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Tales of a Talking Piano: Performing for childlike adults or adultlike children

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Abstract This paper discusses the theoretical rationale and practical experimentations that culminated in the project *Tales of a Talking Piano* for speaking pianist. The project involves pre-existing piano music composed on the subject of the child, along with a commissioned, original fairy tale by the musician and author Dr. Andriana Minou. The repertoire consists of fragments of Sofia Gubaidulina's *Musical Toys* (1969), Helmut Lachenmann's *Ein Kinderspiel* (1980), and Robert Schumann's *Kinderszenen* op.15 (1838). Departing from the proposition that in these works the composers attempted to empathize with the condition of 'childhood' rather than write for children from an adult's perspective, as well as experiment with the notions of 'toys' and 'games', these works embody a self-contradictory condition between childhood and adulthood. The main focus here is the role of the performer in relation to these works, and equally their interaction with this 'condition of childhood', in contemporary performance. In this project, the performer almost becomes a collaborator to the original piece, an arranger of the pre-existing music, and a storyteller. In the end, the performance aspires to create an experience in which adulthood and childhood are equalised through becoming transparent, rendering the music fairy-tale relevant to both adults and children. The first part of this paper examines the theoretical background behind the notion that these works were composed on the condition of 'childhood', and introduces the concept of 'games' and 'toys' as a means of inspiration and compositional method. The second part details the collaboration with Dr. Andriana Minou, and the methodology behind blending various musical material from the particular piano repertoire with the fairy-tale.

Keywords music for children; contemporary music; Tales of a Talking Piano; music about children;

Introduction

Tales of a Talking Piano is a creative practice project in which the performer explores creative ideas in relation to the performance of piano repertoire composed on the condition of childhood. The detailed analysis and study of the piano repertoire of this genre and the various compositional methods used by each composer, resulted in the question of how can this concept of 'childhood' inform individual performance decisions and programming, here in reference to Henk Borgdorff's notion of 'discovery-led' research (rather than 'hypothesis-led' research) (Mateus-Berr, 2013, p. 154). To test the premises of this approach, I experimented with performing these compositions in different contexts, curating each performance in diverse ways, and adopting what I purport as the composers' creative stimulus while composing these works – in other words, a condition of childhood with the aim of creating something 'new'.

In the process of experimenting with, and exploring this repertoire both theoretically and creatively, the project *Tales of a Talking Piano* emerged, and with it an expanded understanding of the role of the performer and the nature of the performance: The performer evolved from a mere executor of the music to the arranger of the music and story-teller, and the project became a cross-art collaboration with the addition of an original fairy-tale written specifically for this repertoire by Andriana Minou. As such, *Tales of a Talking Piano* is a collaboration between a performer and a writer, in which an original fairy-tale and pre-existing music composed on the subject of the child are put together to create a musical

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fairy-tale. In this context, a music fairy-tale is understood as a genre in which text and music complement each other, aspiring to create an experience in which the conditions of adulthood and childhood inform one another, through the performers' interpretation of the work. The methodology used in creating the music fairy-tales is informed by the musical material itself, highlighting existing hidden storylines that remain concealed unless approached in this manner. Therefore, in this project the study of the piano repertoire – theoretically and creatively – made methodology itself part of my exploration as a performer, and informed the direction for realising the collaborative project *Tales of a Talking Piano*.

The following section details the theoretical context of this project through discussing piano repertoire for/about children, and focusing on the particular examples of Gubaidulina and Lachenmann. The section "Tales of a Talking Piano" is an analysis of the process and the theoretical and creative exploration behind this collaborative project.

Setting the Context

The broad category of "music for children" showcases various dimensions, according to the function and scope of each composition in relation to children. For the purposes of this paper I will be referring to "music for children" as a genre, and will be separating this genre into two categories, with overlapping characteristics:

1. Music deliberately composed for young pianists/children with a pedagogical intention. This includes:
    - *Exercises in technical advancement*, such as exercises by Charles-Louis Hanon, Ferdinand Beyer, etc. In this category, there is a clear rationale that the compositions target to the progression of technique.
    - *Musical pieces for young pianists/children*, which target at improving the technical aspects of playing through musical pieces attuned to children.
2. Music composed on the subject of the child and/or through a state of 'being a child'. This category includes the objects of study of this project.

1. Composing for young pianists/children with a pedagogical intention

This category can be divided into two further sub-categories that include technical exercises intending to advance technique, and musical pieces for young pianists/children. Here I will concentrate my analysis on musical pieces for children/young pianists with a pedagogical intention. It is assumed that when composers write music for children, their target is children that are in the process of learning an instrument (from beginners to advanced). And even though all music can be considered instructive and hence pedagogical in different ways, here I will be examining those works created as explicitly pedagogical.

Dmitry Kabalevsky, a composer and educator devoted in composing for children of various levels, argued:

> *In order to compose music for children, it is not enough to be only a composer. One has to be at the same time a* composer*, a* teacher*, and an* educator*. A* composer *will see to it that music is good and fascinating. A* teacher *will see to it that the music is expedient from the pedagogical standpoint and useful. An* educator *will have in mind that music, like any art, educates children: cultivates not only their artistic taste and creative imagination but rears in them love of life, love of mankind, of nature* […] (Kabalevsky, 1964, p. 49)

This view encapsulates one of the most challenging aspects of composing for children. The challenge of composing something within certain technical limitations (level of student), which aims to advance or cultivate specific dexterities of young pianists, but without compromising the artistic integrity of the music and music making *per se*. Although there is a vast selection of performance pieces for children and piano teaching methods with original material, it is more often that we encounter music that compromises artistic integrity to technical progression. Nevertheless, a variety of examples manage to achieve a balance between the composer-teacher-educator triptych that Kabalevsky is suggesting: Kabalevsky's own piano cycles and pieces for the beginner and intermediate pianist; Aram Khachaturian's *Children's Album* (1926-1947) for intermediate - advance student; Bela Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* (1926-1939) that consists of six books of progressive technical difficulty that introduces the student to technical features of the instrument, various uses of harmony and form, through artistically intriguing pieces evidently composed by Bartók (Suchoff, 1961). What these three examples share is that, while they were all explicitly composed for children, they achieved to utilize the 'compromises' in their favor and result in music consistent to the composers' artistic nature and vision.

Contemporary practice in this spirit has been institutionalized in events such as the "Mauricio Kagel Composition Competition" that has been actively involved in promoting new music for children and young adults with an educational perspective – a prominent example is Matius Shan-Boone's work, *6 views from my window* (winner of the competition in 2016). According to the organizers:

> *Everything appears to exist already, even pieces for children and young adults. Still, far too frequently it is precisely this contemporary „educational literature" which proves lacking in artistic qualities; accompanying a reduction in technical difficulty, with an objectionable reduction in the notion of what children and young adults are capable of understanding – both intellectually and emotionally.*
> *We are looking for piano pieces written for children and young adults which, although limited in their technical difficulty, remain uncompromising in their artistic aim; pieces written with a contemporary compositional technique which offer the young student stimulus, insight and new experiences: experiences about oneself and the world in which we live* (Mauricio Kagel Composition Competition, 2017).

1.1 In between the two main categories of music for children

A more recent example that stands in between the two main categories of music for children (composing for pedagogical reasons, and composing on the subject of the child), is György Kurtág's *Játékok*, a cycle of nine volumes composed between 1960 and 2017. *Játékok*, which translates as 'games' in English, undoubtedly belongs to the first category as Kurtág specifies the pedagogical intention of the work, but he also points at strong parallels with the second category that he drew inspiration from the convention of childhood and the act of 'being a child' through the use of 'games'.

Kurtág believed that conventional pedagogical methods limited the education and development of young pianists in relation to musical expression, their relationship with their body and instrument, and so he attempted to fix this problem with these 'games' (Jang, 2015, pp. 2-3). The quality that distinguishes *Játékok* from the conventions of other pedagogical piano pieces, is that Kurtág departs from the conventional format of pedagogical methods, and composes performance pieces for young pianists using graphic notation, extended techniques,[2] as well as traditional elements of piano playing. He promotes a rounded approach to piano playing in the sense of developing mutually technical aspects and musical expression.

Amid the various pedagogical inputs of *Játékok*,[3] what is of interest here is that it challenges the imagination through the act of games, and introduces knowledge through what Kristiina Junttu describes as the 'spontaneous nature of children at play' (Junttu, n.d.).[4] Concentrating a bit more on this model of 'games', Gabriel Neves Coelho proposes a wider understanding of the word 'games' that takes significance in *Játékok* within three aspects: 'playing' as the act of performing a piece; 'playing' as the act of childhood 'playfulness' in which the word 'toys' is embedded; and 'playing' in the sense of 'compositional and/or cultural games' (Coelho, 2014, p. iv). This very last branch of playing – which will prove a meaningful resource when discussing Lachenmann's *Ein Kinderspiel* shortly – reveals new perspectives in regards to what 'playing' can mean to the composer and how a 'game' could seem "childish". On the other hand, the fact that such compositions could also be considered a statement or comment on existing traditions, conventions, and practices on the part of the composer (see for example Coelho, 2014, iv), render these works directly relevant to adults even if not for pedagogical reasons.

2. Composing on the subject of the child and/or through 'being a child'

> *How have composers risen to the challenge inherent in children? By providing them with a potty or with fruitful syntheses of artistic creativity and pedagogical wisdom? By setting themselves up as children's composers or by recognising the fact that children are ultimately the most unyielding challenge the composer is ever likely to come across (as Einojuhani Rautavaara never tires of pointing out)?* (Linjama, 1999)

The works of this category, and particularly the works of this project – *Musical Toys*, *Ein Kinderspiel* and *Kinderszenen* – were not composed for children as the works in the first category, but rather *about* children and childhood. These works were not composed with a pedagogical intention, even though they can certainly be instructive for young pianists. Instead, these works use the condition of childhood in various capacities as a starting point for composing and 'approaching' children through their own nature. Children's nature, as approached by Leonard Meyer, denotes the neutral perspective that is not determined by cultural expectations, since "the child symbolizes the ideas of acontextuality and

[2] The players are requested to use not only their fingers, but also their palm, fist and forearm exploring the whole range of the instrument through glissandi and clusters, and using their whole body.
[3] Some of the pedagogical goals of *Játékok* are the following: Familiarizing young pianists with a new musical language, new format of notation, and sound possibilities of the instrument; the expansion of the kinesthetic abilities of the players and their relationship with the instrument (Junttu, 2008); and, developing musical expression (Shi, 2016).
[4] According to Junttu: "Kurtág began writing a set of very short pieces which were inspired by the spontaneous nature of children at play. In Játékok he tries to recapture something of this spirit." (Junttu, n.d.)

egalitarianism" (Meyer, 1997, p. 174). Furthermore, Meyer makes a direct association of this perception of childhood with music composed 'for and about children':

> *The prevalence of these beliefs is evident in the art of the "high" culture: in the compositions for and about children (for instance, those of Schumann, Saint-Saens, and Debussy) and in literature (from Blake's "Songs of Innocence" to Kipling's "Just So Stories). The truths of innocent childhood result from a closeness to the divinity of nature and are gradually dissipated through the weight of custom… (Meyer, 1997, p. 174)*

Accordingly, this paper is arguing that the works belonging in this category attempted to stimulate creative ideas based on a similar understanding of children's nature.

2.1 Sofia Gubaidulina's Musical Toys

> *Above all, this book is intended as studies in musical expression; it is therefore important that players should respond imaginatively to the titles*. Aki Takahashi (Gubaidulina, 1991)

Gubaidulina's *Musical Toys* (comp.1969), is a collection of fourteen short pieces for children. Pianist and educator Aki Takahashi, describes it foremostly as "studies in musical expression" (as cited in Gubaidulina, 1991), while Michael Kurtz, Gubaidulina's biographer, as "pictorial miniatures that she would have liked to play as a child" (Kurtz, 2007, p. 81). Indeed, the imaginative titles of individual pieces – such as 'Mechanical Accordion', 'The Trumpeter in the Forest' – as well as the collective title of this cycle that introduces the concept of 'toys', ignites the listener's/performer's curiosity for an undiscovered world of sounds. On the other hand, these pieces are excellent examples of studies, not only in musical expression, but also in musical imagination and synesthetic associations. Svetlana Rudenko associates *Musical Toys* with neonatal synaesthesia (see Walker, P. et al., 2010, pp. 21-25) – the condition in which the newborn mixes the senses and is able to perhaps smell the sound or hear the smell. Her methodology focuses on their educational aspect, suggesting ways of using the musical content of *Musical Toys* for enriching and creatively challenging the imagination and response of the young pianist (Rudenko, n.d.).

Still, these pieces are undoubtedly difficult and challenging for children in a number of ways (see Kim, 2015). From a technical perspective, this work requires a large hand span and an advanced finger control movement, for example the echo technique ('The Echo'). It contains complex rhythms, difficult passages ('The Little Tit'), and challenging musical expression ('Song of the Fisherman'). Moreover, it entails dodecaphonic rationality, as well as polyphony within a wider spectrum of artistic spontaneity and freedom. In terms of the edition and format, the pieces do not correspond to one technical level but move in between the standardised level of intermediate and advanced. Additionally, the various extended techniques and technical material that come up in each piece are not accompanied by detailed or pedagogically supportive notes, but are rather simply introduced (only when necessary) in the format in which they would be written in an "adult's" musical score.

These observations accentuate the lack of pedagogical intention on the composer's part as they render the score more 'dysfunctional' or difficult to use in such a context. It could be argued that *Musical Toys* could be intended for children that want to be challenged, or for adults that want to act childlike. Indeed, it has been performed by a good number of professional pianists, while it has also been of some use as pieces for children, whether that

is in graded exams or general repertoire (Gubaidulina, n.d.). Gubaidulina herself commented on *Musical Toys*:

> *I often thought of my childhood and of the lack in those days, of piano pieces that were able to take one back into the highly imaginative world of toys. At the time I also looked upon toys as material from which I could elicit sounds; they were part of the world of my musical sensations. With this collection, I have paid a late tribute to my childhood*. (Roster, 1995, p. 6)

At first glance, this statement seems to describe the composer's attempt to create pieces for children in order to compensate for a lack in inspiring pianistic repertoire for children, similarly to Kurtág in *Játékok*. Upon deeper inspection though, Gubaidulina is referring to herself as a child and the lack 'in those days' of piano pieces that would take her back to the magical experience of toys – meaning that she was already over that experience of discovering things for the first time through toys. When composing *Musical Toys*, she experimented with toys, in an attempt to revive the "discovery" phase of childhood, which is both the inspiration for this work, as much as the methodology of the compositional process. And in that sense, could it not be also part of the performance of this work? Gubaidulina is interested in unlocking the mind and imagination of the pianist (professional or young pianist), promoting a childlike experience, in which the composer-performer-listener acts as a child and does not have pre-formed assumptions of what happens if you press a key on the piano.

2.2 Helmut Lachenmann's Ein Kinderspiel

> *…in which it concerns more the demonstration of a child's model than the charming of childhood*… Theodor Adorno (as cited in Lachenmann, 1982a)

Lachenmann's *Ein Kinderspiel* approaches the notion of childhood from Adorno's perspective (rendering it a questionably child-friendly piece). *Ein Kinderspiel* was composed in 1980 and consists of seven short pieces with inventive titles, such as 'Clouds in icy moonlight', 'Fake Chinese, slightly drunk', 'Shadow Dance' and so on. Although it was composed for his son and has been performed by his daughter when she was still seven years old, Lachenmann clarifies that this is "not a pedagogical music or a music intended specially for children either" (Lachenmann, 1982b). In *Ein Kinderspiel* Lachenmann uses familiar forms, patterns, finger technique, and children melodies such as 'Hänschen Klein' creating at first glance a safe territory for the listener and performer to enter. Yet, very soon within the piece the listeners realize that this seemingly familiar land is just the surface. Through the structural arrangement of the music and various extended piano techniques, Lachenmann manages to make the familiar transparent and allows something else to appear on the other side, which in fact was already there (Lachenmann, 1982b).[5] In other words, he interchanges our hearing with our perception of what we thought we already knew. The stylised 'compromises' of the material that Lachenmann is exploiting do not result equally in an artistic compromise.

Lachenmann further provokes the transparent nature between adulthood and childhood with the following statement:

[5] Also, Seth Brodsky writes: "The astonishment we might experience comes in part from the phantom-quality of this third-stage-music: it seems made by no one, not the composer, not the pianist. It simply comes in from the outside, the ghost in the machine giving us a second's wink of recognition." (Brodsky, n.d.).

> *The result of all this is something easy to play and easy to understand: a childrens* [sic] *game but aesthetic, without compromises… here is actually a question of the demonstration using a childs* [sic] *model rather than of the conjuration of childhood*… (Lachenmann, 1982b)

By defamiliarising children's musical material and transforming them into something else, Lachenmann leads the pianist (young or adult) into a 'discovery' land of possibilities in which he (re)discovers something (a)new, or something that was already there, through *playing as a child*. According to the composer: "To experience lustfully and, in this experience, discover the world, nature, technology, art and especially itself, thus develop and unfold its powers ever more" (as cited in Eecke, 2016, p. 227).

2.3. Summarizing the points

From what we have seen until now, Kabalevsky's opinion that to write for children "one has to be at the same time a composer, a teacher, and an educator" (Kabalevsky, 1964, p. 49), stands in contrast with the works of this second category of music for children. What diversifies Gubaidulina's, Lachenmann's, and even Kurtág's works from Kabalevsky's approach, is a difference of viewpoint. In order for Gubaidulina, Lachenmann, and Kurtág to compose these pieces, they were not thinking so much as teachers and educators, but rather attempted to re-create a condition of 'being a child'. Obviously, the perspective from which this act is directed is an adult's who consciously attempts to act as a child and experiment with discovering something anew. The result leaves us with self-contradictory compositions in which the game and process of discovery is imbedded in structured compositions and expressed through adult solutions for sound effects. It constantly alternates between the idea of 'child as adult' and 'adult as child', and in this way, creates a transparency between who is the adult and who is the child – if we decide to make that distinction.

Livine van Eecke makes a notable comparison in her analysis of Lachenmann's *Ein Kinderspiel* with Adorno and more precisely with the paradoxical statement that Adorno discusses in *Minima Moralia*: "The intellectual is faced with the choice, to inform himself or to turn his back to the hateful" (as cited in Eecke, 2016, p. 227). Eecke discusses that the listener faces the choice, to either listen to the music with the innocence and naivety of the uncritical 'child', or as an adult with a critical approach and contextualized opinion. According to Eecke, the 'child-listener' runs the danger of compromising to the societal taste-dictates of "sensuous listening" whilst the adult-listener is respectively in danger of rationalizing the music and as such losing sight of the "utopian possibility that reality may be different" (Eecke, 2016, p. 228). Inspired by Adorno's theory of the *negative dialectic,* Eecke concludes that the listener has a third option apart from the antinomy of child vs adult, in which the listener embraces both extremes.

By extension, and in agreement with Eecke's reading of Adorno, this paper and project introduces a similar discussion about the roles of the composer and the performer. Lachenmann, in this particular case, appears to be positioning his work outside an antinomy, and to be embracing a harmony of the extremes. As such, his work is used here exactly for this reason – to highlight and reinforce the idea of blending together two opposite roles or functions. This project has discussed so far, the following pairs of opposites:

These works were composed by adult composers who attempted to experience musical composition both as children and adults.

These works are intended to be played from children and adult performers.

These works are to be listened by children and adult listeners.

As argued before, this mode of thinking has clear reasons for being present not only in Lachenmann's work but also Gubaidulina's and Kurtág's works (Gubaidulina discovered sounds through *toys* and Kurtág created new sound possibilities through *games*). What all these composers share – and what characterizes works that fall within the second category of music for children – is their childish nature, their un-conventional manner of 'educating' the pianist through deconstructing and reconstructing the state of 'being a child'.

Taking this point of view further, arriving to the role of the performer, these works were intended to be performed by both adult and children performers. Within this project though, the antinomy for the performer takes up a new perspective and attempts to answer not only to the question, '*Who* should perform these works?', but most importantly to the question: '*How* should I perform these works?' *Tales of a talking piano* engages with the above understanding of the compositional process of each composer, and attempts to promote a similar mindset in relation to performance. In this project, I have personally experimented with enacting the state of 'being a child' through the use of musical works that were composed on the subject of the child, aiming to embrace both ends of the following antinomies. Thus, the performer's role can expand to act as the interpreter of the music but also the arranger and collaborator of the music.

This project revolves around the understanding of conceptual oppositions – such as child and adult in the case of the composer/listener, text and music in the case of the fairy-tale, and, interpreter and arranger/collaborator in the case of the performer – not as oppositions, in which one surpasses the other, but as interdependent conceptions.

3. Tales of a Talking Piano

For my final MMus degree recital in 2009, I played a selection of *Musical Toys* along with Alfred Schnittke's *Improvisation and Fugue* (1965) and J.S. Bach's Partita in E minor BWV 830 (1730). The feedback at the time was a dismissive, 'Charming little pieces, yes, but don't you think they are somehow easy for an MMus final recital?' My defensive response was 'Perhaps, but do you not think the other two works made up for the "virtuosic" loss? I was looking to project other aspects of my playing: sound control, creativity, and childish playfulness'. Then I realised my childish playfulness probably cost me a few marking points but yet, earned me a charming smile as a response.

Nevertheless, I continued performing and exploring this repertoire driven not only by the creative stimulus that these pieces offered me, but most importantly driven from a necessity to defend the "significance" in performing these pieces as an adult.

3.1. Experimenting with games

Tales of a Talking Piano began to evolve during a residency at the Banff Centre of Arts in 2016, in which I started experimenting with Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, Gubaidulina's *Musical Toys*, and Lachenmann's *Ein Kinderspiel*. As a tool, I created a set of 'childish games' for developing further experimentations with this repertoire and allow as such, unfiltered creative discoveries to arise:

<u>Game 1: Automatic associations</u>
Place paper copies of *Musical Toys*, *Ein Kinderspiel*, and *Kinderszenen* on the floor and observe it all at once. Take colored pencils and circle associations that emerge at first glance. The associations can be similarities or severe contrasts. Play in that order.

<u>Game 2: Different sounds & Improvisations</u>
Choose any piece(s) and improvise with the material or with different sounds: transpose it, use a different instrument /non-instrument/toys/movement, etc.

<u>Game 3: Synesthetic associations</u>
See what you are hearing, say what you are seeing, touch what you are hearing, etc.

The output of 'playing' with these games revealed particular ideas that served as the core of *Tales of a Talking Piano*. Through exploring "Game 1", I experimented with collaging pieces from the particular works in a different order, forming thus, short groups of pieces (always including pieces from all three works). Through exploring "Game 2", I experimented and improvised with motifs from the particular pieces of each group in an attempt to create a continuous flow between the pieces, using melodic/rhythmical motives to move from one piece to the other. Finally, "Game 3", clearly pointed out that I wanted to focus on the inherited storylines of these groups of pieces, which led me to seek a collaborator that would realise in words the musical storylines.

As a result of these games-experimentations, my initial role as merely the performer branched out to other roles as well, namely that of the arranger of the music and also the curator of this collaborative project.[6]

3.2. Setting up the collaboration

The point of departure for our collaboration with Minou was a mapping of the musical associations and the various musical storylines that emerged from my experimentations.

[6] For the given project, which falls within the field of musical borrowing in that it uses pre-existing material as a starting point, I decided to use the word 'arrangement' – in favor of other words such as transcription, re-composition, etc. – as I find it more fitting in relation to the nature of this project, which is a collaboration of text and music, and thus the music is arranged to collaborate with the text (and the opposite). For more information see, Sofroniou, A. K. (2016). *Recycling Music-Recycling Performance*. Retrieved from Jerwood Library Trinity Laban.

Based on our mutual understanding of the theoretical compositional background of these works and the embodiment of a self-contradictory perception of adulthood and childhood within them, we formulated our particular concept and musical content. The concept focused on the state of 'being a child' and my intention to experiment with this state as a performer, arranger of the music, and story-teller. And the content of the music was narrowed down to the following:

Schumann, 'The Poet Speaks' from *Kinderszenen* –> Gubaidulina, 'Song of the Fisherman' from *Musical Toys* –> Lachenmann, 'Shadow Dance' from *Ein Kinderspiel*.

In relation to the content of the fairy-tale, Minou suggested that since the musical material of this project derives from pre-existing music, she could also experiment with pre-existing fairy-tales as a means of inspiration. Our quest for suitable fairy-tales, revealed a short Inuit story titled "Kakuarshuk" by Angela Carter. What this story portrays is a paradoxical situation in which an adult becomes a child (to later become an adult again), and highlights the relationship between adult and child as a double-sided interaction, in which not only children learn from adults, but also adults learn from children – a concept that was used by Minou in her fairy-tale.

A short description of the story follows:

The story of Kakuarshuk describes how Inuit women became mothers by digging in the earth and discovering their children. Yet, Kakuarshuk happened to be an infertile/unlucky woman that dug the earth with no luck. Following the advice of an angakok, a spiritual Inuit figure, she went to a specific place and dug the earth deep, and then deeper, until she came out on the other side of the earth where things were different. Carter writes: "There was neither snow or ice and babies were much bigger than adults. Kakuarshuk was adopted by two of these babies, a girl-baby and a boy-baby." After a while, Kakuarshuk, who was very well treated by her baby-parents, asked them to help her find a child of her own. They advised her to go to a specific place and dig the earth. Instead of a child, Kakuarshuk found and met with various vampire trolls that tortured her, finally to be saved by a fox that took her back to the other side and found her a child.

This story follows the concept that seems to be constantly prominent in this paper, by introducing conceptual oppositions, such as child and parent in this case, which are later bridged and reversed: A parent looking for a child, becomes a child with parents, and then becomes (again) a parent with a child. The contribution of the story of Kakuarshuk to this project has not only been the idea of transformation from 'other' to 'another', but predominantly the re-transformation from 'another' to a more complete version of 'other'. Through her experience of transforming to the opposite, Kakuarshuk gained further knowledge and managed to achieve what she wished for in her original identity.

A short description of Minou's fairy-tale follows:

A boy is bored of being a boy and wishes he would became old. But when a magical fish makes his wish come true, things are not as he expected. The boy does not seem to enjoy

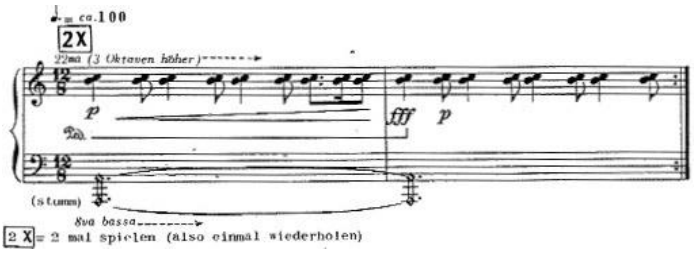
the life of a grown-up and tries to meet again with the little fish so to 'withdraw' his wish and become a little child again.

3.3. Music to Text <-> Text to Music

When receiving the first draft of the story, I started off by making notes of the broader plan of how music and text would interact. An excerpt can be seen below, in which my notes are in brackets:

> *The boy was really excited. At last! He was old! And he had a job and a house and a car and a wife and children of his own!*
>
> *(Start 'Shadow Dance' Lachenmann)*
>
> *It was still dark outside and he was sleepy and he went into his car but he didn't know how to drive it. So, he walked to work and he was late and his boss yelled at him and then he looked on his desk for his crayons to draw with but there were no crayons to be found anywhere so he couldn't draw and he was sad because he didn't know how to do anything else.*
>
> *So, his boss fired him and he walked back home and he sat on the sofa. His wife was preparing food and his children jumped on him but he didn't feel like playing, he was exhausted. And when supper was served, he started crying because he hated fish and chips, he was really hungry but HE SIMPLY HATED FISH AND CHIIIIIIIIPS*
>
> *(Lachenmann fff)*

After experimenting with various ways of adjusting the pieces with the story, as well as with different ways of reading the story on its own, I came up with new ideas of how to arrange the two together. For the climax of the piece, in which I am playing Lachenmann's 'Shadow Dance', it seemed suitable to appropriate the rhythm of the words to the rhythm of the music (*Example 1*).



Example 1: Rhythmical pattern in Lachenmann's 'Shadow Dance' (Lachenmann, 1982b)

In the following excerpt of the fairy-tale, the underlined words are the ones that are spoken on the crotchet notes of the rhythmical pattern in 'Shadow Dance':

> His boss fired him and he walked back home and sat on the couch.
> "Darling, darling, your favourite food!" "Daddy, daddy, let's play hide and seek."
> But he was exhausted, tired, hungry, "LEAVE ME ALONE!"
> When supper was served, he started crying. His wife had cooked fish and chips.
>
> (stop music) "I HATE FISH AND CHIPS!"

Example 2 shows how the words were spoken with Lachenmann's rhythmical pattern:

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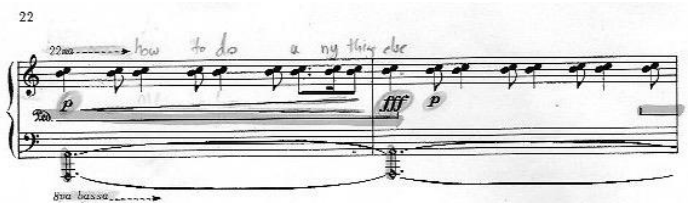
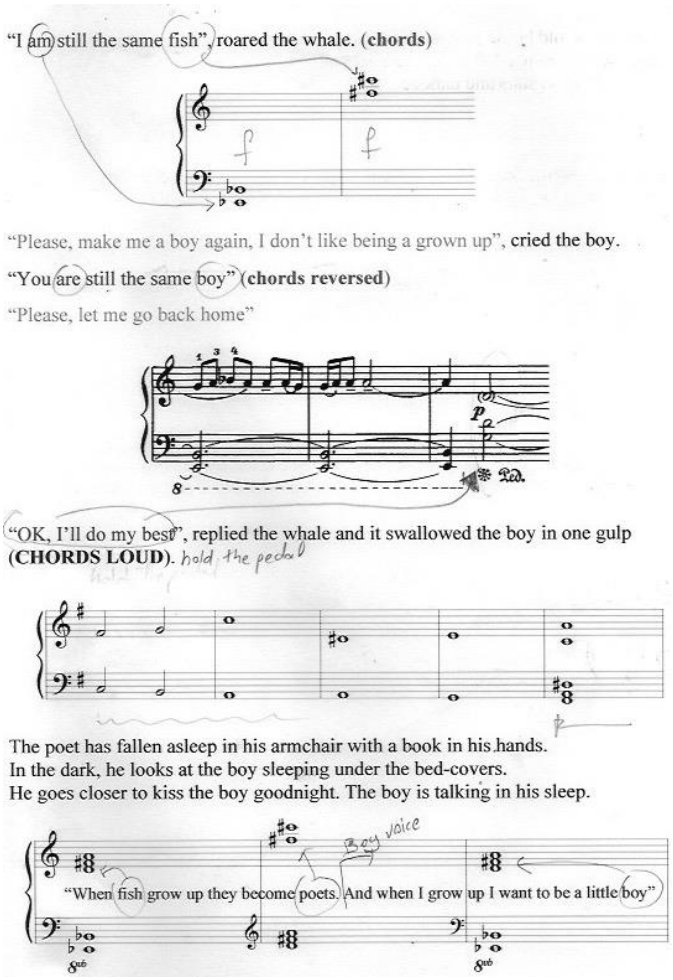


Example 2: Rhythmical pattern in 'Shadow Dance' with text

Minou's fairy-tale revolves around three main characters, the poet, the boy and the fish. The poet relates with Schumann's 'The Poet Speaks', and the boy and fish with Gubaidulina's 'Song of the Fisherman', in which each character matches a different musical line/musical idea. Thus, the pre-existing pieces are not performed complete but are presented fragmented. The text and music interact in various functions: *spoken text over music*; *spoken text with an improvised or already composed musical accompaniment* that derives from the three pieces and storyline; *spoken text on its own*, which occurs once in the climax of the story.

While reciting the last excerpt of Minou's story, an improvised combination of Gubaidulina's 'Song of the Fisherman' and Schumann's 'The Poet Speaks' is being played, an example of which can be seen in *Example 3:*



Example 3: The end of *Tales of a Talking Piano*

Conclusion

Whether this project is successful in harmonising adulthood and childhood and be relevant to both adults and children, is something to be experienced in action. This project aspires to be presented in diverse venues such as schools, arts organisations, music venues, and to a variety of audience, and forms part of a broader project of mine in promoting contemporary music to a wider audience. Up until now, it has been performed twice: at the Jamboree music venue in London (UK) as part of 'Coocoolili', a monthly collaborative performance event (April, 2017), and as part of the conference "Music for and by Children: Perspectives from Children, Composers, Performers, and Educators" at the University of Aveiro, Portugal (October, 2017). After these performances, I came to understand that *Tales of a Talking Piano* aspires to promote an experience that is relevant to children today and enriches their understanding of the world they are living in, and their relationship to contemporary music, as well as an experience through which adults re-discover their inner childlike nature and enter a condition of childhood as listeners. Finally, a further objective of *Tales of a Talking Piano* is to use the chosen methodology and process of work within this project, as educational material in piano workshops and individual piano lessons to both children and adults, provoking them to create their own music fairy-tales and expand their role from interpreters of the music to become arrangers, improvisers, and storytellers.

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