error* is the manner in which it has evolved over the past decade. Since it was first presented as an installation in Brussels in 2009, *Run Time Error* has grown and changed with the venues and contexts in which it has been presented. Recent performances have been devised and presented in close collaboration with different ensembles whose participation has also determined the content of the work. This mutability is inherent to the concept of *Run Time Error*. Each performance is unique, shaped by the conditions in which it is presented. In addition, with each new performance, Steen-Andersen endeavors to take *Run Time Error* a step further. This sometimes involves reusing ideas from previous performances but always transforming them in some way. As Steen-Andersen explains:

Some elements are used again [...] I try to reuse the best parts for the new routes. But the rule is that if I use anything, I have to take it one step further [...] it can't

just be copy-paste. The idea has to be transformed or evolved. So that the work evolves.<sup>41</sup>

The composer aims for each performance of *Run Time Error* to be “unique and not simply a variation of previous presentations.”<sup>42</sup> As *Run Time Error* has evolved in this way, with each new presentation building on the last, the limitations that the composer originally imposed upon himself, however loosely, appear to have become less and less important to its identity.

Over time, the production value of the documented performance component of *Run Time Error* has increased exponentially. The filming of the performance has become more ‘professional’ and the raw video, and its soundtrack, have been treated to more extensive post-production work. The initial HOTELbich version was shot in black-and-white using an inexpensive surveillance camera and QuickTime. Since then, more and more high-quality cameras have been used in the production of *Run Time Error* – thanks in part to the increasing availability of cheap, high-quality cameras (together with more sophisticated, widely available video editing software) – resulting in a significantly higher picture quality.<sup>43</sup> Steen-Andersen’s use of cameras has also become more sophisticated over time. In the Black Diamond performance (discussed above), Steen-Andersen introduced the free movement of the camera with the aid of a (still somewhat crude) pulley system involving strings and wires (the homemade mechanisms

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<sup>41</sup> “Run Time Error – Behind the Scenes.”

<sup>42</sup> “Run Time Error – Behind the Scenes.”

<sup>43</sup> Consider, for example, the use of a relatively cheap handheld analog camera in the Black Diamond performance (discussed earlier), produced in 2014, compared with the use of a GoPro attached to a gimbal in performances with Decoder Ensemble in 2018.

reflecting a consistently low-tech approach). In subsequent performances, Steen-Andersen has explored this aspect of the video's production further. In the raw video for one of three performances based around *Run Time Error* at the KunstFestSpiele Herrenhausen (a festival of contemporary art) in Hannover in May 2018, the camera is not confined to an over-the-shoulder view but moves around the composer (and musicians) and even takes an independent course, abandoning the composer's route and moving freely between levels of the building (again using a homemade pulley system) before meeting up with the composer again. The camera itself is also integrated into the work. As it diverges from the composer's route, the movement of the camera mimics the action of an electric fan – one of the objects that makes up the composers Fischli and Weiss-like structure – taking the fan as its immediate point of reference (in accordance with the composer's second dogma). In the same performance, we also find that the composer's parkour is not recorded in a single take, as was the case in the documentation of earlier performances, which creates the impression of multiple cameras. In recent performances, Steen-Andersen has also developed the relatively crude pulley mechanism used in the Black Diamond performance for the free movement of the camera (or cameras) with similar but more extensive and elaborate mechanisms that are built into the makeshift obstacle courses.

Recent *Run Time Error* videos typically contain multiple cuts and involve multiple takes. In the Bayreuth video, we find cross-cutting between different shots of the same scene as well as cross-cutting between different scenes. There are also interior as well as exterior shots and scenes. Some performances of *Run Time Error* are now documented

days or even months apart. For instance, a performance at The Free Exhibition Building in Copenhagen in 2014 was filmed over the course of a year, on three separate occasions, months apart during extensive construction work on the building. Steen-Andersen playfully incorporates this aspect of the conditions in which the performance was documented into the work. At one point in the final video (which was presented both as a standalone video installation and used as the basis of a live joystick performance), the video moves forward rapidly in time from one part of the composer's parkour to the next showing the construction work being carried out in the months between filming (captured by a stationary video camera left on site); at a later point in the video, Steen-Andersen uses a jump cut to show (what appears to be) the same scene or space some months apart, after additional construction work has been completed, while keeping the feel of one continuous take.

The composer has also expanded *Run Time Error* by building programs of works around the concept. In addition, he has extended the idea of it being site-specific to it being both site-specific and 'ensemble-specific' with performances of *Run Time Error* devised in collaboration with ensembles such as the JACK Quartet, Decoder Ensemble and Ensemble Modern. Just as the venue is integrated into *Run Time Error*, so too is the ensemble. For a concert at Miller Theatre in New York in 2015, Steen-Andersen incorporated the JACK Quartet into the video component of *Run Time Error* in a program of works, all involving JACK, built around two presentations of *Run Time Error*, one at the beginning of the concert and one at the end (the second presentation

exploring a different route).<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in *The Way Sounds Go*, a version of *Run Time Error* devised in collaboration with Decoder Ensemble in 2018 (the Hannover performance mentioned above, also presented in Hamburg and Aarhus), Steen-Andersen weaves together excerpts from two of his recent works – “*if this then that and now what*” (2016) and a modified version of *Asthma* (2017) – with three different versions of *Run Time Error*. In *The Way Sounds Go*, the Decoder musicians are incorporated into both the composer’s pre-produced video-parkour and the live performance component. In the video component, the composer incorporates the musicians into his parkour, utilizing them in much the same way as he treats the found objects that fill his course. The musicians become part the chain of actions and reactions. At one point in the video, the musicians line up alongside one another and play isolated notes that are combined to form a simple ascending scale in what has become a recurring feature of the video component of performances of *Run Time Error* devised in collaboration with ensembles (also present in the JACK performance mentioned above). This scalar relationship between the sounds produced by the performers can be understood as a literal-minded interpretation by the composer of the type of connection that he establishes between the sounds produced with the objects that the course is composed of (recall, the composer aims for a linear connection between the sounds produced by the objects, “almost like a scale”). Later during the live performance component of *The Way Sounds Go* the composer performs first with joysticks as normal before interacting live with the musicians (also onstage) that have just been encountered in the video. The pre-recorded video-parkour now extends into

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<sup>44</sup> The other works on the program were the three *Studies for String Instruments*, the video work *Obstruction Studies #1-3* (2012) and *Half a Bit of Nothing Integrated* (2012).

the physical domain of the live performance. Here, Steen-Andersen creates an audiovisual counterpoint not just between elements within the video but between the live and pre-recorded elements, blurring the distinction between the two in the process (similar to the subtle counterpoint between the live and virtual performers in *Self-Reflecting Next to Beside Besides* and between the live and virtual performers in *Study #3*). Steen-Andersen also incorporates two ‘homage-excursions’ to Fischli’s and Weiss’s *Der Lauf der Dinge* into this expanded version of *Run Time Error*, as well as Martin Arnold’s *Pièce touchée*, the composer acknowledging the influence of his predecessors and drawing further connections with their works in the process.

The most extensive, elaborate and ambitious presentation of the *Run Time Error* concept to date, however, has surely been the recent Bayreuth production (despite the cancellation of the live performance component). In the Bayreuth performance, titled *The Loop of the Nibelung* and streamed online at the end of July 2020, we find a more complex and extensive set-up than ever before, relatively sophisticated camerawork (possibly involving a drone), cinematic effects and, evidently, more extensive audio and visual post-production (including superimposition and double exposure effects). Rather than the usual new music bands, Steen-Andersen also has the incomparable singers and musicians of the Bayreuth Festival at his disposal who are incorporated into the work in various ways and appear to be equally at home with the typically unconventional sounds and techniques of Steen-Andersen’s music as *Das Rheingold*. *The Loop of the Nibelung* has the added significance of its setting. With the exception of Beethoven, no composer other than Wagner has been heard in The Bayreuth Festival Hall (*The Loop* used

Rehearsal Stage 3). In his consideration of the concrete conditions in which the work is performed, the concept of *Run Time Error* is expanded beyond the integration of the venue itself, and the ensemble, into the work to include, with the aid of historical documents and footage, as well as the music of Wagner, the history of the Bayreuth Festival Hall and indeed the Festival itself.

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In the current chapter, I have discussed some of the inherently visual aspects of the concept, set-up and staging of *Run Time Error* and how performances of it, and its underlying concept, have evolved over the past decade. In his various presentations of *Run Time Error*, Steen-Andersen has continued his exploration of some of the ideas related to the visual elements of performance that he introduced in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments*. The most notable of these is the more extensive audiovisual counterpoint in the live performance component of *Run Time Error*. With the foregrounding of the video element, *Run Time Error* is also more overtly visual than previous works. In the following chapter, I turn my attention to the equally visual *Black Box Music*, one of Steen-Andersen's best-known works. In *Black Box Music*, the video element – a live video stream – is similarly foregrounded. Steen-Andersen also continues to explore ideas related to the visual elements of musical performance introduced in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String*

*Instruments.* Here, as we will see, his treatment of these elements takes the form of a playful exploitation of the viewer-listener's assumptions about the connection between, on the one hand, the physical gestures of a conductor and, on the other, the sound produced by the musicians.

## CHAPTER 3

### THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX: *BLACK BOX MUSIC*

i.

Simon Steen-Andersen's *Black Box Music* for performer, homemade amplified 'black box,' fifteen instrumentalists and live video projection was written for Steen-Andersen's frequent collaborator, Norwegian percussionist Håkon Stene, and first performed by Stene and the Oslo Sinfonietta at the Darmstadt Summer Courses in July 2012.<sup>1</sup> Since then, it has become one of Steen-Andersen's most often performed works (usually by Stene, with various ensembles) and, despite producing a number of well-received large-scale instrumental and staged works in the years since the composition of *Black Box Music* (including the *Piano Concerto*, *Buenos Aires* and *TRIO*), it is the work with which Steen-Andersen is perhaps still most associated. Like *Run Time Error*, *Black Box Music* is a playful, entertaining and, indeed, highly visual work.

In previous chapters, we have seen how in works such as *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments* Steen-Andersen attempts to integrate the physical-choreographic and visual elements of the live concert situation into his music by actively treating them as compositional parameters and bringing them into the

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<sup>1</sup> Stene discusses his collaboration with Steen-Andersen on *Black Box Music*, and on other works by the composer, in a text he wrote as part of a research project presented at The Norwegian Academy of Music in 2014 (Stene, "This is Not a Drum: Towards a Post-Instrumental Practice"). The text suggests that Stene played an important role in the conception of *Black Box Music*, one that perhaps goes beyond the typical involvement of a soloist in the conception of a work that is composed for him (see 46-47).

foreground. In *Run Time Error*, Steen-Andersen continued his exploration of the visual elements of musical performance while expanding his notion of integrating concrete elements to include the venue where the concert takes place. In the current chapter, I turn my attention to *Black Box Music*. *Black Box Music* represents the culmination of Steen-Andersen's exploration of the physical-choreographic and visual elements of musical performance that he began in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments* and remains his most sophisticated exploration of the connection between visual and sounding elements in his music. In the first part of the chapter, I discuss the unique and inherently visual set-up and staging of *Black Box Music* together with Steen-Andersen's exploration of the connection between the visual and sounding elements of music through his playful interrogation of the tropes and conventions of the conductor-orchestra relationship. This discussion is followed, in the second part of the chapter, by an extensive formal analysis of the work. To begin, however, I consider the role of the 'soloist-conductor' in *Black Box Music*.

The program note at the front of the score to *Black Box Music*, presumably written by the composer, offers a succinct summary of some of the ideas behind the work. It says, "The starting point [of the work] is the classical soloist-conductor, only in this case, the conducting and solo part are one and the same" while "the setting is a traditional theatre stage with curtains, props and light; only in this case, the stage is also an instrument." It adds, "Black Box Music could be said to be a deconstruction of conducting and puppet

theatre as well as an exploration and exploitation of the audio/visual relations inherent in conducting and staging.”<sup>2</sup>

These comments provide a useful guide and entry point for my discussion of this multilayered and idiosyncratic work. *Black Box Music* is essentially a concerto for soloist and ensemble in which the soloist occupies the dual role of soloist and conductor while the physical (and primarily visual) gestures of the conductor, and the responses of the ensemble, provide the material of the piece. Although written for a percussionist, as Steen-Andersen explains (above), “the starting point is the classical soloist-conductor” and “the conducting and solo part are one and the same.” By casting the conductor as the soloist in a concerto-like scenario, the viewer-listener’s attention is focused, with the aid of a live video projection, squarely on the conductor and his actions in a way that is normally reserved for a soloist in a classical concerto. This combining of the roles of soloist and conductor is primarily a feature in the opening movement (“Ouverture”) where, to begin with, the soloist-conductor, whose hands are hugely projected onto a large screen in front of the audience, dramatically cues the ensemble and beats time. As a result, as Holmboe observes, “the usual role of the conductor, when it comes to communicating with musicians, is examined and exposed.”<sup>3</sup> This examining and exposing of the role of the conductor within a concerto-like scenario, in particular the relationship between conductor and ensemble, is the main theme of the opening movement.<sup>4</sup> It involves a playful and irreverent exploration on the conductor-orchestra

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<sup>2</sup> Simon Steen-Andersen, *Black Box Music* (Copenhagen: Edition S, 2012), front matter.

<sup>3</sup> Holmboe, “Out of the Box,” 5.

<sup>4</sup> The role of the soloist in the middle and final movements is closer to that of a traditional percussion soloist with ensemble.

relationship that exploits, what Steen-Andersen refers to as, “the expectations and the clichés from the conductor-orchestra situation.”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, as Holmboe explains, it maintains and humorously parades “all the conventional dramatic tensions between soloist and orchestra that are associated with the concerto genre.”<sup>6</sup>

The expectations and clichés of the conductor-ensemble relationship, within a concerto-like scenario, are combined with allusions to other types of live performance. While the staging, with its blown-up projection of a miniature stage inside a black box suggests a theatrical performance, the choreography of the solo part resembles at times a puppet show, mime, dance, a slapstick comedy routine and even a magic act. These allusions add to the humor and eccentric nature of the work as hidden and unintended correspondences between the conductor’s gestures and other, more ‘popular’ types of performance are revealed. It also gives the piece a distinct vaudevillian character. The tone of the performance is thus lowered, stripping the venerated role of the conductor of both the mystique and prestige typically accorded the position – a mystique and prestige that also extends to the role of the classical soloist. Moreover, allusions to other, less ‘refined’ types of live performance help to expose what might be considered an inherent ridiculousness (in the precise sense of the word, i.e. deserving or inviting of derision or ridicule) in the conductor-orchestra situation, including what Adorno refers to (in his classic essay ‘Conductor and Orchestra’) as the “medicine-man gestures” of the

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<sup>5</sup> “Meet Simon Steen-Andersen,” comp card.

<sup>6</sup> Holmboe, “Out of the Box,” 5.

conductor.<sup>7</sup> This is epitomized in the opening movement of *Black Box Music* by the soloist-conductor's dramatically executed recurring "tutti chord" cue (discussed below).

While the main focus of *Black Box Music* is on "examining and exposing" the role of the classical conductor and the conductor-orchestra relationship, the musical material is *conducting itself*. In other words: the physical gestures of the conductor and the ensemble's responses to them. The musical material is thus made up of both visual elements (the soloist-conductor's actions and gestures) and sounding elements (in the ensemble) and, importantly, the *connection* between the two. The soloist-conductor's gestures are not limited, however, to the usual repertoire of hand gestures and signals one typically associates with a conductor. The soloist-conductor also adopts – often to humorous effect – familiar, everyday hand gestures such as the 'thumbs up,' 'call me' and 'middle finger' gestures, which in combination with the usual conductor's gestures, the ensemble also responds to (or appears to respond to). This incorporation of everyday gestures helps to underline the inherent ridiculousness of the conductor-orchestra scenario. Occasionally, these everyday gestures, when they appear together in succession, seem to portray a mini-dramatic scene or narrative, such as a mock telephone conversation (towards the end of the first half of the opening movement) or, more dramatically, a sequence in which the soloist appears to be shot and checks his slowing pulse before flatlining. The choreography of the solo part also alludes to hand games – most notably a 'rock-paper-scissors'-like game at the midway point of the

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<sup>7</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1976), 105-106. Adorno is more than likely referring to African traditional healers rather than the traditional healers or spiritual leaders of the indigenous people of the Americas. The comparison may be considered culturally insensitive by today's standards. Adorno also points out the resemblance of a conductor to a juggler, a circus ringmaster and a head waiter.

opening movement – and borrows from American Sign Language. At times, it is almost as if the soloist is translating or interpreting the music in the ensemble for the audience. These gestures are combined with erratic, cartoon-like musical gestures and orchestration – such as ‘stinger’ chords, ‘wah-wah’ brass effects, rapid glissandi and other kinesthetic gestures – that echo the anarchic cartoon music of Carl Stalling.<sup>8</sup> The soloist-conductor also starts to make sounds inside the box, independently of the ensemble, with and without props, further exposing the perhaps superficial nature of the role of the conductor who, under normal circumstances, instigates and controls the sound, while himself making no sound at all.

Turning to the set-up and staging of *Black Box Music*, the ‘black box’ of the title is a specially constructed box, the interior of which resembles a miniature theatrical stage or (as described by the composer) “a kind of mini puppet theatre” or “mini theatre space,” complete with miniature curtains at the front of the stage and lights that the soloist can switch on and off (front light, back light and down light).<sup>9</sup> The interior of the box can be best described as a hybrid of a miniature black box theater (which does not typically have front curtains) and a puppet show booth with miniature proscenium or Italian-style stage and curtains (the kind of portable puppet show booth used for seaside performances of *Punch and Judy* in the United Kingdom). The ‘black box’ in the title refers to a ‘black box theater,’ a type of performance space often used for experimental

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<sup>8</sup> MacKinney notes the similarity between Steen-Andersen’s music and Stalling’s in *Black Box Music* and *Double Up* (Lisa MacKinney, “Accessible and thoughtfully selected program delivered with warmth and gusto,” *Limelight Magazine*, October 9, 2014, [http://edition-s.dk/sites/default/files/files/review\\_latitude\\_new\\_music\\_festival\\_waso.pdf](http://edition-s.dk/sites/default/files/files/review_latitude_new_music_festival_waso.pdf)).

<sup>9</sup> Holmboe, “Have You Seen the Music.”

theater. This is usually a simple, versatile space with black walls and often (though not always) with the floor at the same level as the first row of the audience.<sup>10</sup>

The box, which is enclosed on all sides, is sound-insulated and fitted with a miniature camera and microphones. There are holes in the back of the box through which the soloist – who performs ‘inside’ the box – inserts his hands (and forearms) in order to perform the work.<sup>11</sup> A live video feed from inside the box, which captures a view from the front of the box, is projected onto a large screen (or a bright back wall) behind the soloist and to the front of the audience. The hugely projected image shows the blown-up interior together with the gigantic disembodied hands of the soloist (the latter dominating the view).<sup>12</sup> Sound from inside the box is sent to loudspeakers surrounding the audience via six miniature microphones installed in the four corners and on the ceiling and floor of the box. The positions of the speakers in the hall correspond spatially to the locations of the microphones inside the box. This allows the soloist-conductor, by focusing on specific mics with the sounds he makes, to control the position or location of the sounds around the audience in the auditorium, most notably at the beginning of the third movement (“Finale”), where the soloist snaps his fingers next to individual mics in the four corners of the box.

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<sup>10</sup> Stene confirms that the title refers to a black box theater (Stene, “This is Not a Drum,” 48n84).

<sup>11</sup> The box was specially designed and constructed to fit the arms and hands of Håkon Stene. (Stene, “This is Not a Drum,” 47). The box was rebuilt in 2017 to facilitate a performance by percussionist Roberto Maqueda and Sinfonietta Container in Badajoz, Spain (“Spanish premiere of Black Box Music with new box,” Edition S, accessed November 30, 2017 <http://www.edition-s.dk/news/spanish-premiere-of-black-box-music-with-new-box>) The work has since been performed by a number of other soloists.

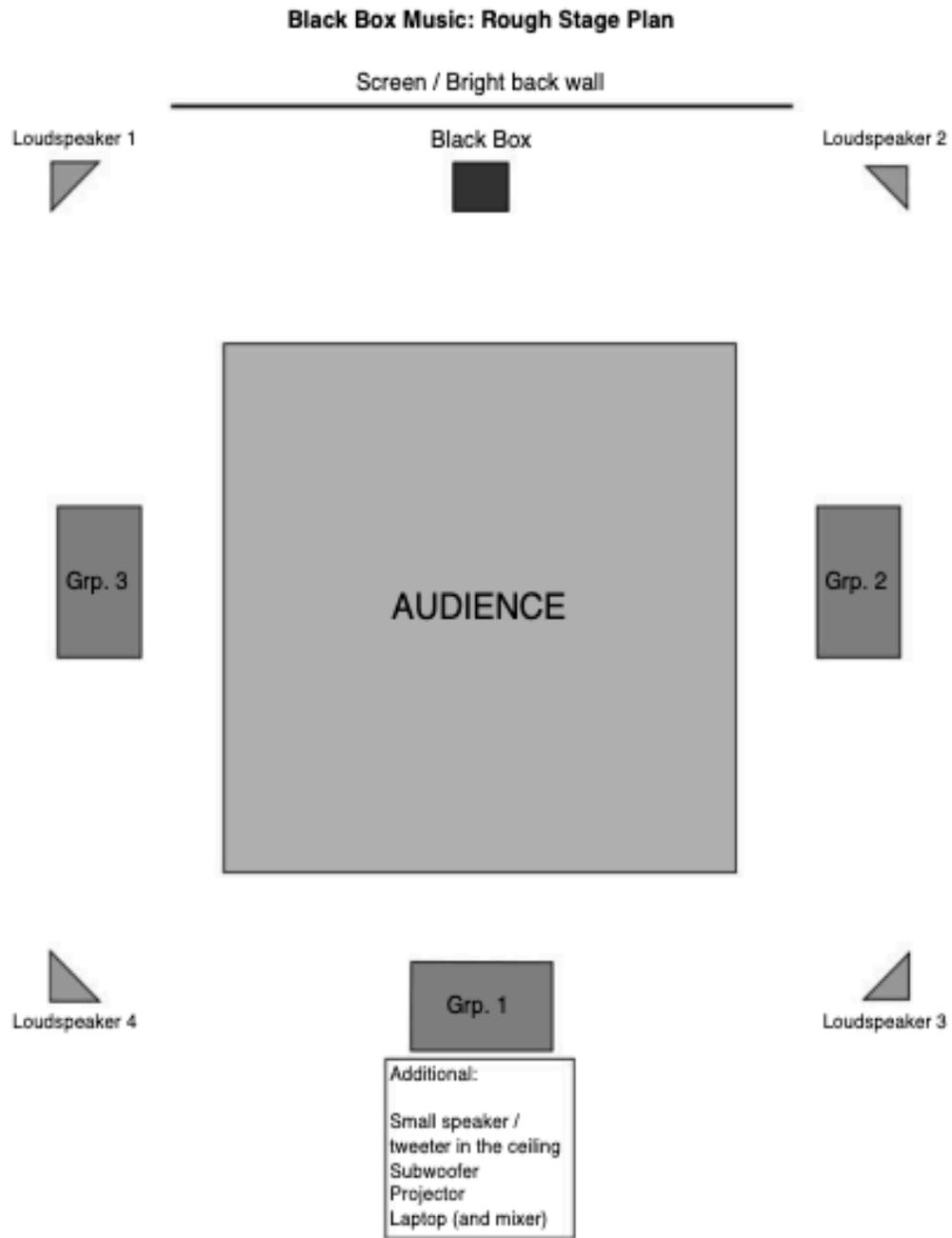
<sup>12</sup> The projected view of the disembodied hands is reminiscent of Martin Arnold’s *Soft Palate* (2010) and other films by Arnold based on classic American cartoons.

The ensemble is divided into three groups of five instrumentalists that are placed around the audience – one group behind and one on either side of the audience – and are positioned so that the sounds they make intersperse with the sounds of the speakers transmitting the signals from inside the box. (The sounds of the ensemble are also mixed to blend with the sounds from inside the black box.) Figure 1 shows the stage plan from the front of the score to *Black Box Music*.<sup>13</sup> As we can see from this plan, with the black box and projection to the front and the musicians and speakers corresponding to the mics inside the box surrounding the audience, the viewer-listener, as Holmboe explains, is placed “at the centre of the event, allowing for a vivid feeling of live surround sound.”<sup>14</sup> The staging of the work also creates the impression for the viewer-listener that they are ‘inside’ the black box in a manner more typical of the uninterrupted connection between an audience and performers in black box theatre spaces where the audience is often configured *within* the space via the open space layout.

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<sup>13</sup> Steen-Andersen, *Black Box Music*, front matter.

<sup>14</sup> Holmboe, “Have You Seen the Music.”



**FIGURE 1:** Stage plan for *Black Box Music*. © Edition S. Used with permission.

On the face of it, *Black Box Music* is more theatrical than Steen-Andersen's previous music. This is due in large part to the inherent theatricality of the set-up and staging (the giant disembodied hands, the miniature theatrical stage, the arrangement of the musicians and so on) while a connection with theater, as already mentioned, is also alluded to in the title. However, it is generally the case that Steen-Andersen's music is theatrical only in as much as it exaggerates or 'amplifies' elements that are already present in the music or connected to the live concert situation. For instance, the ostensibly theatrical physical gestures of the performers in *Black Box Music* and other works are always rooted in the performance of music. The movements of the performers can be exaggerated, by adding extreme dynamics, heavy bow pressure in the strings and so on, but the actions are still connected to the production of sound. Rather than adding something extraneous, Steen-Andersen simply emphasizes what, in a sense, is already there. In other words, the performers do not *pretend* to do anything (such as play an imaginary instrument); they do not act. Put another way, the performer's actions do not *represent* the performance of music; they *are* performing music in actuality. For instance, the exaggerated physical movements in *Next to Beside Besides* are the movements already involved in producing the sounds; in *Study #1*, Steen-Andersen exploits the inherent theatricality involved in a string player executing a glissando, as well as its visual quality; while in *Study #3*, with the addition of video, Steen-Andersen exploits the inherently visual aspects of a cellist's movement of the bow. These are also recognizably musical actions related to common musical practice. Even the more purely visual movements in *Study #1* produce very quiet sounds or are tied in some other way to the production of the sound, such as adjusting the position of the bow to execute the

next sound-producing action. Similarly, the actions of both the virtual performers and live performer in *Run Time Error* are always tied in some way to a musical result. The same holds true for the more ostentatiously theatrical gestures in *Black Box Music*. Like the actions of the performers in *Match* (1964), the classic example of Kagel's instrumental theater, the actions of the soloist-conductor remain connected to the music and its performance.

Let us briefly compare the role of the soloist-conductor in *Black Box Music* and the percussionist in *Match*. The role of the former is clearly reminiscent of the latter. In *Match*, the percussionist assumes the role of a percussionist-referee in “a musical game of tennis” involving two cellists.<sup>15</sup> The percussionist-referee frequently interferes with the match that is alluded to by the two cellists by interrupting the players, signaling entries and so on. These actions are usually triggered by some change in the music. As Heile explains in his succinct description of the work, the actions of the percussionist-referee

are for the most part integrated into the playing of the instrument, for instance, by being executed with a percussion instrument; and in general, the signaling of entries is common chamber music practice and does not violate the rules of music performance.

Importantly, as Heile adds, “the percussionist never steps outside his or her role as an instrumentalist, nor does he or she *become* a referee. Instead he or she fulfils both roles, one or the other of which may predominate at any given moment.” Similarly, the cellists

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<sup>15</sup> Björn Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel* (London: Routledge, 2016), Chap. 3, 47, EBook.

“do not interrupt their playing in order to act as athletes.”<sup>16</sup> They simply allude to, or their performance is reminiscent of, a game of tennis or table tennis. According to Heile, the actions of the performers in *Match* exemplify

the nature of Kagel’s instrumental theatre: musical performance and theatrical effect do not represent distinct levels but constitute an integral unity. The players do not switch between musical performance and theatrical role play [...] but carry out activities which are characteristic of both and which are plausible on either level.<sup>17</sup>

The same could be said of *Black Box Music*. Even the more ostensibly theatrical gestures of the soloist-conductor that allude to some non-musical situation or narrative (such as a telephone call) are tied to or trigger in the ensemble specific musical gestures (or are triggered by the sound in the ensemble). (For the most part, the soloist-conductor does not allude to a non-musical situation, such as a sporting event, but, self-referentially, to musical performance and the social interaction between soloist and conductor and its associated tropes and conventions.) The soloist-conductor remains a conductor. There is never an extraneous gesture unconnected to the music. It is both theatrical and musical. In this way, the theatricality of Steen-Andersen’s music is clearly of the same class as Kagel’s, which had already integrated the musical and theatrical half a century earlier.

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<sup>16</sup> Heile, *The Music of Mauricio Kagel*, Chap. 3, 48.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Chap. 3, 49.

Before proceeding to my analysis of *Black Box Music*, allow me to consider the relationship between the soloist-conductor and ensemble in more detail. In a conversation with Rasmus Holmboe in 2014 (the same conversation referred to in Chapter 1), Steen-Andersen describes the connection between the visual and sounding elements as the “main element” in the opening movement of *Black Box Music*. He describes the “starting point” for the movement as “an exercise in the way we connect what we hear with what we see, in our heads,” adding that the music “plays on how we build up some kind of logic in these connections that can be broken up at a later point.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, Steen-Andersen explores the connection between the conductor’s physical gestures and the sounds in the ensemble and the viewer-listener’s perception of this connection. The “logic” Steen-Andersen refers to, which is partly based on our preexisting assumptions about the causal relationship between the conductor’s gestures and the sounds in the ensemble, is established or reinforced at the outset with the soloist-conductor employing gestures that resemble those typically associated with conducting, such as those associated with beating time and giving cues. For each of these gestures in the solo part there is a corresponding (and musically appropriate) musical gesture in the ensemble that appears to respond to the soloist-conductor’s physical gestures. During the course of the opening movement, however, the assumed connection between the soloist’s conducting gestures and the sounds in the ensemble is “broken up” or subverted, primarily through the soloist-conductor’s gestures going in and out of sync with the corresponding sounds in the ensemble in a way that is reminiscent of the synchronous and asynchronous physical movements of the performers in *Next to Beside Besides* and in the *Studies for String Instruments*, as

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<sup>18</sup> Steen-Andersen, “I am a composer.”

well as the counterpoint between the two video panels in *Run Time Error*. In *Black Box Music*, the focus of the synchronicity and asynchronicity is reoriented to the connection between the physical gestures of the soloist-conductor and the sounds produced in the ensemble. As we will see in my analysis of the work, this is a feature of (what I refer to as) ‘scene 2’ when it appears beginning in m. 98 (the soloist-conductor’s gestures going out of sync with the ensemble in m. 106, then back in sync in m. 109) and again when it appears beginning in m. 121 where the soloist-conductor’s gestures go out of sync for a more extended period of time (from m. 123 to the end of m. 134). The counterpoint created between the visual (the soloist’s gestures) and the aural (the sound of the ensemble) elements in these measures leads the viewer-listener to question what, up until now, has been an assumed causal relationship between the soloist-conductor’s actions and the sounds in the ensemble. Indeed, it leads the viewer-listener to question whether the soloist-conductor is leading or in fact following the ensemble.<sup>19</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the choreography of the solo part is expanded with the gradual introduction of various ‘non-conducting,’ often familiar everyday gestures, which are mixed with the more traditional conducting gestures. This further confuses the nature of the relationship between the soloist-conductor’s gestures and the sounds in the ensemble. By the first interlude (m. 189), the soloist-conductor’s conducting gestures have been largely replaced by everyday hand gestures. However, the ensemble continues to respond (or appears to respond) to these everyday hand gestures with corresponding musical gestures *as if* they were conducting gestures. At this point, the

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<sup>19</sup> The scenario reminds one of Montaigne’s cat. Montaigne wonders if he is playing with his cat or if in fact his cat is playing with him.

role of the soloist is closer to that of a puppeteer than a conductor as the soloist-conductor appears to use his puppet-less hands to portray characters in mini dramatic narratives while the ensemble mickey-mouses the action. The music develops into what Steen-Andersen describes as a “hand choreography accompanied by the ensemble rather than the hands guiding or leading the ensemble.”<sup>20</sup> However, the precise role of the soloist-conductor and the relationship between the soloist-conductor’s gestures and the sounds in the ensemble remains ambiguous. At times, the sounds in the ensemble still appear to be instigated and controlled by the soloist-conductor’s gestures, or vice versa. At other times, the ensemble appears to be illustrating or musically interpreting the hand gestures or, conversely, the soloist-conductor is offering a kind of choreographic interpretation of the music.

The major focus of Steen-Andersen’s exploitation of the relationship between the visual gestures of the soloist-conductor and the ensemble’s responses, as well as “the expectations and the clichés from the conductor-orchestra situation,” is a recurring tutti or ‘stinger’ chord cue and its responses in the ensemble (referred to as “fff entry” in the score). The gesture is introduced and established at the beginning of the work (in m. 8) and returns in the recapitulation. In an interview from 2012 (posted on the website of the composer’s publisher), Steen-Andersen explains how he plays on or exploits the “logic” between the conductor’s gestures, the ensemble’s response and the expectations of the viewer-listener with this tutti chord:

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<sup>20</sup> “Steen-Andersen: Black Box Music,” YouTube video, 3:10, posted by “LondonSinfonietta,” March 6, 2014, [https://youtu.be/DxpNfCOSj\\_g](https://youtu.be/DxpNfCOSj_g) (unlisted).

In a big orchestra somehow everybody agrees on playing late at the same time, instead of ON the entry marked by the conductor. A simulation of this becomes a kind of theme in the piece and after a while I start playing around with this logic. The orchestra's reaction to the conductor's gesture starts getting faster and faster, shortly [*sic*] it gets in sync with the conductor and then the ensemble ends up being ahead [of the] conductors [*sic*] entry gesture.<sup>21</sup>

When Steen-Andersen refers to “everybody agreeing to play late,” he is referring to the way in which the tutti chord is notated so that the ensemble's entry comes slightly after the soloist-conductor's cue. From a practical point of view, the coordination of these “late” entries in the ensemble is achieved with the use of a click track.<sup>22</sup> Initially, the ensemble's entry comes three sixteenth beats after the soloist-conductor's notated cue (in m. 8) and this presentation of the “*fff* entry” cue and its response in the ensemble continues largely unchanged in the opening half of the movement. However, when the tutti/stinger chord appears in the recapitulation (rehearsal P, m. 312), the space between the soloist-conductor's cue and the ensemble's response becomes smaller and smaller until the soloist-conductor's gesture and the ensemble's response are, briefly, exactly in sync (in m. 320) before the soloist-conductor's gestures become increasingly out of sync with the ensemble. Eventually, in m. 328, it is the soloist's “cut-off” gesture that corresponds with the ensemble's entry. Paradoxically, at this point, the soloist-conductor appears to be both back in sync and completely out of sync with the ensemble. The relationship between the soloist-conductor's gestures and ensemble has been, as it were, turned on its head so that the soloist-conductor's actions elicit the exact opposite response to the intended one. Eventually, however, the relationship between

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<sup>21</sup> “Thinking Inside a Box.” Playing slightly late or *after* the conductor's indicated beat is typical of many European orchestras.

<sup>22</sup> A click track is also used in the second movement but not in the final movement.

the soloist-conductor's gestures and the ensemble's responses comes full circle. By the final tutti chord (which marks the beginning of the coda), order is restored with the ensemble "all playing late at the same time," three sixteenth beats after the soloist-conductor's cue, as it was at the beginning.

In the second and third movements of *Black Box Music*, the composer's "exploration and exploitation of the audio/visual relations inherent in conducting" and, more broadly, the relationship between what we see and what we hear, is curiously abandoned and is no longer a feature of the work. The soloist no longer assumes the dual role of soloist-conductor. Rather, the remaining movements are more obviously scored for soloist and ensemble. As such, the nature of the relationship between the actions or gestures of the soloist and the sounds in the ensemble is a much more conventional one. The soloist produces sounds inside the box, using a variety of props, while the ensemble simply accompanies them as in any performance involving a percussion soloist and ensemble, even if, at times, for practical performance reasons, the ensemble relies on the projected view from inside the box to follow the soloist.

*Black Box Music* is in three movements, “Overture,” “Slow Middle Movement” (or “Disambiguation”) and “Finale.”<sup>1</sup> In the following analysis, I will consider each movement in detail. My discussion of the work is based on the revised version of the score (January 2016). The score can be viewed online on the website of the composer’s publisher, Edition S.<sup>2</sup>

## OUVERTURE

Steen-Andersen’s own comments in relation to the opening movement of *Black Box Music* provide a useful guide in considering its formal design. In a conversation with Rasmus Holmboe, Steen-Andersen describes the form of the opening movement in filmic terms, saying that it is composed of “a limited number of scenes” with hard cuts between them.<sup>3</sup> These scenes, which he says are “edited together,” are characterized by

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<sup>1</sup> Steen-Andersen, *Black Box Music*. The second movement is sometimes referred to as “Disambiguation” (see, for instance, “Black Box Music (2012),” Edition S, accessed March 8, 2021, <http://www.edition-s.dk/music/simon-steen-andersen/black-box-music>). This may have been the original title of the movement. The title is given as “SLOW MIDDLEMOVEMENT” [*sic*] in the score. The three-movement form, together with the ‘slow’ middle movement, alludes to the formal layout of a classical concerto.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.edition-s.dk/music/simon-steen-andersen/black-box-music> (link active as of April 26, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Steen-Andersen, “I am a composer.” Steen-Andersen uses the term “sharp cuts” rather than ‘hard cuts.’ This may be an error in the translation of the interview, which is published in both Danish and English. (Given that both the interviewer and interviewee are Danish, the interview was likely conducted in Danish.) In film editing terminology, a hard cut is the most basic type of cut in which the end of one clip is connected with the beginning of another without any kind of transition.

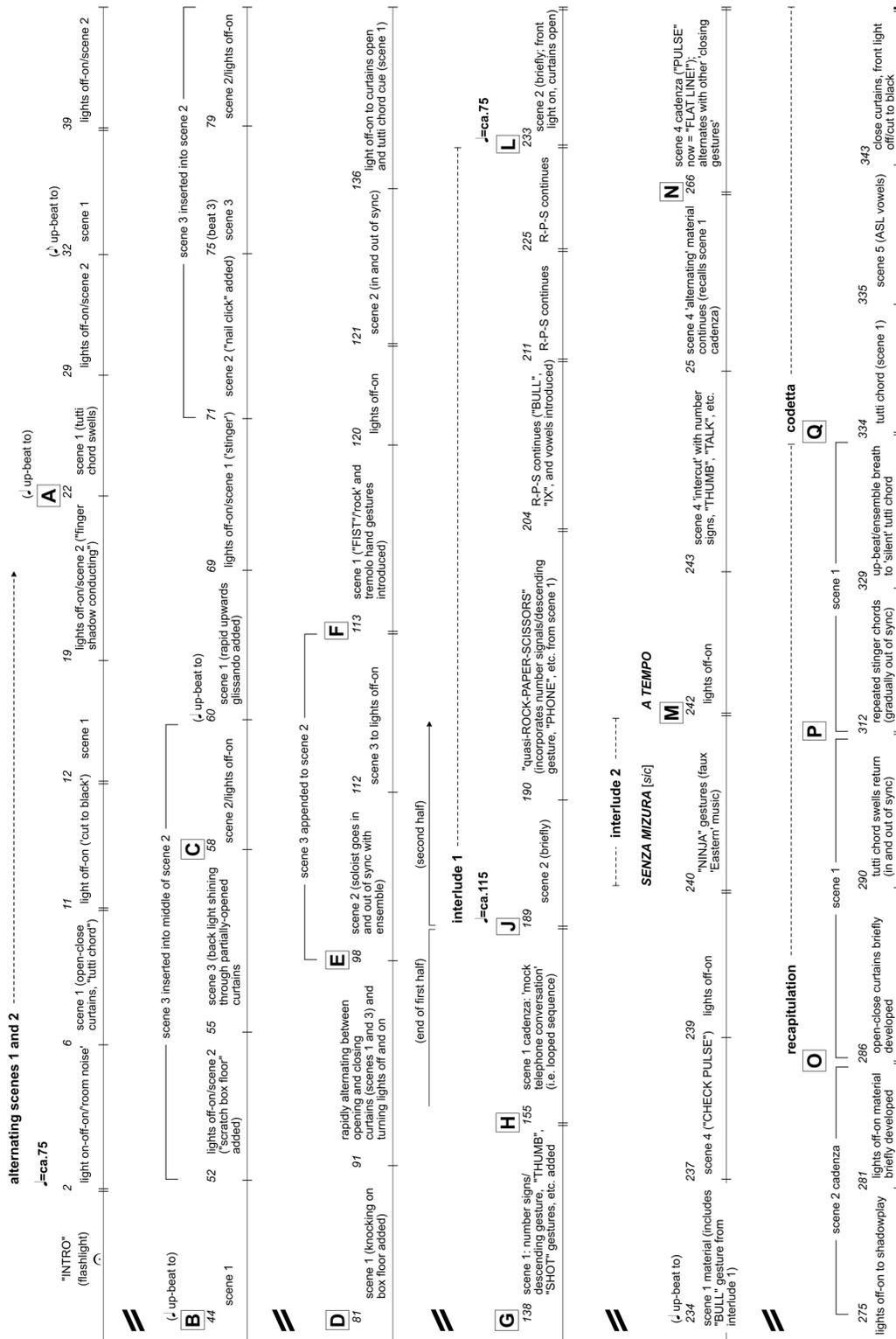
“different kinds of music or materials.” As the scenes evolve, he says, the visual-musical gestures that make up the scenes appear more frequently and the scenes become progressively longer (this is generally the case, though not always). He adds that when a scene reappears, it always continues where it left off with each scene or “layer” developing in “its own direction.” He also refers to the fact that “each [block of] material or scene culminates at a particular time and each one has their [*sic*] own little cadenza or solo – before making space for the others.” Continuing with the cinematic analogy and the manner in which scenes are “edited together” with each scene continuing where it left off, Steen-Andersen says, “it is just like in the movies when you get the feeling that the scenes take place simultaneously even though we first see a bit of the one and then a bit of the other”; he describes the effect as a “formal polyphony or macro-polyphony” which he refers to, idiosyncratically (or, perhaps, nonsensically), as “skin-polyphonic form.”<sup>4</sup> Put simply, in film terminology, Steen-Andersen is ‘cross-cutting’ between different scenes or blocks of material.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Steen-Andersen, “I am a composer.” In the Danish version of the text, the term “skinpolyfon form” is given. In the English version, it is translated as “pseudo-skinpolyphonic form.”

<sup>5</sup> Cross-cutting, sometimes referred to as ‘parallel editing’, is a common film editing technique that involves taking two or more sets of action or storylines taking place in separate spaces and alternating or ‘cutting’ between them as they progress. The cutting between the different sets of action or events establishes a relationship between them and often suggests simultaneity. A good example of cross-cutting is the famous baptism scene from Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather* (1972). Here, we find cross-cutting between a scene in which Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) stands as godfather to Connie’s child (accepts God and renounces Satan) and the killings of the rival dons by hitmen recruited by Michael Corleone. Cross-cutting links the events, illustrating a contradiction between Michael’s religious obligations and his mafia duties, and suggests that the events are happening at the same time. The intended feeling of simultaneity between blocks of material in *Black Box Music* does not occur in practice. This may be because the visual contrast between the different blocks of audiovisual material is not strong enough for the effect to occur.

The following diagram (Figure 2), which I will refer to as I go, provides a synopsis of the form of the opening movement.



**FIGURE 2: Formal synopsis of the Overture of *Black Box Music*.**

### **Mm. 1-113: Scenes 1-3 Introduced**

The opening movement of *Black Box Music* begins with a short, purely visual introduction in which the soloist moves a flashlight around inside the black box. The effect of his actions is that of a spotlight trying to find its target, which it quickly does, illuminating the figure of the soloist and the black box in front of the screen and, consequently, drawing the viewer-listener's attention to the mechanics (the miniature black box and its operator) of the performance that is about to be presented. The first movement-proper begins with the soloist turning on and off the front lights of the miniature stage (mm. 2-6).<sup>6</sup> With the lights on, the blown-up view of the interior of the box, with curtains closed, is revealed, together with the figure of the soloist in front; the turning off of the lights (m. 4) and a return to the complete darkness that the piece began with produces what will become a recurring 'cut to black' effect, a filmic effect (typically signaling the very end or final appearance of a scene in a film, or the very end of a film) in keeping with the composer's aforementioned notion of editing scenes together in the manner of a film.

The switching on of the front light triggers a very quiet open string E in the double bass (marked *pppp*). It is as if the double bass is imitating the electric hum of a light bulb, which is combined with the imitation of other extremely quiet 'room noise' – or, what is referred to in the score as, "background noise" – in the percussion and piano (also marked *pppp* and, in the case of the bass drum, *ppppp*) that together invoke a David

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<sup>6</sup> The black box has three stage lights, a front light, back light and downlight, referred to as "1," "2" and "3" respectively in the score.

Lynch-type soundscape (not to mention Lynch's fascination with electricity and flickering lightbulbs). Although primarily a visual effect, the switching on of the light itself makes a sound – a distinctive clicking sound – that is incorporated into the musical vocabulary of the movement with the sounds in the ensemble combining with and augmenting the 'real world' sound of the light switch.

In m. 6, with the front light on, the curtains of the miniature stage are opened for the first time, exposing the miniature stage itself as well as the giant disembodied hands of the soloist. The opening of the curtains also marks the introduction of our first block of material or 'scene.' As we can see from the synopsis, the first half of the movement (i.e. as far as the first interlude beginning in m. 189, rehearsal J) is made up primarily of two alternating scenes, 1 and 2, punctuated by the switching on and off of the lights of the box. Scene 1 is defined, to begin with, by a recurring *fortissimo* "tutti chord," which is signaled emphatically by the soloist-conductor and notated so that the chord comes slightly after the soloist's cue. The tutti chord – one of the most prominent features in the opening movement – is made up of a combination of both tonal and 'noise' elements of indefinite or no pitch: low notes in the brass with harmon mute (trombone with added flutter tongue) and a repeated pedal 'buzz' effect on the E string in the harp part combined with indeterminate multiphonics in the woodwinds and other effects in the percussion (wind whistle, ratchet and 'prepared' electric drill), piano (scraping along the low strings with a card) and electric guitar (interference between the jack and guitar output). Given the predominance of noise elements in the chord, it is, in effect, more of a noisy cluster than a chord.

When it is presented initially (and again when it appears again in the section beginning at m. 312, rehearsal P), the character of the tutti chord is that of a ‘shock chord’ or, what are traditionally called ‘stinger’ chords in film music, a type of crude mickey-mousing effect found in cartoon soundtracks and in early Hollywood film scores (and sometimes later scores) that involves a loud, dissonant chord synchronized to some on-screen action.<sup>7</sup> However, as the scene evolves, the tutti chord is stretched and contracted and, beginning in m. 24, the individual instrumental groups offset their constituent parts of the chord against one another with unsynchronized, overlapping dynamic swells that further elongate the chords and draw attention to the spatial arrangement of the ensemble. The soloist, in addition to cueing the tutti chord, now also begins to beat time with the right hand.

Scene 1 is framed by the soloist opening and closing the curtains of the miniature stage – a primarily visual and dramatic action similar to the primarily visual effect of the switching on and off of the lights. The soloist’s actions are accompanied (or perhaps controlled) by a *crescendo (dal niente)* and *diminuendo (al niente)* on a unison A-flat in the bass clarinet and baritone saxophone (groups 1 and 2, respectively). The unison A-flat overlaps with the open string E in the double bass and other room noise in the ensemble triggered by the switching on and off of the front light. Like the switching on and off of the lights, the opening and closing of the curtains itself makes a sound – what might be described as a ‘scrolling,’ percussive sound – that is similarly incorporated

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<sup>7</sup> Goldmark, *Tunes for ‘Toons*, 64.

into the musical language of the piece and, here, combined with and augmented by the unison A-flat in the ensemble.<sup>8</sup>

We get a first brief glimpse of scene 2 in m. 20, followed by successively longer appearances as the opening half of the movement continues (as noted by Steen-Andersen, above). In contrast to scene 1, scene 2 is illuminated by the back light instead of the front light (hence the switching off of the front light and switching on of the back light between the alternating scenes) and the curtains, which are closed at the end of each appearance of scene 1, remain closed for scene 2 so that scene 2 takes place behind the closed curtains. With the back light shining directly towards the front of the stage, the soloist's right hand is cast as a shadow on the curtains as the soloist (appears to) lead the ensemble by beating time with his index finger (referred to in the score as "finger shadow conducting").

Scene 2 also contrasts musically with scene 1. The low dynamic level and subtle instrumental effects of scene 2 contrast with the louder, more extrovert scene 1 and its tutti chord. The switching on of the back light for scene 2 triggers the same room noise that is triggered by the switching on of the front light for scene 1 in the opening and subsequent measures. However, instead of the open string E in the double bass that accompanies the switching on of the front light, the switching on of the back light triggers an open string C pedal in the cello that continues through scene 2 (and, later,

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<sup>8</sup> The sounds of the light switch and curtains are perhaps most effectively incorporated into the music in the passage beginning at the end of m. 91 where the opening and closing of the curtains alternates with the switching on and off of the lights.

scene 3). The room noise (now triggered by the back light) also continues through scene 2. In this way, musically, scene 2 can be considered an extension of the switching on and off of the lights material. At the same time, the sound of the light switch is transferred to the ensemble who, responding to the soloist's pointing cues (or appearing to do so), imitate the clicking sound of the light switch with dog clickers (horn, electric guitar, bassoon) combined with subtle extended techniques elsewhere in the ensemble (double bass, trumpet and harp). This incorporation of the 'real world' sound of the light switch into the music in scene 2 gives it a definite musical and indeed motivic quality that is further emphasized as the movement progresses.<sup>9</sup>

A further scene, scene 3, is introduced in m. 55. Like scene 2, scene 3 uses the backlight. In it, the soloist partially opens the curtains, slowly, so that the narrow opening reveals a bright light (the backlight) shining directly towards the front of the box and out towards the audience, "resembling sunrays, even suggesting associations to the divine" according to Stene, before the soloist closes the curtains again.<sup>10</sup> The soloist's actions are underscored by a halo of sound produced by a combination of double harmonics in the viola and double bass, air blown through a PVC tube (trumpet), bowed saw (harp) and the sound of the motor of the electric drill (percussion 3). This halo of sound is superimposed onto the sound of open string C in the cello, which is

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<sup>9</sup> For example, see mm. 79-81 where the switching off and on of the back light is incorporated (in m. 79) primarily for the percussive sound it produces (i.e. its musical-motivic quality). The motivic quality of the switching on and off of the light switch, as well as the opening and closing of the curtains, is further emphasized later on with a focus on the components of the stage itself in the sequence beginning in m. 91 and again beginning in m. 281 (discussed below).

<sup>10</sup> Stene, "This is Not a Drum," 49.

continued on from scene 2 together with other sustained (unpitched) noise in the piano and percussion. When it first appears in m. 55, scene 3 is inserted into – or ‘edited into’ – the middle of an appearance of scene 2 (see synopsis), and again when scene 3 appears in m. 75 (beginning on beat 3), but this is followed by a sequence beginning in m. 91 in which the opening of the curtains from scene 3 alternates rapidly, in a series of ‘fast cuts,’ with the switching on and off of the front and back lights (scenes 1 and 2) and the closing of the curtains from scene 1 (i.e. focusing on the components of the stage itself).<sup>11</sup> The curtains are opened all the way here but the music (the scene 3 halo of sound) signifies that the action is from scene 3 rather than scene 1, while the tutti chord that accompanies the closing of the curtains signifies that the action is from scene 1. Scene 3 appears just once more, briefly, in m. 112 (tacked onto the end of another appearance of scene 2) before scene 3 is forgotten about completely. Unlike the other scenes, scene 3 does not appear to “culminate” or have the associated “little cadenza or solo” that Steen-Andersen refers to in his comments (above).<sup>12</sup>

As scenes 1 and 2 (together with scene 3) alternate and evolve, they become (as already noted) progressively longer with subsequent appearances of the scenes continuing where they left off. From m. 113 (rehearsal F), the opening movement, which has been slowly gathering in momentum since the start, begins to find its pace. This is partly due to scene 1 switching from being predominantly in triple time to quadruple time (*seen in*

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Fast cutting’ is a film editing technique involving several consecutive shots of short duration.

<sup>12</sup> What I have denoted as scene 3 could also be simply interpreted as part of scene 2. The continuation of the C pedal, together with the use of the back light, suggests that this may be the case. However, the passage is distinct enough, visually and musically, to be considered a separate scene. The soloist’s manipulation of the curtains in scene 3 also suggests a connection with the (more rapid) opening and closing of the curtains (fully) in scene 1.

the soloist-conductor's gestures if not always *felt*) as well as the introduction of a range of new hand gestures or signals with corresponding musical gestures. Scene 1 also asserts itself, gradually, as the dominant scene in the first half of the movement, culminating with an extensive elaboration of scene 1 beginning in m. 138.

### **Mm. 113-155: Elaboration of Scene 1**

Initially, the main focus of scene 1 was the manipulation of the recurring tutti chord. From m. 113, however, the evolution of the scene is characterized not so much by a 'development' of its musical material but by accumulation and reorganization. New visual-musical gestures are gradually introduced and combined with a recycling and reshuffling of those gestures already introduced (an approach to the material that is mirrored in the second half of the movement). The process begins with the introduction of a rapid upwards glissando in m. 67 that alternates between the different instrumental groups (apparently) in response to a signal (a pointing cue) from the soloist with the direction of the soloist's signal (upwards-left, upwards-right, and straight up) communicating which instrumental group is to play the glissando. When scene 1 reappears beginning in m. 113, two further hand gestures with corresponding musical gestures are introduced: the "l. h. FIST" gesture (later reused as the 'rock' hand signal), which first appears in m. 115, and a rather comical tremolo hand gesture ("shake hand"). These are combined with the rapid upwards glissando as well as the tutti chord

(offset spatially and dynamically as before) and the soloist knocking on the floor of the box.

The subsequent appearance of scene 1, from m. 138 (rehearsal G) as far as m. 189 (rehearsal J) is, as already mentioned, more extensive than before in terms of length but also material with a large number of new visual-musical gestures gradually introduced. These are combined, as before, with a reshuffling of those gestures already introduced. Increasingly, the soloist's hand gestures are less obviously related to conducting gestures and (as mentioned in the earlier part of the chapter) begin to include familiar, everyday gestures (such as the "THUMB" or 'thumbs-up' gesture), gestures that appear to be adapted from sign language (such as number signals) as well as more ostensibly theatrical gestures (such as the "SHOT" gesture, as if pointing and firing a gun). These everyday hand gestures evolve seamlessly out of the more traditional conducting gestures.

Among the newly accumulated gestures are various number hand signals, all of which are accompanied (or perhaps triggered by) by a distinctive, not-quite-modal thirty-second note descending figure beginning on E-flat (occasionally on E-natural) in the bass clarinet, combined with dampened bass drum strokes and various kinds of descending 'bends' or glissandi elsewhere in the ensemble (a single musical gesture corresponding to all of the different signals). The number signals, together with their corresponding descending gesture in the ensemble, dominate the scene as far as m. 155 (rehearsal H). Unlike most of the musical gestures that appear in the first movement, the

descending gesture, which continues into the following sections, is altered somewhat when it reappears with subtle changes to the sequence of notes in the bass clarinet part.<sup>13</sup>

The gradual accumulation, combining and reshuffling of the different visual-musical gestures in scene 1, from m. 113 and again from m. 138, means that the choreography of the solo part becomes increasingly intricate and virtuosic. To begin with, the soloist simply conducted (or appeared to do so). Now, in addition to beating time and signaling responses from the individual instrumental groups, the soloist-conductor adopts (as mentioned earlier) an ever-increasing variety of hand shapes and gestures that are not typically associated with conducting. The soloist also begins to, simultaneously, make his own sounds independently of the ensemble using the interior of the box itself as a kind of percussion instrument. In m. 54, the soloist introduces a recurring “scratch” sound produced by scratching the box floor. Similarly, in m. 75, a “nail click” performed close to the roof mic is introduced and, in m. 84, the previously-mentioned knocking on the floor of the box introduced. The sounds of the soloist physically interacting with the box are in addition to the aforementioned sounds of the light switches and scrolling curtains (sounds related to the mechanics of the miniature stage)

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<sup>13</sup> In effect, the thirty-second note figure in the bass clarinet is more of a written-out ‘falling away,’ in the manner of the glissandi and bends of the other instruments, than a distinct succession of notes (and is, in any case, blurred by the bends and glissandi of the other instruments). Hence, the individual choice of pitches, with the exception of the clearly-articulated starting note, is perhaps somewhat unimportant. Although identical repeating patterns are established – and, later, the figure settles into quasi-Aeolian as well as octatonic patterns – alterations to the clarinet’s sequence of notes do not appear to be determined by the working out of a particular harmonic process or system.

which, through amplification of the interior of the box, have already been established as part of the musical vocabulary of the work.

The solo part is complicated further by the independently evolving scene 2, which is defined not just by its amalgamation of sorts with scene 3 and, to a lesser extent, by the introduction of new hand gestures, but by the soloist-conductor, who, until now, had seemed to lead the ensemble, beginning to go in and out of synchronization with the ensemble. In the appearance of scene 2 beginning m. 98, the soloist-conductor's gestures (which simultaneously beat time and signal responses) go out of sync with the ensemble in m. 106, then back in sync in m. 109. When the scene reappears in m. 121, the soloist-conductor similarly goes out of sync, this time for a more extended period (from m. 123 to the end of m. 134).

### **Mm. 155-189: Scene 1 Cadenza**

The more extensive elaboration of scene 1 beginning in m. 138 represents, in my estimation, the culmination of scene 1. This more extensive elaboration of scene 1 is followed, in m. 155, by what the composer likely considers to be the scene 1 "little cadenza or solo," coming as it does at the end of the final appearance (for now) of scene 1. It could also be considered a cadenza in as much as it represents a kind of 'flourish,' is arguably more virtuosic than the preceding music and has a quasi-improvisatory quality.

The scene 1 cadenza is perhaps the most effective and memorable section in the opening movement of *Black Box Music*. It consists of a looped sequence (beginning in m. 155) in which the soloist appears to act out a kind of mock telephone conversation. Steen-Andersen follows his established pattern of organizing the visual-musical material by combining previously introduced scene 1 gestures (“hit box floor,” “THUMB,” “FIST,” “0,” etc.) with a newly introduced “PHONE” or ‘call me’ gesture (introduced in m. 154) and, most notably, the “TALK” or ‘talking hand’ gesture, which largely defines the section. The “PHONE” gesture appears to simulate the sound of picking up an old-fashioned telephone handset complete with the clicking sound made when the handset is taken off the hook (clicker in the bassoon) and dial tone (a unison A4 in the saxophone, muted trumpet, guitar and cello combined with a G-sharp artificial harmonic in the viola part corresponding to the 425 Hz dial tone used in most European countries) with accompanying white noise (air tone in the horn). The talking hand gesture is illustrated in the ensemble by the trombone with harmon mute (for the right hand) beginning in m. 158, and later, in m. 183, by trumpet with harmon mute (left hand), in a comical manner that is reminiscent of both the ‘wah wah’ voices of the unseen adult characters in the Peanuts animated television specials and (to a lesser extent) the use of a swazzle (a kazoo-like device) in Punch and Judy performances. The sequence is made up of a four-measure block of material that is stated then repeated or looped with each successive iteration becoming shorter as individual visual-musical gestures and their corresponding durations are taken away or subtracted. The durations of the initial statement and its repetitions are as follows:

mm. 155-159 (initial statement) = 8 quarter-note beats  
mm. 159-163 (first repeat) = 7 beats  
mm. 163-167 (second repeat) = 6 beats  
mm. 167-170 (third repeat) = 5 beats  
mm. 170-173 (fourth repeat) = 4 ½ beats  
mm. 173-176 (fifth repeat) = 4 beats  
mm. 176-178 (sixth repeat) = 3 ½ beats  
mm. 178-180 (seventh repeat) = 2 ½ beats  
mm. 180-181 (eighth repeat) = 2 beats  
mm. 181-182 (ninth repeat) = 1 ½ beats

The first repeat, beginning in m. 159, is identical to the initial statement (mm. 155-159) but with the “4” sign (m. 156) and the left-hand index finger cue gesture (“l. h. pointing INDEX finger”) (m. 158), together with their corresponding music, omitted. In the following repeat, beginning in m. 163, the “l. h. FIST” and “FLICK” are omitted. And so on until m. 182 when the only remaining visual-musical gesture is the right-hand “TALK” gesture.

Despite the subtractive process at play in the cadenza, the section maintains a feeling of rhythmic regularity, if slightly off-kilter, with a seamless transition from double time in the initial statement, simply divided into metric units as before, to predominantly triple time by the beginning of the third statement (m. 163) (like before, seen if not always felt) via alternating double and triple time measures in the second statement (beginning m. 159). The exception to the metric division of the beat is the “TALK” gesture, which partly accounts for its prominence in the section.

In m. 183, the right hand, which has done all of the ‘talking’ up until now, is finally ‘answered’ by the left hand (‘wah wah’ effect in the trumpet part). The right hand

speaks once more in m. 184 and, reversing the previous process of subtraction, a brief process of adding rhythmic values to successive measures begins in m. 185:

m. 185 = 1 ½ beats  
m. 186 = 2 beats  
m. 187 = 2 ½ beats  
m. 188 = 3 ½ beats

At the same time, the reintroduced “PHONE” gesture progressively *increases* in duration (from an eighth-note to a dotted half-note) while the “TALK” gesture transitions from three triplet-eighth-notes (in the space of one quarter-note) to a single eighth-note (via two eighth-notes).

The ‘hanging up’ of the soloist’s imaginary telephone, simply scored with the mechanical sound of switching off the snare on a side drum and a top note C on the piano, brings the main scene of the opening movement to a temporary conclusion as well as the first half of the movement.

### **Mm. 189-233: Interlude 1 (rock-paper-scissors)**

In m. 189 (rehearsal J), the natural progression of the movement and its alternating scenes is interrupted with the first of two interludes.<sup>14</sup> The first interlude is an extended

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<sup>14</sup> Scene 2 appears to conclude without a cadenza.

‘solo’ for the right hand alone. The left hand remains stationary or ‘silent’ throughout, appearing almost as if (following their heated telephone conversation in the previous section) it is being berated by the right hand.

Interlude 1 can be divided into four parts or subsections: mm. 189-204, 204-211, 211-225 and 225-233. The first part begins with a brief statement of scene 2, as if to continue the pattern of alternating between scenes 1 and 2, but with the curtains now open and the front light on instead of the usual scene 2 back light. However, this brief statement of scene 2 quickly shifts to the soloist’s right-hand solo (m. 190). Marked “quasi-ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS” in the score, the solo begins almost like a one-hand game of rock-paper-scissors with repeated “FIST” gestures (now reconstituted as ‘rock’) answered, first by the “hit box floor” gesture (perhaps intended as a variation of the rock gesture), then by the newly-introduced ‘scissors’ (“V”) gesture, followed by the “5” sign (now reconstituted as ‘paper’). The rock hand gesture is accompanied by its usual group 1 corresponding music (bass drum with a piano cluster on its lowest keys) while the “hit box” and paper gestures are underscored with barely audible effects produced by the pianist (rubbing paper in circular motions on the floor with the foot) and percussion 2 (an extremely soft bass drum roll) derived from the earlier room noise which was previously triggered by the light switches (and is also present through scene 2).

The new dual-interpretation of “5” as both the number 5 and the paper gesture is playfully exploited when, continuing on from its use as the paper gesture in m. 195, it

forms part of a series of number signals (recycled from scene 1), which are introduced in descending order (“5” to “1”). The numbers here also form part of a further process of subtraction (albeit on a small scale than before) beginning in m. 196 with rock gestures gradually taken away (three rock gestures in m. 196, two in m. 198 and one in m. 199). At the same time, the number signals, which, together with the “hit box,” scissors and “PHONE” gestures, alternate with the rock gestures, are gradually added to (one from m. 189 to m. 200, two in m. 200 and three in mm. 201-203). The result of these overlapping processes of subtraction and addition is a transition away from the rock-paper-scissors pattern of three rock gestures (i.e. the part of the game usually accompanied by the players counting aloud to three, or saying ‘Rock! Paper! Scissors!’) followed by the answer or ‘throw.’ The number signals, including the reconstituted “5” signal, are accompanied, as before, by the descending bass clarinet figure, now settled into repeated Aeolian patterns, doubled, as before, by bends and glissandi elsewhere in the ensemble.

The right-hand solo continues in the following parts of the interlude but, despite the continued presence of the rock gesture, it is less obviously related to the rock-paper-scissors game. Nonetheless, it maintains the playful and game-like character of mm. 189-204 as well as the rhythmic regularity of the first part. The rules of the game have changed however. By the beginning of the second part (m. 204) it has evolved into a succession of alternating hand signals, together with their corresponding musical gestures, involving just the fingers. With the transition away from the repeated rock gestures of the quasi-rock-paper-scissors game and the up-down or swinging forearm

motion involved in its execution, the soloist now assumes (what is referred to in the score as) a “quasi-FIXED HAND” position. This position is maintained almost exclusively from m. 201 until the end of the interlude. Consequently, the remainder of the right hand solo is made up almost entirely of actions that involve the soloist moving just the fingers (including the thumb), such as the previously introduced number signals/descending figure (in the new tempo) and thumbs up (“THUMB”) gesture (from scene 1) combined with newly-added signals involving just the fingers, such as “i” (little finger extended), “IX” (index finger extended), “U” (index and middle fingers extended together, touching) and a side-facing ‘rock and roll salute’ (“BULL,” index and little finger extended).<sup>15</sup> In contrast to the lightly scored “i,” “IX” and “U” gestures, the corresponding musical gesture for the rock and roll salute is a crude ‘raspberry’ effect in the ensemble composed of a distorted B-flat major triad superimposed onto open string tremolandi in the cello and double bass, perhaps intended as a parody of a heavy metal chord. Interlude 1 concludes with a ‘middle finger’ gesture (“FUCK”), accompanied by a censor bleep (a 1000 hertz sine tone triggered), as if the soloist has given up trying to play the game, before offering one final rock gesture.

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<sup>15</sup> The “i” and “U” signs are borrowed from American Sign Language albeit with the hand facing in the wrong direction (i.e. the back of the hand facing the viewer and fingers facing to the side) in order to maintain the same fixed hand position.

## **Mm. 233-242: Transition to Interlude 2 & Interlude 2**

In m. 233 (rehearsal L), the movement returns to its original tempo (crotchet = ca. 75).

To some extent, the music fails to regain its momentum after the extended interruption

of Interlude 1 (a momentum that had been gathering since the beginning of the

movement), and at times, between the end of the first interlude and the recapitulation

(m. 286), the music feels a bit directionless. After the Interlude 1, the combination of

visuals and music is largely made up of a recycling of previous material, while the

newly-introduced scene 4 (first appearing in m. 237) – the dominant scene of the second

half of the movement before the return of the tutti chord – is notably weaker than the

previous scenes. It is based on a single, motionless and sparsely accompanied gesture –

the “CHECK PULSE” gesture – that alternates with the recycled gestures. It lacks the

novelty, excitement and virtuosity of scene 1, which defined the opening half of the

movement and propelled it forward.

The transition between interludes 1 and 2 (mm. 233-324) is notable primarily for the

introduction of scene 4 (in m. 237). The section begins with another brief appearance of

scene 2 (“finger shadow conducting” with curtains open and front light on). This leads

seamlessly into a block of scene 1 material that is somewhat reminiscent (and perhaps

intended to be a continuation) of the looped sequence from the scene 1 cadenza with the

addition of the “BULL” gesture from the first interlude. This block of scene 1 material

is followed by the introduction of scene 4 and its “CHECK PULSE” gesture. Here, the

soloist appears to check his pulse having apparently been shot three times in the

previous measure with three “SHOT” gestures successively cued in the three instrumental groups. The soloist’s gradually slowing ‘pulse’ is supplied by the bass drum (percussion 1), sparsely accompanied by the group 2 and 3 percussionists lightly shaking thunder sheets (marked *pianissimo*). At this point, the front light is switched off for another cut to black and, for the first of only two times in the entire work, the down light is switched on, in preparation for Interlude 2.<sup>16</sup>

In the unmeasured second interlude – or “NINJA” section – (mm. 240-242), the soloist adopts a series of, what Stene refers to as, “Ninja hand signs,” which are glibly accompanied by faux ‘Eastern’ music produced by the three percussionists playing opera gongs combined with cello and double bass sustaining their open C and E strings, respectively, and added ‘interference’ in the electric guitar (jack buzz) and harp (rubbing the strings with an alcohol pad). According to Stene, this soundscape is intended to resemble the music of “Eastern martial arts movies of the 1960s.”<sup>17</sup> In effect, it is a parody. It is a curious and somewhat awkward interlude that, in sentiment, owes more to the kinds of exploitation films involving ninjas produced during the 1980s in the United States such as the cult *American Ninja* pentalogy (1985-1993) and, perhaps above all, exemplifies the composer’s esoteric sense of humor.

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<sup>16</sup> The down light is switched on again (and the front light switched off) in m. 530 of the third movement and remains on until almost the very end of the piece.

<sup>17</sup> Stene, “This is Not a Drum,” 49. Stene is probably referring to martial arts films produced in East Asia during the 1960s, primarily in Hong Kong as well as in Taiwan and Japan, such as *Come Drink with Me* (1966) and the *Shinobi no Mono* series of films (1962-66).

### **Mm. 242-286: ‘Check Pulse’ Section (Scene 4) & Transition to Recapitulation**

Scene 4 becomes the main focus of the following section, mm. 242-275, what might be called the ‘CHECK PULSE’ section. In the first part of the section, mm. 243-266, the “CHECK PULSE” gesture is extended and alternated (or ‘intercut’) with other previously introduced gestures. These recycled gestures, with which the “PULSE” gesture is alternated, appear individually and as part of a series of gestures including, most prominently (as far as m. 258), the number hand signals (with the usual corresponding descending figure, now alternating between an E-flat and E natural starting note) as well as the rock gesture and the reintroduced talking hand gesture from the scene 1 cadenza (m. 155). The thumbs up gesture is also reintroduced (in m. 251) and features prominently, undergoing further development. The alternating gestures become more prominent as the passage progresses so that pattern of the “PULSE” gesture alternating with other, recycled gestures transitions to a more extended sequence of just the alternative, non-“PULSE” gestures in m. 258. Here, there is a particular focus on the thumbs up and talking hand gestures (interspersed with the rapid upwards glissandi that began in m. 67) that harks back to the mock telephone conversation of the scene 1 cadenza (i.e. m. 155).

The rhythmic value of the repeated bass drum notes that accompany the “CHECK PULSE” gesture is altered each time the gesture appears with a gradual transition from dotted quarter-notes in m. 243 to eighth-notes in m. 257 so that there is a gradual acceleration in the rate of the pulse. This process culminates, musically and

dramatically, in the following beginning in m. 266 (rehearsal N) with the repeated bass drum pulsations of the “CHECK PULSE” gesture replaced by a “FLAT LINE!” sound simulated by a high C in the trumpet.

The ‘flat line’ scene beginning in m. 266 can be considered the culmination of scene 4 and likely represents the scene 4 cadenza before scene 4 makes way for other scenes (in this instance, the *return* of other scenes). From m. 266, the “PULSE” gesture continues to alternate with other previously-introduced gestures and, in a process similar to the gradually accelerating pulse in the previous section (and other previous additive and subtractive processes), the duration of the “CHECK PULSE” and its newly corresponding flat line sound gradually decreases with successive appearances while, at the same time, there is a general increase in the duration of the alternating groups of gestures culminating, as in the previous passage (mm. 242-266), with a more extended sequence of alternating gestures featuring the rock and roll salute (“BULL”), call me (“PHONE”), and talking hand (“TALK”) gestures.

The *raison d’être* of the scene beginning in m. 266, however, seems to be to provide a closing function. That is, to bring the main part of the movement to an end in anticipation of (what might be termed) a recapitulation with the return of the scene 1 tutti chord material in m. 286 (even if the recapitulation does not follow on directly from the “PULSE”/flat line section). The “PULSE”-now-“FLAT LINE!” gesture forms part of a series of alternating gestures, the most prominent of which have an already established ‘cadential’ quality having been used previously to bring scenes or sections

to a conclusion (in dramatic as well as visual and musical terms). The “HANG UP” gesture brought the mock telephone conversation of the scene 1 cadenza to a close (the cadenza bringing scene 1 itself to close) and the middle finger gesture (“FUCK”) was used to bring the first interlude to a conclusion. One could say that these gestures also have an inherently cadential quality. For instance, the hanging up of a telephone brings a conversation to an end; the middle finger also has the potential to bring a conversation to a (perhaps abrupt) conclusion; while the flat line sound signifies the cessation of heart or brain activity and, possibly, life itself. A further, equally cadential gesture is introduced in m. 274 with the “TIME OUT” gesture or T-sign (used in many sports to bring a halt to play), which brings the “PULSE”/“FLAT LINE!” section, as well as scene 4, and indeed the main part of the movement to an unambiguous conclusion. The T-sign, which is accompanied by the same unison A-flat of the scene 1 opening and closing of the curtains (here mimicking the sound of a sports buzzer), is followed by the equally cadential actions of closing the curtains and switching off the front light and a cut to black.

Given the closing quality of mm. 266-275, we might expect the recapitulation to fall directly after, in m. 275. However, the beginning of the recapitulation is delayed by the insertion of an intervening scene, a short shadowplay involving a mime-like interaction between the two hands and an invisible prop. The shadowplay is clearly related to scene 2, which, except for the two very brief appearances of the scene in mm. 189 and 233, has been absent since the first half of the movement. Like scene 2, the shadowplay takes place behind closed curtains with the back light casting the shadow of the soloist’s

hands onto the curtains. The usual C pedal triggered by the back light further connects the scene with scene 2. Despite its curious placement in the overall formal scheme, the shadowplay is probably the scene 2 cadenza. Unlike scene 1, scene 2 did not appear to reach a “culmination” in the first half of the movement, nor did it have the “little cadenza” that the composer refers to (above). Perhaps Steen-Andersen is tying up a loose end here.

The shadowplay continues directly into a passage beginning in m. 281 in which the soloist turns his attention once more to the components of the stage itself, focusing first on the lights and then, briefly, beginning in m. 286 (the beginning of the recapitulation), on the individual curtains of the stage. The soloist’s focus on the back light – pressing and releasing the switch and covering and uncovering the light – suggests a continuation of the scene 2 cadenza (the back light is associated with scene 2, just as the front light, during the first half of the piece, is associated with scene 1).

Although the switching on and off of the lights has been used primarily as a device to transition or provide points of punctuation between scenes (particularly between scenes 1 and 2 in the first half of the movement) and the opening and closing of the curtains used primarily to ‘frame’ scene 1, the soloist’s renewed focus on the components of the stage beginning in m. 281 emphasizes the motivic quality of the sounds of the light switches and the scrolling of the curtains themselves. This motivic quality had already been established to some extent earlier in the movement with the greater integration of the sound of the switching on and off of the lights into the musical language of the

movement in, for instance, scene 2 in mm. 79-80 (however brief); with the rapid switching on and off of the lights together with the opening and closing of the curtains in the passage beginning in m. 91; and, indeed, with the focus on the switching on and off of the lights in the opening measures.

### **M. 286: Recapitulation & Codetta**

The soloist's toying with the curtains of the miniature stage beginning in m. 286 marks the start of the recapitulation.<sup>18</sup> The soloist focuses on the curtains individually – opening the right side curtain, then the left, then the right side curtain again – with the usual corresponding unison A-flat in the bass clarinet and baritone saxophone, now doubled at the octave by the brass, together with the bassoon's usual tutti chord multiphonic, which is offset to reflect the focus on the individual rather than both curtains. However, the soloist's renewed attention to the curtains is, like his preceding focus on the lights, short-lived and in m. 289, the actions and corresponding sounds are cut off by the "TIME OUT" gesture (here, the gesture cutting off the sound rather than initiating it). The "TIME OUT" gesture is immediately followed by one of the soloist's emphatic two-handed cues and the unambiguous return of the scene 1 tutti chords, which become the object of a renewed and more extensive focus than before. There is also a renewed focus on 'conducting' gestures (beating time and giving cues) in the

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<sup>18</sup> Like the tutti chord, the opening and closing of the curtains belongs to scene 1.

recapitulation, as opposed to the soloist's everyday or theatrical gestures that have dominated the choreography of the second half of the movement.

Mm. 290 to 293 are almost identical to mm. 24-27. However, in m. 293, the soloist-conductor's gestures abruptly go out of sync with the tutti chord swells in the ensemble and then back in sync in m. 298, similar to the way in which the soloist-conductor's gestures went out of and then back in sync with the ensemble in scene 2 during the first half of the movement (in the appearances of scene 2 beginning in mm. 98 and 121).<sup>19</sup> This is followed by a passage beginning in m. 300 in which the individual conducting gestures that are attached to the spatially and dynamically offset tutti chords in the preceding measures are isolated and repeated together with their corresponding music in the individual instrumental groups. In mm. 300-303, the soloist-conductor's quarter-note downbeat-left to downbeat-right gestures (beats one and two from mm. 298 and 299, and previous 3/4 measures) are isolated and repeated (twice) together with the music of the corresponding constituent parts of the tutti chord in groups 2 and 3; in mm. 303-306, the soloist-conductor's eighth-note down-beat-up-beat gestures (the third beat in m. 299, and previous 3/4 measures) are isolated and repeated twice, together with the corresponding constituent part of the tutti chord in group 1, (initiating a series of 2/8 measures); and in mm. 306-308, the 2/8 measure eighth-note down-beat-up-beat gestures in the solo part are continued but with the eighth-note downbeat gesture replaced by an eighth-note downbeat to the left gesture (from the 3/8 m. 48, and

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<sup>19</sup> This going out of sync with the ensemble is a feature associated with scene 2 in the first half of the movement. Despite the intense focus on the tutti chord in the recapitulation, the integration of this aspect of scene 2 into scene 1 here, and later in the recapitulation, suggests a consolidation of sorts of scene 1 and scene 2.

elsewhere) that corresponds with the dynamic peak of the constituent part of the tutti chord in group 2 (the group 2 part of the tutti chord initiated by the eighth-note upbeat in m. 305). The group 1 part of the tutti chord continues into mm. 306 and 307, eliding with the group 2 entry.) The series of 2/8 measures (in m. 303-308) is followed by a passage in (what is referred to in the score as) “quasi slow motion” in which the soloist’s conducting gestures are dramatically slowed down and the corresponding musical gestures ‘stretched out,’ mimicking the effect of slow motion in film. The stretched out music is made up of a sustained *niente* to *fortissimo* chord in group 3 (corresponding to the slow motion down beat to the left, stretched to three quarter-note beats, followed by a down beat to the right), the tail of which overlaps with another *crescendo-decrescendo* in group 1 (initiated by a slow motion eighth-note down beat stretched to three eighth-note beats).

From m. 312 (rehearsal P), the focus on the tutti chord continues but with the focus now on the original stinger version of the chord (introduced in m. 8), played with even greater force than before (marked “Tutta la forza!”). As the stinger chords are repeated, the soloist-conductor gradually goes out of sync once more with the ensemble. Initially, the soloist-conductor’s actions appear to cue and cut off the chords (notated, as before, so that the chord comes slightly after the soloist’s cue) but gradually it becomes apparent that the soloist-conductor’s gestures, which are increasingly out of sync with the ensemble, bear no causal relationship to the sounding result.<sup>20</sup> By the final tutti

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<sup>20</sup> The soloist-conductor and ensemble go out of sync through a process of progressively subtracting rhythmic values from the soloist-conductor’s repeating gestures, similar to earlier processes of subtraction.

chord in m. 328, it is the soloist's "cut-off" gesture that corresponds with the entry of the chord so that, paradoxically (as mentioned earlier), the soloist-conductor appears to be back in sync *and* completely out of sync with the ensemble at the same time. The situation continues in the following measures with the ensemble responding to the soloist-conductor's upbeat to the tutti chord – the sound of the performers breathing in, combined with and other anticipatory actions or noises – but the soloist-conductor's dramatic repeated downbeat signals are met with complete silence rather than the expected tutti *fortissimo* chord in the ensemble. The soloist's repeated signals occur at shorter and shorter intervals (through the usual process of subtracting rhythmic values) before the tutti chord sounds again one last time in m. 334 (letter Q), apparently in response to the soloist-conductor's cue in the previous 3/16 measure.

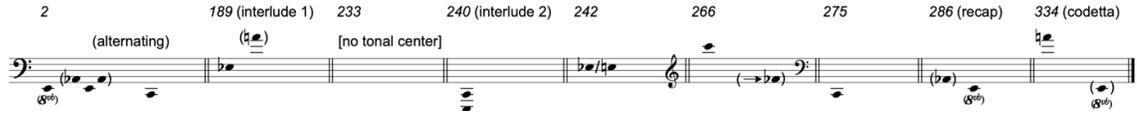
The final appearance of the tutti chord in m. 334 (rehearsal Q) also marks the beginning of the codetta and the final scene, scene 5, in which the soloist signs the vowels of the alphabet in American Sign Language. The signs are accompanied by repeated, timbrally shifting unison A4's in the ensemble (trumpet with harmon mute, variously doubled elsewhere in the ensemble) below shifting harmonics in the strings. The string harmonics appear to function as false overtones of the repeated note A, anticipating both the repeated (out of tune) notes A4 and the accompanying string harmonics at the beginning of the following movement. The final vowel sign in m. 340 (the 'sometimes vowel' Y) transitions to a magician-like "PUFF" gesture via a "FIST" gesture with the final measures sparsely accompanied by the light switch room noise from the beginning together with the hum of the open string double bass. The open string E is perhaps

intended, however subtle (marked *pppp*), to imply a resolution to the overall ‘tonic’ of E of the opening measures. The movement concludes, fittingly, with the soloist closing the curtains and switching off the illuminated front light for a final cut to black.

\*

Before leaving the opening movement, allow me to make a few additional comments in relation to the harmony. Despite the noisy character of the movement, which relies heavily on indefinitely-pitched and toneless elements, it is still possible to make some general observations about the harmonic structure.

To some extent, the overall harmonic structure of the movement can be considered to be largely a byproduct of Steen-Andersen’s ‘editing together’ of his blocks of material or scenes, which, in turn, are made up of an editing together of the largely unchanging visual-musical gestures. Yet, the overall harmonic structure displays a certain coherence, which is, no doubt, by design. The following figure provides an outline of the overall harmonic structure of the movement according to the dominant tonality or tonal element of each section:



**FIGURE 3:** Harmonic structure of the opening movement of *Black Box Music*.

As we can see from this rough outline (and bearing in mind that the first measure of the outline is equal to the entire first half of the movement), much of the movement is rooted in E or C with a digression to E-flat in the middle of the movement. Broadly speaking, we can say that the overall ‘tonic’ or tonal center of the movement is E. The open string E in the double bass is the only tonal element of the opening musical material that accompanies the soloist’s switching on and off of the front light. It is also the note on which the tutti chord of the following scene 1, despite being a predominantly noise-filled cluster, is rooted with a low E in octaves in the harp and trombone at the bottom of the cluster (connecting the tutti chord, and scene 1 to which it belongs, harmonically with the front light material). The music eventually returns to a tonal center of E with the renewed focus on the tutti chord in the recapitulation.

As mentioned earlier, scene 1 is framed, musically, by the unison A-flat that accompanies the opening and closing of the curtains, so that, to begin with, scene 1 alternates between A-flat and E (of the tutti chord) but, as the scene evolves and becomes longer and longer with the stretching and contracting of the tutti chord, the unison A-flat becomes less prominent and the scene is dominated, at least as far as the

reappearance of scene 1 beginning in m. 113, by the tutti chord. The tonal center of scene 2 is C – the only specified tonal element, provided by the open string C pedal in the cello triggered by the back light. For convenience sake, let us say that scene 3, which is subsumed into scene 2, also has a tonal center of C since the back light/scene 2 C pedal extends into scene 3 and it is perhaps redundant to try to assign a tonal center to or otherwise define the spectrum of specified and unspecified pitches that are superimposed onto the continuing pedal other than to say that the specified pitches of the string harmonics are related to the manner in which the strings' pitch material appears to be determined, to some extent, by the open strings of the instruments.

As the first half of the movement progresses, the harmonic structure corresponds, naturally enough, with the alternating front light/scene 1 and back light/scene 2 + 3 giving us alternating tonal centers of E and C. Scene 2, with its combination of indefinite and mostly unpitched material above the C pedal, and scene 3, remain tonally unchanged with successive appearances while the harmonic profile of scene 1 is altered in tandem with the accumulation of new, tonally distinct musical gestures that, as mentioned earlier, are combined with the rearranged, previously introduced gestures. Because of the recycling of gestures, which appear unaltered, there is not a lot of harmonic variety or development in the movement. Harmonic variety within the recurring scenes is largely, it seems, a byproduct of the accumulation, combining and rearranging of the repeating, tonally unaltered gestures. This is especially the case in scene 1, but also in scene 4, in the first interlude and, to a lesser extent, in scene 2/scene 3.

In the first interlude, given the prominence of the number hand signals with their corresponding descending gesture beginning on E-flat, the tonal center could be considered E-flat, although the A corresponding to the “PHONE” and vowel signs, with which the number signals alternate, becomes more prominent as the interlude progresses. The transition to the second interlude (mm. 233-240), which does not have a strong harmonic profile, has no tonal center to speak of. The second interlude (mm. 240-242), with its stock ‘Eastern’ music made up primarily of opera gongs, combines the sustained open string E of the front light/scene 1 and the open string pedal C of the back light/scene 2 (and 3).

In the following “PULSE” section from m. 242, the pitchless scene 4 “CHECK PULSE” gesture (bass drum and thunder sheets) alternates with recycled gestures (number signals, “THUMB,” “TALK,” the upwards glissando introduced in m. 67), of which the number signals/descending gesture is – at least to begin with – the most prominent. The descending gesture now fluctuates between beginning on E-flat and E natural – the E natural perhaps a reminder of the overall tonic and/or anticipating the return to E in the recapitulation that follows. From m. 258, the fluctuating E-flat/E-natural tonal center transitions, via alternating “THUMB” (indefinitely pitched except for the trombones starting note C) and “TALK” (trombone glissando beginning on G) gestures combined with upwards glissando gestures, to a tonal center of C beginning in m. 266. The C is provided by the trumpet and piano at the top of their ranges (“FLAT LINE!” and “HANG-UP,” respectively) and anticipates the tonal center of the following scene 2 cadenza. The music transitions away from C with the recycling of further

gestures (“FUCK,” “PHONE,” “BULL,” “TALK”) – the harmonic content once again a consequence of rearranging of the unaltered gestures – and ‘resolves’ to the A-flat of the “TIME OUT” gesture, which is tied to the A-flat octaves of the closing of the curtains.

Despite the tweaking of the descending gesture that accompanies the various number signals, the pulse section occupies more or less the same harmonic territory as the first interlude, which also had (to begin with) the number signals/descending gesture as its most prominent tonal element. The lack of any real harmonic contrast or development partly accounts for the stagnancy of the second half of the movement following the first interlude. As already mentioned, the movement never really regains the momentum it had in the first half of the more compelling first half of the movement.

The tonal center of the scene 2 cadenza/shadowplay beginning in m. 275, which delays the beginning of the recapitulation, is, as with previous iterations of scene 2, C, provided, as before, by an open string C pedal in the cello below the usual sparse accompaniment of mostly unpitched noise. The delayed recapitulation beginning in m. 286 marks not just the return of the tutti chord but the overall tonal center of E, reintroduced with the double bass’s low hum on its E string. The return of scene 1 (in its initial form) begins as it did at the opening of the movement with the A-flat of the opening and closing of the curtains. This is cut off by the soloist’s T-sign and the return of the largely unaltered tutti chords, which insist on the return of the overall tonic. As already mentioned, the tutti chord is a noisy cluster, but it is firmly rooted on E. At the

very least, we can say that the return of the tutti chord represents a ‘dramatic’ if not entirely convincingly tonal return. The tonal center of the following codetta beginning in m. 334 is clearly A – the repeated note A accompanying the succession of vowel signs – with the faint double bass open string E in the final measure implying a resolution of sorts, of the overall tonal center. As already mentioned, the A tonality of the codetta anticipates the harmony of the opening of the following movement.

### **SLOW MIDDLE MOVEMENT**

The slow and considerably shorter middle movement of *Black Box Music* is more obviously scored for ‘soloist and ensemble’ (as is the Finale). The soloist suspends his assumed role as conductor to perform a solo on tuning forks of various sizes – introducing props to the box for the first time – lightly accompanied by a pared down ensemble of vibraphone, viola and cello (with the addition of electric guitar and, briefly, trombone later in the movement). While the blown-up projection of the soloist performing with tuning forks of various sizes adds to the novelty of the movement, unlike the opening movement, the view from inside the box is not essential to comprehending the musical scenario. The primary focus of the middle movement is on sound and, in particular, harmony.

In the middle movement, the soloist produces a succession of pairs of sustained tones with the tuning forks by striking them against one another and then pressing the handles

of the forks against (what appears to be) a metal strip on the base of the box.<sup>21</sup> (Example 6 shows the solo part in isolation from the beginning to the end of the movement.) By pressing the handle of the tuning forks against the metal strip on the base of the box, the box acts as a resonator, naturally amplifying the pure or fundamental tones of the tuning forks (which are, in turn, amplified by the microphones/speakers). The higher frequencies or overtones that are initially produced when the tuning forks are struck against one another are anticipated by artificial harmonics in the viola and cello while the fundamental tones are sustained by bowed vibraphone notes and, later, beginning in m. 374, by electric guitar swells (replacing the vibraphone) and, at the end of the movement (in m. 386), by a solitary trombone note.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The tuning forks are tuned as follows: 1: 442 Hz (A); 2: 392 Hz (G); 3: 329 Hz (E); 4: 523.25 Hz (C); 5: 466 Hz (A-sharp); 6: 415 Hz (G-sharp); 7: 435 Hz (A); 8: 440 Hz (A); 9: 443 Hz (A); 64 Hz (C). The 64 Hz tuning fork is not assigned a number in the score. The numbers denote the arrangement of the forks, from left to right, inside the box.

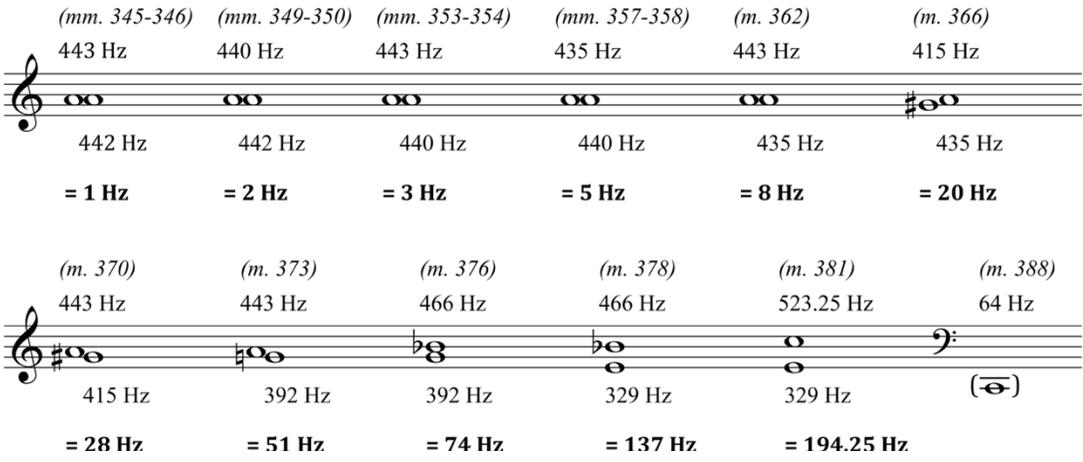
<sup>22</sup> Steen-Andersen does not follow the usual practice of restarting measure numbers in successive movements. The second movement begins with m. 344 (the third with m. 389).

**EXAMPLE 6:** Solo part, Slow Middle Movement, *Black Box Music*, mm. 344-389. © Edition S. Used with permission.

Initially, the pure tones of the tuning forks gravitate around A 440 Hertz with slight differences in tuning between the pairs of tones elicited from the various tuning forks producing interference or beating (perceived periodic variations in volume). As the movement progresses, the distance between the frequencies of the tones is gradually increased causing the rate of the beating to get faster, before the ‘out of tune’ unison A expands to approximately a minor second (a distance of 20 Hertz, or a ‘flat’ minor second). From here (m. 366), the distance between the notes of the consecutive pairs of tones continues to increase as the intervals between the notes fan out: a ‘sharp’ minor

second; a sharp major second; minor third; tritone; and minor sixth. The final pair of simultaneously sounding pure tones in m. 381 is repeated a number of times with the soloist striking the tuning forks against the base of the box instead of against one another and, instead of pressing the handles of the tuning forks against the base of the box, holding the tuning forks to the microphones to amplify the sound before the addition of a low C (64 Hz, i.e. two octaves below middle C) brings the progression of intervals to a (perhaps premature) conclusion. (The blown-up projection gives the 64 Hz tuning fork the perhaps unintentionally comic appearance of an oversized novelty tuning fork.) The bowed vibraphone notes, which sustain the fundamental tones of the tuning forks, echo the beating produced by the tuning fork tones with the motor (cancelling out any naturally occurring perceived periodic variations in volume between the tempered vibraphone notes and the untempered tuning fork tones), adjusting the speed of the motor, from slowest to fastest, in imitation of the increasing speed of the beating between the tuning fork notes as the tones move gradually further apart in frequency. Similarly, the trombone's one and only note in the movement beginning in m. 386 – in addition to sustaining the fundamental tone of the E tuning fork in the left hand – imitates the 'wah-wah' effect produced by the soloist turning the fork while holding it to the roof mic, which in turn imitates the beating produced by the pairs of tuning fork tones earlier in the movement. Further 'interference' is produced by the soloist making the tuning forks 'buzz' when pressing the handles against the metal strip on the base of the box in mm. 374 and 379.

Figure 4 illustrates the gradually expanding distance between the sustained fundamental tones of the tuning forks (illustrated as musical notes) with the distance between the frequencies measured in Hertz. Initially, the distance between the frequencies is just 1 Hz (equal to approximately the just noticeable difference between two complex tones – the beating is discerned even if a difference in pitch is not); eventually, the distance between the frequencies is 194.25 Hz (beginning in m. 381) before the arrival on the low C (64 Hz). (The rate of change or expansion does not appear to follow any particular pattern.)



**FIGURE 4:** The sustained pure tones produced by the tuning forks in the Slow Middle Movement of *Black Box Music* with corresponding measurements in hertz. The distance between the frequencies is given in bold.

The low C represents what might be interpreted as a tonic C, providing a resolution to the harmony of the preceding measures, and indeed the entire movement. If we consider the pure tones of the tuning forks in terms of musical notes (as opposed to measurements of frequencies), and if we take the final low C as our harmonic destination, the overall harmonic structure can thus be defined – in somewhat Schenkarian terms – as a move from a tonal center of A to C (perhaps intended to imply a relative minor to major relationship). A modulation away from A begins in m. 366 (where the notes of the tuning begin to fan out); we appear to have already arrived at our destination in m. 381, prior to the appearance of the low C, with the repeated notes E and C (implying tonic first inversion), to which the dominant note is added in the cello at the end of m. 385, with the low C added in the final measure merely emphasizing the root of the chord and re-voicing it in root position. The overall harmonic structure is also defined by a concurrent progression from harmonic instability at the beginning, with the repeated ‘out of tune’ notes A, to harmonic stability with the introduction of tempered tones in the tuning forks in m. 376. In other words, the movement articulates a move from an out of tune or *untempered* tonal center of A to a *tempered* tonal center of C. The original title of the movement, “Disambiguation,” may have referred to this process.

In keeping with the ‘spectral’ thinking that is already part of the movement (namely, the highlighting of the tuning fork overtones in the strings) we could also say that the addition of the final note C provides a sort of missing fundamental: the tuning fork tones in the preceding measures (from m. 381), together with the artificial harmonic in

the cello (beginning at the end of m. 385), in addition to outlining a major triad, could be said to outline the lower partials of an overtone series on the fundamental note C (partials 5 and 8 in the tuning forks and 6 in the cello). This reading of the tuning fork notes would also account for the previous tuning fork tone B-flat introduced in m. 376 (partial 7), while the repeated string harmonics C and A-flat beginning in m. 380, which, on the face of it, highlight the initially-sounding overtones of the E and C tuning forks when they are struck together, could also be considered as belonging to the overtone series of the low C. Admittedly, above the fourteenth partial, any note might be considered part of the series; yet, the A-flat in the violin is also present lower in the series (partial 13, two octaves below the violin sounding note) and is thus a more prominent note in the spectrum, as is, of course, the note C in the cello (what we might consider displaced octave overtones). With this in mind, and the move from A to C mentioned above, we can say that the harmony moves from an untempered overtone series on A (the upper partials highlighted in the strings) to a tempered series on C (upper partials highlighted in the strings; lower partials in the tuning forks). The modulation away from A begins in m. 365/366, via partial 13 (G-sharp, displaced down an octave) and we arrive on the tempered series C in m. 376 with partials 6 and 7 in the tuning forks (the tuning forks now tempered) from where further notes in the series are gradually outlined and, eventually, the fundamental note is added, as if placing a period at the end of a sentence. This reading of the harmony is in keeping with Holmboe's observation that the tuning forks gradually build up a chord, i.e. an overtone or spectral chord on C, although it is more accurate to say that the notes of the chord are 'outlined'

in the tuning forks since only two tuning fork fundamental tones sound at any one time.<sup>23</sup>

## **FINALE**

*Black Box Music* concludes with “a festive, pompous, self-imploding ‘Finale’” in which the soloist gradually constructs, what the composer has describes as, a “kind of installation” or “musical machine” within the box.<sup>24</sup>

As we can see from my formal synopsis in Figure 5, the movement can be divided in three main parts:

Part 1: mm. 1-530: a dance-like solo made up of finger snaps with the gradual installation of four rubber bands in the box

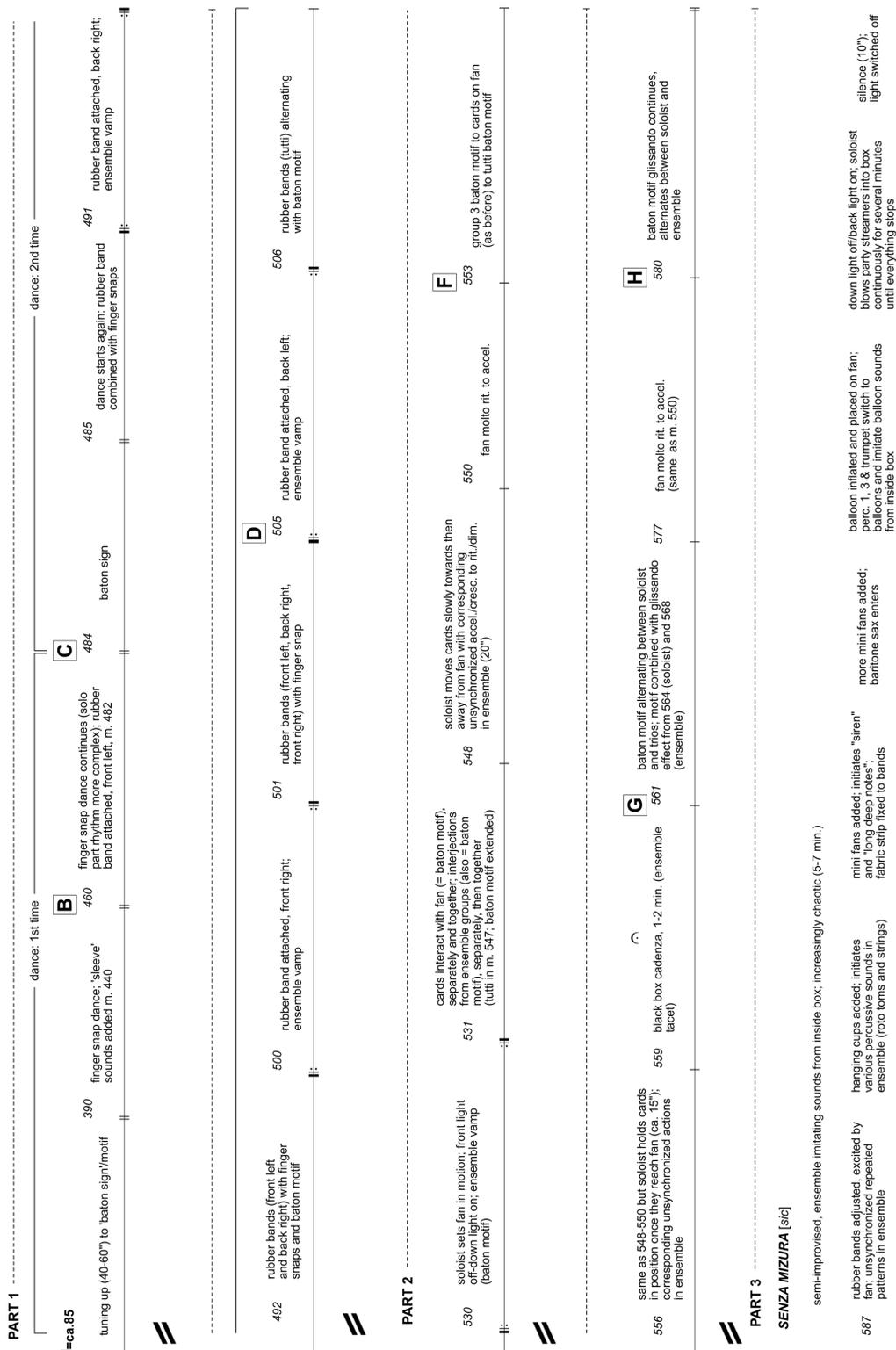
Part 2: mm. 530-587: the installation of a desktop fan – the ‘engine’ of the musical machine – which interacts with cards and is otherwise manipulated to produce continuous sixteenth-notes

Part 3: mm. 587 to the end: a semi-improvised, increasingly chaotic sequence in which the soloist adds more and more objects to the box until, eventually, the machine/music breaks down

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<sup>23</sup> Holmboe, “Have You Seen the Music?”

<sup>24</sup> “Black Box Music (2012)”; “Festival TACEC 2018/Simon Steen-Andersen,” YouTube video, 10:07, posted by “Teatro Argentino de La Plata,” October 18, 2018, <https://youtu.be/PFSkfwRcv1E>.



**FIGURE 5:** Formal synopsis of the Finale of *Black Box Music*.

## **Part 1: mm. 389-530**

The movement begins with the musicians tuning (or pretending to tune) their instruments before the soloist-conductor calls the ensemble to attention by tapping his baton on the floor of the box – a gesture referred to in the score as the “batton-sign” [*sic*]. This seemingly inconsequential gesture – a simple rhythmic motif consisting of four repeated sixteenth-notes – becomes the basis for almost all of the musical material later in the movement. It is increasingly the basis of the musical material from m. 484 (rehearsal C) and the basis for all of the musical material from m. 530 to the end. The only exceptions are the freely-improved cadenza (in m. 559), which, in theory, may also be based on the baton motif, and the loosely-prescribed, semi-improvised material in the final part of the movement from m. 587.

Following the baton sign, the soloist, who continues to produce sounds independently of the ensemble in the Finale, performs a rhythmic, dance-like solo made up of finger snaps. Whereas the use of tuning forks in the second movement signified to the viewer-listener that the music was predominantly concerned with tuning and pitch, the use of finger snaps – associated with rhythm and keeping time, and indeed dance – at the beginning of the third movement signifies to the viewer-listener that the movement is concerned primarily with rhythm.

The dance begins simply enough with a repeated pattern in the solo part made up of four quarter-notes with each quarter-note assigned to a finger snap in a different

position about the box corresponding to the position of the four main mics (front right, front left, back left and back right). The steady pattern of quarter-notes in the solo part is offset, beginning in m. 394, by short, percussive interjections in the ensemble, which are divided among the individual instrumental groups around the hall. These interjections or ‘snap chords’ are made up of unchanging combinations of percussive effects (snap pizzicati, slap tonguing and so on) in the instrumental groups that mimic the sound of the soloist’s finger snaps. From m. 399, there is a brief reversal of roles, together with an audible change of meter from 2/4 to 3/4 (the change to 3/4 occurring in the previous measure), as the instrumental groups temporarily take over the dance and, from m. 401, the soloist provides the interjections before more equal roles are established after m. 405. As the dance continues, occasional, localized patterns of repetition, addition and subtraction emerge (similar to those in the opening) involving both the soloist and ensemble. Short rhythmic patterns or ‘cells’ are also recycled and elaborated on. However, there does not appear to be an overall or larger compositional scheme at work that determines the evolving rhythm of the dance.

In m. 416, the composer introduces some variety to the solo part by adding a finger snap at the roof mic to the four positions of the soloist’s finger snaps and, in m. 420 adding a further sound-producing hand gesture with the soloist knocking on the floor of the box (as he did in the opening movement). The soloist further expands his repertoire of sound-producing hand gestures beginning in m. 440 by gradually replacing the finger snaps with sounds produced by variously rubbing or brushing his sleeves. This, in turn, initiates a change in the types of sounds produced by the ensemble – and a

corresponding shift in dynamics – with air-tones, string noise and other subtle effects replacing the percussive effects in the instrumental groups.

In m. 460 (rehearsal B), the soloist begins to snap his fingers again and the dance continues. The solo part is more virtuosic here – and becomes increasingly so – with faster and more complicated finger snap configurations and corresponding choreography. Meanwhile, the instrumental groups resume their snap chords interjections from before, using the same combinations of percussive effects, but here the interjections are less frequent. An isolated (and somewhat out of place) drum fill, in which the soloist's triplet finger snap pattern is translated to the group 1 percussionist, momentarily takes over from the soloist in m. 478 before a final flourish of finger snaps in the solo part.

The sound of the soloist snapping his fingers bears a marked resemblance to the sound of tap dancing, which becomes especially apparent with the faster finger snap patterns from m. 460. This resemblance heightens the sense of the opening section being a 'dance.' The finger snaps also emphasize the resemblance of the scenario – with its focus on the soloist's hands, the black box and various props – to a magic act.

The first section or 'round' of the finger snap dance concludes with the soloist installing, then plucking the first of four rubber bands in the box in mm. 482 and 483. The rubber band is attached to screws in the roof and floor in the front left of the box. While the soloist is installing the bands, the double bass plays a B-flat pizzicato note

with a glissando, anticipating the plucking of the rubber band by the soloist in the following measure. Despite being somewhat obscured by the glissando, the pizzicato note is notable for being the first truly pitched note in the entire movement. Up until this point, almost all of the percussive effects that the section is made up of, in both the solo and ensemble parts, are unpitched or produce an unspecified or indefinite pitch. The only exceptions are repeated slap tongue effects in the baritone saxophone and trombone and a repeated low E in the harp. However, even these effects, like the surrounding effects (such as the snap pizzicati in the strings), are primarily percussive in nature or the pitch is obscured in some way. In addition, these specified pitches are combined with, and, indeed, outnumbered by, the unpitched and indefinitely-pitched sounds produced elsewhere in their instrumental groups so that the perceived contrast between the interjecting chords of the different groups is by and large timbral (and spatial) rather than harmonic.

In m. 484 (rehearsal C), the soloist taps his baton on the floor of the box again. This time, the baton sign is answered, with the same four-note rhythm, by group 2. Here, group 2 employs an alternative combination of percussive sounds to those used in their snap chord. The saxophone, trumpet and viola each strike their music stands with a mallet; the guitarist strikes the strings of the instrument with the hand; and the percussionist (the only instrument in the group to use the same effect as in the snap chord) strikes a woodblock.

The finger snap dance begins again in m. 485, now incorporating the plucked rubber band installed at the front left of the stage, which replaces the soloist's finger snap at the front left mic. As the dance progresses, three further rubber bands are installed – in the back right, front right and back left of the box, respectively – with each new rubber band added replacing the finger snap in the corresponding position. The installation of the rubber bands takes place during a series of vamp measures, the meters of which become successively shorter (m. 491 =  $\frac{3}{4}$ , m. 500 =  $\frac{2}{4}$  and m. 505 =  $\frac{3}{8}$ ). By m. 506, all of the rubber bands have been installed and the interior of the box has effectively been turned into a four-stringed musical instrument. From here, the plucking of the rubber bands/rubber band material becomes increasingly virtuosic with sixteenth-notes and, from m. 522, sixteenth-note triplets combined with the eighth-note rhythm. This mirrors the process of increasing virtuosity of the finger snaps with faster and faster rhythmic patterns that occurred in the previous section from 460.

The addition of the pitched (albeit indefinitely-pitched) sounds of the plucked rubber bands, which replace the unpitched sounds of the finger snaps, gradually introduces a greater sense of pitch to the dance. A similar process occurs in the ensemble with the largely unpitched snap chords in each of the instrumental groups (mimicking the sounds of the finger snaps) gradually replaced by trios in each group whose more definitely-pitched chords mimic the sounds (including the pitched quality) of the plucked rubber bands: prepared roto tom combined with a pizzicato chord on the scordatura open strings of the viola and an open-fifth dyad in the electric guitar in group 2 beginning in m. 487; an unspecified muted piano note combined with prepared roto tom and a

pizzicato chord on the scordatura open strings of the double bass in group 1 beginning in m. 493, following the installation of the back right rubber band; and prepared roto tom combined with harp buzz and a pizzicato chord on the scordatura open strings of the cello in group 3 beginning in m. 504, following on from the installation of the front right band.<sup>25</sup>

The baton motif, which the soloist reintroduced in m. 484 (answered by group 2), continues to feature, interspersed with the finger snap/rubber bands material in a manner similar to the kind of editing together of blocks of material or scenes with hard cuts between them in the first movement. The motif, which is treated to the simplest of development, grows in prominence as the section progresses. In mm. 498 and 509, the motif is stated in the solo part and then transferred to and extended in the instrumental groups. In m. 498, the soloist's statement is answered by group 2, repeating the same four-note motif, and is then transferred to group 3 who extend the motif to eight sixteenth-notes. In m. 509, the soloist's statement is answered and extended in the same way in groups 2 and 3 and extended further in group 1 with twelve sixteenth-notes (bass clarinet and horn both striking the music stands with a mallet; muted-string notes in the piano; percussion 1 striking the rim of the snare drum; and double bass striking the strings). In m. 518, group 2 takes the lead with its statement of the motif answered by the soloist (without any extension). This is followed by further, isolated statements of

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<sup>25</sup> Confusingly, in the third movement, the viola part appears to be notated at sounding pitch (with the possible exception of m. 570 as far as the section beginning in m. 587) while the cello and double bass parts, which were notated at sounding pitch in the first movement, appear to be notated at written pitch as far as the section beginning in m. 587 and then, somewhat carelessly, switch back to sounding pitch.

the motif – now taken over by the ensemble – in group 2 in m. 523 (without extension) and, in m. 527, in group 3 where the motif is extended to eight sixteenth-notes.

The growing prominence of the baton motif in this section (mm. 484-530) culminates with the focus on the motif in the vamp measure m. 530, where it is continuously repeated by group 1. The focus on the motif in this section also anticipates the singular focus on the repeated sixteenth-note rhythm of the motif as a source of musical material in Part 2 (from m. 530 to 587) and the continued prominence of the repeated sixteenth-notes in Part 3.

### **Part 2: mm. 530-587**

The installation of the rubber bands in the box beginning in m. 482 began a gradual process of reconfiguring the interior of the box and turning it (the interior of the box itself) into a musical instrument or, what might be described as, a makeshift, semi-automated musical machine that the soloist plays on or, more precisely, interacts with. The soloist had already begun to use the interior of the box itself, including its components (the light switches and curtains), as a kind of instrument in the opening movement when he began knocking on the floor of the box (beginning in m. 84). This process continued in the second movement with the introduction of props to the interior of the box with the tuning forks, which, by being made to interact with the box (using the box itself as a resonator for the forks in addition to striking the base of the box with

the forks) became part of the instrument. In the third movement, as we have seen, the soloist begins by turning the interior of the box into a fully playable stringed instrument with the installation of the four rubber bands. Now, in m. 530, with the first part of his musical instrument fully installed, the soloist proceeds to the next step: the installation of what will become the ‘engine’ of the musical machine, a desktop fan, in the center of the box. Attached to the propeller of the fan is a thin piece of string that revolves around the fan with the motion of the propeller and, as the movement progresses, will be used to interact with a variety of objects. While group 1 vamps on the repeated baton motif, the soloist sets the fan (and piece of string) in motion, which, together with the switching off of the front light and the switching on of the down light, marks the end of the first part and the beginning of the second part of the movement.<sup>26</sup>

Next, the soloist introduces two cards to the box and holds them in position on either side of the fan so that they come into contact with the revolving piece of string. The striking of the cards by the piece of string produces a continuous tapping sound, as well as a repeated sixteenth-note rhythm, that, in m. 532, takes over the repeated sixteenth-notes of the repeated baton motif in group 1. In effect, the fan itself with its attached piece of string – and indeed the interior of the box itself – now takes up the baton motif.

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<sup>26</sup> The switching off of the front light and switching on of the down light here is not indicated in the score but occurs in the commercially available Dacapo DVD performance (Oslo Sinfonietta and Håkon Stene, *Simon Steen-Andersen: Black Box Music*). Stene also refers to the switching on of the down light here to light the fan in his critical reflection on the work (Stene, “This is Not a Drum,” 49). Although the Dacapo performance (recorded in 2014) predates the currently available score (dated January 2016), which presumably represents the composer’s most recent thinking on the piece, I suspect the indication has simply been omitted from the score.

The repeated sixteenth-notes of the baton motif sound continuously throughout the section with the tapping of the soloist bringing the cards into contact with the revolving piece of string, separately and together, interspersed with statements of the motif in its original four-note form in the instrumental groups. The groups enter individually at first before they are combined for a tutti statement of the motif, extended to twelve sixteenth-notes, in m. 547.

In the following measure (548), the soloist begins to manipulate the mechanics of the partially-constructed musical machine by moving the cards, from their starting position on either side of the fan, slowly towards and then away from the center of the fan. The action obstructs the regularity of the revolution of the piece of string and, consequently, upsets the constancy of the repeated sixteenth-note rhythm produced by the piece of string striking the cards. The ensemble underscores the soloist's actions with an unsynchronized *accelerando* and *crescendo* followed by an unsynchronized *ritardando* and *diminuendo* based on the baton motif; the ensemble's repeated percussive sounds follow the movements of the soloist and add a melodramatic tension to the scene. The ensemble then drops out and the soloist produces a similar effect, albeit in reverse, by himself by gently pressing the center of the fan's propeller with his finger (mm. 550-552). The soloist gradually increases the pressure causing the spinning of the propeller to gradually slow down, together with the rate of revolution of the piece of string and, consequently, the tempo of the repeated sixteenth-notes of the piece of string striking the right-hand card, which has remained in position. The soloist gradually decreases the pressure to produce the opposite effect.

The continuous sixteenth-note rhythm of the revolving piece of string striking the cards continues as normal from m. 552. After a short passage in which the repeated sixteenth-notes are passed from the soloist to group 3 (m. 553) and then, once again, from the soloist to the entire ensemble for a continuous double statement of the baton motif (m. 555), the soloist repeats the obstruction of the revolution of the piece string by moving the cards towards and then away from the fan (from mm. 548-550) beginning in m. 556 with the soloist's actions underscored as before by a corresponding unsynchronized *accelerando/crescendo* and *ritardando/diminuendo* in the ensemble. This time, the soloist holds the cards briefly in position once they have reached the fan for about fifteen seconds while the instrumentalists maintain whatever unsynchronized tempos and dynamics they have each reached at that point before the soloist moves the cards away again.

This takes us to a freely improvised cadenza in m. 559. At this point in the score, there is a fermata together with the instruction "cadenza, 1-2 min. black box ad lib." With few other indications in the score, it is worth referring to the commercially available Dacapo performance of the work in which Håkon Stene (for whom the work was written) performs the solo part.<sup>27</sup> Stene's cadenza lasts about thirty seconds (somewhat shy of the one to two minutes indicated in the score). In it, he develops the semi-automated procedures involving the soloist's interaction with the fan and cards from the preceding measures. He also introduces a new makeshift instrument to the box, a disposable

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<sup>27</sup> Oslo Sinfonietta and Håkon Stene, *Simon Steen-Andersen: Black Box Music*. Like the performance of *Run Time Error* that I referred to in the previous chapter (which appears on the same DVD), the Dacapo performance of *Black Box Music*, which was supervised by the composer, likely represents a typical performance of the work.

plastic cup with a rubber band attached to the bottom. While continuing to let the right-hand card interact with the revolving piece of string (continuing the repeated sixteenth-note rhythm of the baton motif), Stene attaches the cup's rubber band to a screw in the center left of the box (between the already-installed front left and back left rubber bands). Once installed, Stene (now holding the card in his right hand and the plastic cup in his left) allows both the cup and card to interact with the revolving piece of string simultaneously, then separately, manipulating the timbre of the continuous sixteenth-notes in the process. The soloist then shifts his focus to the cup's interaction with the piece of string alone, in particular, its attached rubber band. Stene manipulates the relative pitch and timbre of the sound produced by the rubber band being struck or plucked by the revolving piece of string by moving the cup up and down, which, in turn, stretches and releases the tension of the band, at varying speeds; the result is a marked quasi-glissando effect.

Whereas in the opening movement, the soloist performed the dual role of soloist and conductor, in the Finale, the role of the soloist is closer to that of a traditional solo percussionist with ensemble. In the Dacapo performance, nowhere is this more apparent than in the cadenza, which, in Stene's hands (so to speak) is essentially a cadenza for solo percussionist. Of course, Stene is a percussionist by trade and an alternative soloist, especially a non-percussionist, may very well perform the cadenza in a very different, less percussionist-like way. However, in performing a percussion solo, Stene is simply continuing to assume the role of solo percussionist that has already been established in relation to the solo part in the preceding section (from m. 530), and earlier, with the

soloist performing on (or interacting with) various makeshift instruments that are part of the larger, semi-automated percussion instrument that the interior of the box is progressively being transformed into in the Finale and, indeed, in the previous movement where the tuning forks function as the soloist's finely tuned percussion instruments. In contrast to the more overtly visual and gestural solo part in the opening movement, the solo part in the Finale is more obviously scored for a percussionist. As signified at the outset of the movement by the soloist's finger snaps, the music is primarily concerned with rhythm, if not, at times, timbre. It is also made up exclusively of unpitched or indefinitely pitched sounds that are, at least as far as the semi-improvised section beginning in m. 587, almost entirely, what might be considered, percussive sounds (the plucking of the rubber bands being a possible exception).

The cadenza continues seamlessly into the following section beginning in m. 561 (rehearsal G) via a 2/4 measure of repeated sixteenth-notes in the solo part; the repeated sixteenth-notes here assume the function of a trill at the end of a classical cadenza. The music is now fully notated again, except for the solo part where the rhythm is specified but not the precise manner in which the notes are to be obtained (nor the pitch).<sup>28</sup> (In the Dacapo performance, Stene continues to employ the plastic cup with the rubber band attached.) From m. 561, the repeated sixteenth-notes are passed around between the soloist and the same trios in the ensemble as in the finger snap dance the second time round (mm. 485-530). The trios are made up of the same 'rubber band chords' combinations of sounds/techniques as earlier but with some slight alterations: the viola,

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<sup>28</sup> Confusingly, the composer uses the same notation for the unspecified notes here (a lozenge on the top line of the staff) as he does for the plucked front right rubber band.

cello and bass open strings are now strummed with plectrums; the undefined muted note in the piano is now replaced with a defined/specified pitch E, doubling the lowest string of the double bass an octave higher (and, in m. 567, by a repeated staccato note A, doubling the lowest stopped note of the double bass an octave higher); while the repeated harp note in m. 563 appears two octaves higher than before.

From mm. 567-568, the trios begin to imitate the quasi-glissando effect produced by the piece of string striking the expanding and contracting rubber band attached to the cup (or produced by some other unspecified manner) in the solo part. Strummed glissandi chords in the strings are combined with similar effects in the other parts. To facilitate the execution of a glissando on their respective instruments, the viola, cello and double bass players necessarily switch from open strings to stopped notes. Beginning with the double bass in m. 567, the string players each stop all of their four strings with a guitar-like single-finger barre chord, to which the cello adds a glissando in m. 568, followed by the viola in m. 570. The double bass adds a glissando to its barre chord in m. 572. The viola and cello (appear to) shift everything up a perfect fifth for the stopped-note starting position of their glissando while the double bass shifts everything up a compound fourth for its repeated strummed chords in m. 567 and then up a perfect fifth for the starting position of its glissando in m. 572. The barre chord finger/hand shape means that the intervallic makeup of each of the ascending chords (which corresponds to the open strings of each instrument) is maintained from the beginning to the end of the action.

In m. 577, the soloist repeats the ritardando-accelerando effect produced by applying pressure to the center of the propeller of the fan (from mm. 550-552) before the baton motif sixteenth-notes with quasi-glissando effect continues, briefly, beginning in m. 580 (rehearsal H). The effect alternates as before between the soloist and the ensemble but with the trios in the ensemble augmented with the previously omitted woodwind and brass instruments in each group. The woodwind and brass instruments supplement the glissandi effects of the trios in each group with staccato arpeggio figures, similar to the figure introduced by the piano in m. 572. At first, the intervals between the notes in the arpeggio figures are limited to alternating tritones and perfect fifths (same as the piano in m. 572) but from m. 584, the interval collection is expanded with the addition of a minor second/augmented unison (including a compound minor second/augmented octave). The only exception is a solitary minor sixth in the piano in mm. 584-585.<sup>29</sup>

The now augmented trios combine for a final tutti statement of the quasi-glissando effect in m. 585. This is followed in m. 586 by the soloist alone whose repeated sixteenth-notes continue without a break into the semi-improvised final part of the movement.

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<sup>29</sup> Some patterns also emerge in the vertical combinations of pitches between the woodwinds, brass and piano (where precise pitches are specified) from m. 580. For instance, in m. 580, the intervals between the saxophone and trumpet alternate between major and minor sixths (the minor sixth on the second sixteenth-note beat spelled as an augmented fifth) while in m. 585, there is a succession of parallel consecutive major sixths between the baritone saxophone and bassoon.

### **Part 3: m. 587**

The Finale is less precisely notated than the opening and middle movements and, with the exception of the cadenza, this is especially the case in the sparsely notated, semi-improvised final part of the movement beginning in m. 587. The various actions to be performed by the soloist and the musicians in the ensemble are mostly indicated with verbal instructions including a general note at the beginning of Part 3. The only exceptions are notated repeated patterns in some of the instrumental parts. The instructions themselves are somewhat lacking in detail, even if the section is designed to be semi-improvised. This is particularly the case in the solo part, which includes only very rough indications of the actions to be carried out. The instructions in the individual instrumental parts are, however, supplemented by the information in the general note at the beginning, which is essentially a description of the scenario (though some decoding is required). The ensemble is divided into duos and trios, each of which is assigned to – and its musical material initiated by – a specific object or action and its resulting sounds inside the box (what are referred to as “duo-partners” of the duos and trios), which the duos and trios “imitate and play up against” using the given notated patterns and verbal instructions. The cue for the duos and trios to end a repeated notated pattern or other musical element is the ceasing of its associated object or action inside the box. As the section progresses, the performers are instructed to “take more and more freedom” and to “slowly increase in dynamics and activity” in tandem with an increasing disorder inside the box. They are also instructed to imitate or interpret any sound they might hear

coming from inside the box, “planned as well as unplanned,” but always within what the composer describes as “the sound world given by the box.”

Part 3 begins with the soloist adjusting the positions of the rubber bands installed during the finger snap dance so that, gradually, all four rubber bands are interacting – in quasi-Rube Goldberg fashion – with the revolving piece of string at the same time. The combination of the uneven, continuously sounding notes of the rubber bands interacting with the revolving piece of string upsets the usual regularity of the repeated sixteenth-notes and produces a contrapuntal rhythmico-mechanical effect that is somewhat reminiscent of György Ligeti’s *Poème Symphonique* (albeit on a much smaller scale). At the same time, trios from each of the ensemble groups (the same trio combinations as before) enter one at a time (in tandem with the rubber band entries), with their own unsynchronized repeated patterns, which imitate the uneven rattling of the piece of string striking the rubber bands coming from the box. Each trio is assigned to a specific rubber band inside the box: group 3 enters with the initiation of the front left rubber band’s contact with the revolving piece of string; group 1 enters with the back left rubber band; and group 2 enters with the back right rubber band. The patterns in the trios (the only notated elements in the final part) are, like the repeated sixteenth-note chords in the trios beginning in m. 561 (before the glissandi effect is added) based on, what I referred to earlier as, the rubber band chords from the section beginning in m. 485 (the snap dance, second time round). Here, they are composed of a similar combination of effects: (in order of entry) roto tom combined with repeated buzz notes in the harp and open string pizzicato notes in the cello in group 3; roto tom combined

with unspecified muted notes in the piano and open string pizzicato notes in the double bass in group 1; and roto tom combined with the same open fifth (E, B) dyad in the electric guitar as earlier and open string pizzicato notes in the viola in group 2.

From here to the end, the scene becomes increasingly chaotic, even absurd, as the soloist begins adding more and more items to the box, which interact with and become part of the semi-automated musical machine/instrument until, eventually, everything, including the music itself, begins to break down. First, the soloist inserts two “hanging cups” (plastic cups attached to rubber bands) into the box, which he attaches to screws in the roof (so that they hang down on either side of the fan) and, like the quartet of rubber bands, interact with the revolving piece of string, eliciting a succession of continuous but uneven hollow tapping sounds. The addition of the hanging cups initiates, what the score refers to as, “sharp impulse-sounds” in percussion and string duos in each of the instrumental groups (roto toms combined with various loosely-defined percussive sounds in the strings) that imitate and blend with the sounds of the cups interacting with the revolving piece of string (the percussionist and cellist from group 3 “partnering with” the left hanging cup and the percussionists and string players from groups 1 and 2 partnering with the right hanging cup). Meanwhile, the piano and harp (from groups 1 and 3 respectively) continue their initial repeated patterns with the harp slowly adding undefined glissandi to its repeated pedal buzz notes on the E string.

Next, the soloist adds four mini fans, two at a time, to the box. As the soloist is inserting the mini fans, before placing them on the floor next to the larger fan in the center of the

box, he holds them, momentarily, to the back mics. This both focuses the viewer-listener's attention on the buzzing sound that the mini fans make and, by subtly altering the positions of the fans in relation to the mics, creates a quasi-glissando or -Doppler effect, referred to in the score as "MINI FAN SIREN." Once the siren effect begins, this is the cue for a trio of trumpet and percussion 1 and 3 to begin corresponding siren effects: the trumpet executes a harmonic glissando to, and then away from, a fortissimo high C; there is a crescendo and decrescendo to fortissimo with thunder sheets in percussion 1; and, in percussion 3, an accelerating and decelerating electric drill. The introduction of the mini fans also initiates unspecified "long deep notes" with a staggered "fading in and out ad lib." in the bass clarinet and horn, which partner with mini fans 1 and 2, followed by similar long deep notes in the bassoon and trombone, partnered with mini fans 3 and 4.

The soloist then fixes a fabric strip around the adjusted rubber bands (giving the interior of the box the appearance of a makeshift boxing ring). This initiates a vaguely defined change to the repeated notes in the piano, electric guitar and harp parts. Next, the soloist adds two further mini fans (mini fans 5 and 6) to the box. The fans are used to produce the same siren/Doppler effects as before, which as accompanied, as before, by corresponding effects in the trumpet and percussion. Additional "long deep notes fading in and out ad lib." are also initiated here in the baritone saxophone, which enters for the first time in the section. The saxophone is also instructed to imitate "other sounds from the box or the ensemble ad lib.," in keeping with the prescribed increase in freedom in the instrumental parts as the section progresses.

As the piece nears its conclusion, the playful and irreverent qualities of the music come to the fore as the piece descends into farce. Added to the growing collection of everyday objects now inhabiting the box, is, of all things, a balloon. This is a somewhat surprising addition despite the general oddness of the scenario. The balloon is inflated via a PVC tube while the bass clarinet temporarily interrupts its long deep notes to imitate and repeat the quasi-whistle tone effect produced by the soloist blowing air through the tube. Once sufficiently inflated, the soloist ties the balloon (to keep the air in) and places it atop the desktop fan in the middle of the box. There, it is confined to a limited area about the fan and kept in continuous if irregular contact with the fan's revolving propeller by the fabric strip attached to the rubber bands. The sound of the balloon interacting with the propeller of the fan adds further to the cacophony of sound now emanating from the box.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, the trumpet and percussion trio ceases its repeated siren effects and mimics the sound of the balloon in the box with balloons of their own, rubbing or otherwise applying pressure to the balloons with their hands.

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<sup>30</sup> In a lecture delivered at IRCAM in 2018, Steen-Andersen suggests that the sound of the rotating piece of string attached to the fan striking the balloon is an allusion to the pulsars in Gérard Grisey's *Le noir de l'étoile* (1989–90). Grisey integrates recordings of pulsars – rapidly rotating neutron stars that survive after a solar system implodes and emit electromagnetic waves that can be converted to sound – into *Le noir*, which are combined with the sounds of and emulated by the percussionists. Much of the third movement of *Black Box Music*, in particular from the introduction of the desktop fan m. 531 to the end and its continuous pulsations, bears a certain superficial resemblance to *Le noir*. It seems plausible that the set-up of *Le noir*, with its six percussionists dispersed around the audience, also influenced Steen-Andersen's work (Steen-Andersen, “[ircam] A musical approach to audio/visual composition: Implicit AV aspects ...”).

At this point, the soloist switches the down light off and switches the back light on. The musical machine, which the soloist has been gradually constructing over the course of the movement, is now complete and, in quasi-Rube Goldberg fashion, working independently of the soloist. The cacophony of sound, coming from both the box and the ensemble, continues for around twenty seconds before the soloist begins blowing serpentine streamers (party streamers) into the box continuously for several minutes. The soloist now appears to be throwing a party in the box! The soloist's objective, as described in the general note at the beginning of the section, is to make all of the fans gradually stop working by continuously filling the box with the streamers, which obstruct the motions of the fans. Consequently, the machine, and the music, break down.<sup>31</sup> As the fans gradually stop working and the cacophony from inside the box begins to die down, there is a corresponding diminuendo by the instrumentalists, who are now improvising quite freely, as they try to match the instructed "softer and softer levels" of the sound coming from the box. Eventually, everything stops (the ensemble stopping with the fans) and, after a few seconds of silence, the soloist switches off the light of the box for the final time.

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<sup>31</sup> The score indicates that the soloist may not succeed in stopping all of the fans with the streamers, in which case the soloist is instructed to manually turn off the fans after the back light has been switched off at the very end.

## CLOSING REMARKS

In the present thesis, I have explored the music of Simon Steen-Andersen, who, despite his relative youth, is one of the most successful and widely performed composers of his generation. In the preceding chapters we have seen how the composer's focus on integrating concrete elements into his music has led him to foreground elements of live musical performance. This focus can in large part account for the appeal of his work, together with its inventiveness, humor and sheer entertainment value. While Steen-Andersen's project of integrating concrete elements of the live performance situation into his music initially focused on physical-choreographic elements, in works such as the *Next to Beside Besides* series and the *Studies for String Instruments* there is a clear shift towards a more explicit focus on the visual elements of musical performance. In *Run Time Error*, Steen-Andersen develops some of the ideas introduced in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments*, but *Run Time Error* is also more visual in conception than the earlier works, something evident in the inherently visual aspects of its set-up and staging. In *Black Box Music*, Steen-Andersen continues his exploration of the visual aspects of musical performance through a playful exploitation of the conductor-orchestra relationship and what he refers to as "the audiovisual relations inherent in conducting." Here, we find the culmination of Steen-Andersen's exploration of the physical-choreographic and visual elements of performance that he began in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments* and *Black Box Music* remains his most sophisticated exploration of the relationship between visual and sounding elements in his music to date.

Since *Black Box Music*, Steen-Andersen has continued to focus on and foreground the visual aspects of musical performance in works such as the *Piano Concerto*, *Asthma* and *TRIO*, as well as the continuously-evolving *Run Time Error*. However, despite an impressive and often-virtuosic interplay between visual and sounding elements in these works (*TRIO* perhaps being the prime example), curiously, the composer's focus on visual aspects has become, in some respects, more conventional. The visual dimension in these works primarily involves a foregrounding of live and interactive video elements, which are combined with live performance. Often, the visual material itself is the primary focus, considered in isolation, with the performers relegated to a supporting role. In *TRIO*, despite the carefully synchronized counterpoint and antiphonal relationships established between the repurposed video material and the live performers, the role of the live performers is, at times, largely incidental to the rapid succession of prominently displayed images. In *Asthma*, the accordionist performs a live soundtrack to a muted video. Indeed, *Asthma* can be considered primarily a video work. This focus on multimedia elements is related to Steen-Andersen's tendency in recent works to conceive of music as, above all, spectacle. At times, the sounding and other elements of a work are hopelessly overpowered by the visual display. *Black Box Music*, with its playful undercutting of the assumed cause and effect relationship between what we see and what we hear, between the physical gestures of the conductor and the responses in the ensemble, still remains his most novel and sophisticated exploration of the visual elements of musical performance. In *Black Box Music*, Steen-Andersen's focus was on the *relationship* between the visual and sounding elements. In later works, we find the focus is often on the visual material itself.

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There is a lingering question at the end of my discussion. What is the significance of Steen-Andersen's foregrounding of the physical aspects of music? Beyond the humor and virtuosic interplay between live and video elements, does Steen-Andersen develop a critical perspective on his musical material, in particular his visual material? Often, a broader critique is implied but never clearly articulated. In *Black Box Music*, for instance, beyond a foregrounding of the conductor's gestures and allusions to other forms of live performance, does Steen-Andersen offer a genuine deconstruction or critical analysis of the role of the conductor and the conductor-orchestra relationship? Steen-Andersen's characterization of the conductor in *Black Box Music* appeals to a (somewhat anachronistic) popular image of a conductor as a kind of authoritarian dictator, a characterization that aligns, at least superficially, with Adorno's caricature of a conductor in his essay 'Conductor and Orchestra' (mentioned in Chapter 3). For Adorno, the modern conductor represented the music appreciation-racket, which in turn embodied the Culture Industry and its fusion of culture and entertainment.<sup>1</sup> In Adorno's essay, the relationship between conductor and orchestra is also presented as a

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<sup>1</sup> Adorno's caricature of a conductor in 'Conductor and Orchestra' and elsewhere appears to be based primarily on Arturo Toscanini (although Toscanini is mentioned only in passing in 'Conductor and Orchestra'). Adorno had a particular dislike for Toscanini who, as 'high priest of the music appreciation movement of the thirties and forties,' became, for Adorno, a byword for (what Virgil Thomson dubbed) the 'music appreciation-racket' and its mass marketing of classical music in America (Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini: How He Became an American Culture-God and Helped Create a New Audience for Old Music* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1987), 3; Virgil Thomson, "Why Composers Write How," in *Virgil Thomson: A Reader: Selected Writings, 1924-1984*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Routledge, 2013), 22-47).

microcosm of modern society and the relationship between individuals and their political leaders. Unlike Adorno, however, in Steen-Andersen's representation of the role of a conductor, it is unclear if he is attempting to illuminate a deeper political or sociological point or simply exposing the inherent ridiculousness of the conductor's gestures. Steen-Andersen's deconstruction of his musical material in *Black Box Music*, and in other works such as the *Study for String Instrument #1*, would seem primarily to involve a breaking down of the musical material into its constituent elements: in *Black Box Music*, the conductor's gestures and the ensemble's responses and in *Study #1*, the left- and right-hand movements. Even Steen-Andersen's deconstruction, it seems, takes a literal shape.

In *TRIO*, Steen-Andersen returns to the topic of the role of the conductor and the conductor-orchestra relationship. Here, the composer appears to reference the Culture Industry and, in particular, the Situationists' notion of the 'spectacle'. With its almost unrelenting stream of repurposed audiovisual material from the SWR archives, *TRIO* is undoubtedly Steen-Andersen's most spectacular work. Steen-Andersen draws our attention to the spectacle itself by incorporating footage of audiences applauding at the beginning and at end of the work. The composer even appears to reference (accidentally or otherwise) the iconic cover image from the 1970 publication of Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Steen-Andersen's repurposing or 'repackaging' of

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<sup>2</sup> The photograph for the cover of the 1970 publication of *The Society of the Spectacle* by Black and Red Books (the first English translation) was taken by *Life* magazine photographer J. R. Eyerman. The photograph was taken at the premiere of *Bwana Devil* (1952), the first feature-length 3-D film in color, and shows the audience wearing anaglyph glasses gazing passively at the screen in a virtual trance.

classical music in *TRIO* might be read as an example of a Situationist-like ‘détournement’ resulting in a subversion or disfigurement of the audiovisual material (consider, for example, the way in which Celibidache is mocked through the subtle editing of the original video footage and the ironic repetition of his comments by the choir) while adding to and breathing new life into it. But does Steen-Andersen rescue the familiar music and its performers from the wider spectacle or are they subsumed by the novelty and spectacle of Steen-Andersen’s work? Is there a larger critique at play here? Is it all just part of the spectacle?

Consider the work of some of those artists I have mentioned as models or sources of inspiration for Steen-Andersen’s work in the preceding chapters. Martin Arnold clearly expresses his critical stance towards his material in his description of Hollywood as “a cinema of exclusion, reduction and denial, a cinema of repressions.”<sup>3</sup> This stance is then borne out in his exposure of hidden meanings in otherwise mundane scenes from old Hollywood movies. Similarly, the directors associated with Dogme 95 express a clear critical stance towards their medium. Their dogmas are mobilized in the service of a deep suspicion about the artificiality of mainstream cinema. Within the realm of contemporary classical music, Lachenmann offers a clear critical perspective on his musical material through his interrogation of (what he refers to as) the “aesthetic apparatus,” including aspects of its interpretation, reception and other aspects of the social mediation of the work. Steen-Andersen amplifies and exposes the performative

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<sup>3</sup> Olga Moskatova, “Re-Inscriptions: Microscopy of Time and Motion,” in *Meta- and Inter-Images in Contemporary Visual Art and Culture*, ed. by Carla Taban (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013), 197).

and visual elements of music but it is unclear *what* we are looking at, so to speak, or what meaning is to be derived from them. At times, rather than offering a critical perspective, Steen-Andersen would even seem to affirm accepted meanings and assumptions, such as the tropes and conventions of the conductor-orchestra relationship or the instruments employed.

Yet, Steen-Andersen's music exhibits a skillful and often virtuosic control of its formal features. While many of his contemporaries produce music that similarly emphasizes the performative and visual aspects of music-making, Steen-Andersen's success may lie in the fact that (to put it bluntly) he simply does it better than anybody else. His success may also be attributed to the fact that, while he frequently strays into areas such as theater, performance art, installation and so on, Steen-Andersen's work is always rooted in musical performance. His work always remains within the realm of music and a recognizably musical experience. Indeed, for Steen-Andersen, his focus on the concrete elements of performance has always been about emphasizing or amplifying features that are unique to and already present in music, whether it is the literal amplification of hidden or subverted sounds in his exploration of microscopic sounds, the physical movements of the performers in *Next to Beside Besides* and the *Studies for String Instruments*, or the relationship between the visual gestures of the conductor and the sounds of the ensemble in *Black Box Music*. To some extent, *Run Time Error* falls outside of this pattern with its elaborately constructed obstacle course, but even here the composer is amplifying aspects of the live concert situation and incorporating the venue itself into the work, using it as a giant percussion instrument. For Steen-Andersen, the

visual element is an expansion of what is already there, not something added or extraneous to the music. At a time when most of us consume music primarily through its mechanical reproduction, disconnected from the manner in which the sounds are produced, Steen-Andersen's music is a vivid reminder of the physicality of music and that music is always inherently visual. Steen-Andersen's music is, in the composer's own words, "visual music."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Stene, "This is Not a Drum," 48n83. See also, Holmboe, "Out of the Box," 4.

## APPENDIX

### LIST OF WORKS BY SIMON STEEN-ANDERSEN

The following list of works by Simon Steen-Andersen has been compiled primarily from a list of works on the composer's personal website and from the scores available from the composer's publisher, Edition S.<sup>1</sup> Further information has been garnered from catalogues of works published in *Musique transitive* and in *MusikTexte*.<sup>2</sup> Works marked with an asterisk [\*] are unpublished (possibly withdrawn), not yet published (as of March 2021) or do not have a score. The list is in reverse chronological order.

*Walk the Walk* (2020)\*

for 4 performers, treadmills, objects, light and smoke

*Automata-Etude* (2019)\*

video work in 5 parts for solo instruments and robotics in collaboration with filmmaker Michael Madsen and SCENATET (ensemble); robotic choreography by Feileacan McCormick<sup>3</sup>

*TRIO* (2019)

for orchestra, big band, choir and video

*Radio Archive Scale* (2018)\*<sup>4</sup>

for radio

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<sup>1</sup> "List of works (in chronologic order)," accessed March 7, 2021, [http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng\\_CV.htm](http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng_CV.htm). Many of Steen-Andersen's scores can be viewed online on the Edition S website (<https://www.edition-s.dk/composer/simon-steen-andersen>).

<sup>2</sup> "Catalogue of Works," in *Simon Steen-Andersen - Musique transitive*, ed. Pierre Roullier (Paris: Ensemble 2e2m, 2014), 163-170; Herzfeld, "'Radikal und unmittelbar,'" 12.

<sup>3</sup> The individual studies are composed for "audience," cello, percussion and trombone (2 versions).

<sup>4</sup> Produced for Danish online radio station The Lake Radio's annual Works for Radio program (<http://thelakeradio.com>).

*Rasmussen-shuffle* (2017)\*<sup>5</sup>  
for sinfonietta

*Asthma* (2017)  
for accordion and video<sup>6</sup>

“*if this then that and now what*” (2016)  
music theatre for 4 actors, 2 trombones, 4 percussionists and 12 strings

*Korpus* (2015)  
for 3 Harry Partch instruments played by 7-8 musicians

*Piano Concerto* (2014)  
for piano, sampler, orchestra and video

*Buenos Aires* (2014)\*<sup>7</sup>  
music theatre in 5 scenes for 5 singers and 4 musicians

*Mono* (2014)  
“Autotune Study” for male voice, keyboard and electronics

*Inszenierte Nacht* (2013)\*  
stagings of pieces by Bach, Schumann, Mozart and Ravel for trumpet,  
trombone, percussion, piano, guitar, cello and electronics

*Half a Bit of Nothing Integrated* (2012)\*  
for amplified objects and live video (1 performer)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A short, unpublished work written to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of Steen-Andersen’s former teacher Karl Aage Rasmussens (not included in the list of works on the composer’s personal website).

<sup>6</sup> A version for percussion solo and video has also been performed (“Upcoming Concerts and Broadcasts,” accessed March 7, 2021, Steen-Andersen’s personal website, [http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng\\_aktuell.htm](http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/eng_aktuell.htm)). A version for ensemble is incorporated into an expanded version of *Run Time Error* entitled *The Way Sounds Go*.

<sup>7</sup> According to the composer (communicated to the author via the composer’s publisher), there is no score for *Buenos Aires* but there is a script with cues and stage directions and “a few things are written out in music” (Edition S, e-mail message to author, December 3, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> A version for string quartet and video was performed by the JACK Quartet at Miller Theater, New York in 2015.

- Obstruction Study #1-3* (2012)\*  
video installation (featuring the JACK Quartet)
- Black Box Music* (2012)  
for performer, amplified box, sinfonietta and video
- String Quartet #2* (2012)  
for strings with prepared and amplified bows
- Im Rauschen* (2012)  
“Three Situations After Schumann” for piccolo (playable by a non-flutist), flute  
and bass clarinet with intra-instrumental playback
- Snebillede* (2011)\*  
video installation in collaboration with Henrik Budde
- History of My Instrument* (2011)  
for prepared harp and video
- Study for String Instrument #3* (2011)  
for cello (or guitar) and video
- Double Up* (2010)  
for sampler and small orchestra
- Walker* (2010)\*  
soundtrack/sound design for an animated video by Carl Krull
- Study for String Instrument #2* (2009)  
for 1 or more string instruments and whammy pedal
- Run Time Error* (2009)\*  
video installation/performance
- Self Simulator* (2009)\*  
interactive installation

*A Bit of Nothing Integrated* (2008)\*  
for 3 performers and live video

*Pretty Sound (Up and Down)* (2008)  
for amplified piano (played by a pianist or percussionist)

*Beloved Brother* (2008)  
2 movements from J. S. Bach's *Capriccio in B-flat Major* ("On the Departure of His Dearly Beloved Brother") arranged for "backside-guitar"

*On And Off And To And Fro* (2008)  
for soprano saxophone, vibraphone, double bass and 3 players with megaphones<sup>9</sup>

*Ouvertures* (2008, rev. 2010)  
for amplified guzheng, sampler and orchestra

*soundTAG* (2008)\*  
"epidemic sound installation (room, street and web) in cooperation with Kaj Aune"<sup>10</sup>

*Study for String Instrument #1* (2007)  
for 1 or more string instruments

*Nothing Integrated* (2007)\*  
for extremely amplified clarinet, percussion, cello and live video

*Difficulties Putting it into Practice* (2007, rev. 2014)<sup>11</sup>  
for 2 or 4 amplified performers

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<sup>9</sup> An alternative instrumentation exists with E-flat clarinet and cello instead of saxophone and double bass.

<sup>10</sup> "List of works (in chronologic order)." The website [www.soundtag.info](http://www.soundtag.info) is no longer active.

<sup>11</sup> The work was previously titled *In Her Frown* and appears on the recording *Pretty Sound* with this title (Simon Steen-Andersen, *Pretty Sound: Solo and Chamber Works*, with Asamisimasa, Dacapo 8.2226523, 2011, compact disc). Originally scored for 2 sopranos with amplification, the version on *Pretty Sound* was "transposed" for 2 non-singing performers (performed by Steen-Andersen and Håkon Stene) (Stene, "This is Not a Drum," 53). It was revised in 2014 and it is presumably at this point that the version for 4 performers was created and the title changed.

*In Spite Of, And Maybe Even Therefore* (2007)

for amplified flute, clarinet and horn + unamplified contrabassoon, piano,  
percussion and double bass

*Chambered Music* (2007)

for 12 instruments and sampler

*loloopop* (2006)\*

audiovisual installation in collaboration with Carl Krull

*[sproglyd]* (2005)\*

interactive webpage for Norwegian and Danish words and phonemes + string  
quartet (<http://simonsteenandersen.dk/sproglyd/>)

*Within Amongst* (2005)\*

“anti-kadenza” for amplified guitar

*Amongst* (2005)

concerto for extremely amplified guitar and large orchestra

*Next to Beside Besides #1-13* (2005-)<sup>12</sup>

for amplified solo instruments

#13 (2008) for guitar

#12 (2008) for accordion

#11 (2007) for vibraphone

#10 (2007) for video camera

#9 (2007) for double bass

#8 (2006) for guitar

#7 (2006) for piano with whammy pedal

#6 (2006) for violin

#5 (2006) for piccolo flute

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<sup>12</sup> The individual pieces can be played alone or together as duos, trios, etc. and ensemble pieces in any combination or as movements in any combination. Combinations with video, where the musicians play together with video recordings of themselves, are called *Self-Reflecting Next to Beside Besides*. A version with video for vibraphone tubes, air spray (gas duster) and table tennis bat titled *Self-Reflecting Next to Beside Besides #14* was performed by asamisimasa at November Music, The Netherlands in 2012 (see “asimisimasa and Simon Steen-Andersen @ November Music, Holland,” asamisimasa website, accessed March 7, 2021, <https://www.asamisimasa.com/event/asamisimasa-and-simon-steen-andersen-november-music-holland>) but is not listed among the “versions so far” at the front of the published scores to #'s 1-13 (see, for instance, Simon Steen-Andersen, *Next to Beside Besides #13* (Copenhagen: Edition S, 2017), front matter).

#4 (2006) for percussion  
#3 (2005) for accordion  
#2 (2005) for (any) saxophone  
#1 (2005) for double bass

*Amid* (2004)

for flute, clarinet, piano, guitar, percussion, violin and cello (with optional amplification)

*Beside Besides* (2003)

subtitle: “(or Next to Beside Besides #0)”  
fragment for solo cello

*Besides* (2003, rev. 2010)

for amplified piano, violin and flute + muted string trio

*Drownwords* (2003, rev. 2019)\*

for soprano and guitar, both amplified

*Rerendered* (2003, rev. 2004)

for pianist and 2 assistants (with optional participating conductor and optional live video)

*Amongst (Unattended Ones)* (2002)\*<sup>13</sup>

for 2 percussionists with adjustable gain

*Split Point* (2002)

for percussion solo

*Spin-Off* (2002)

for soprano saxophone, trumpet, accordion and double bass<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This work, which is not included in the list of works on the composer’s personal website, is included in the *MusikTexte* catalogue, referred to as *Among (Unattended Ones)* (Herzfeld, “Radikal und unmittelbar,” 12). Håkon Stene, who commissioned and, with Kjell Tore Innervik, premiered the work at the 2002 Ultima Festival, also mentions the work using the given title (Stene, “This is Not a Drum,” 44).

<sup>14</sup> A trio version without trumpet also exists.

*Praesens* (2001)  
for 14 musicians

*Electro Miniature* (2001)\*  
for tape

*in-side-out-side-in...* (2001)  
for guitar

*De Profundis* (2000)  
for soprano saxophonist (also playing percussion)<sup>15</sup>

*Impromptu* (2000)\*  
for English horn, bass clarinet, bassoon and baritone saxophone

*Miniature* (2000)\*  
prepared piano and cello

*String Quartet* (1999)

*Punctus contra punctum* (1999)\*  
for organ

*Polaroid* (1999)\*  
a saxophone collage for tape for the short film *Polaroid*

*Sinfonietta Variations* (1999)\*  
for sinfonietta and saxophone

*Aurora Ritual* (1999)\*  
for orchestra

*Etude No. 1* (1999)  
for piano

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<sup>15</sup> Although not mentioned in the score, the work can also be performed on clarinet (see “De Profundis,” Edition S, accessed March 7, 2021, <http://www.edition-s.dk/music/simon-steen-andersen/de-profundis>). A published version also exists for bass clarinet.

*Study for Alto Saxophone and Percussion* (1998)

*4 Petites* (1998)\*  
for cello

*Suite* (1998)\*  
for ensemble

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