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About solo III

solo III for organ was created together with the *solis I* and *II* following Ullmann's encounter with John Cage. The meeting took place during the series 'Cage in GDR – Berlin', when Ullmann and Nicolaus Richter de Vroe organized the first (and last) *Musircircus* by Cage before the self-dissolution of the German Democratic Republic. Through the extensive use of graphic material, all three *solis* permit the interpreters an increased amount of involvement in shaping the musical processes. Yet, *solo III* distinguishes itself from the other *solis* in that the score is more extensive and, in addition to the organist, there are three assistants needed for its performance.

For preparing the piece, the following separately notated materials are provided:

- a) A pedal tone.
- b) An axisymmetrical 13-tone row whose sequence determines the very long sustained central tones.
The central tones make up the cantus firmus of the composition. The last central tone refers back to the beginning. The keys of a mechanical organ that are needed for this should be depressed only minimally, so that the unstable sounds produced are somewhere between the note speaking and noise. What normally takes place within a fraction of a second during the transient phenomenon of a sound is extended here, as in slow motion, to the entire duration of the composition.
- c) Two, out of the many small segments of existing structural processes, reflect the sequence of the central tones in the way their pitches are combined. One of them is rhythmically structured throughout, while the other should be played as fast as possible and has an extremely quiet background layer emerging from the clearly defined pitches of the second structure. It then converts it into a chaotic vortex, a kind of sonic dust. The division of spacial background noise from the composed structures is opaque.
- d) Color graphics regulate the layout of the central tones, the entrance, and the duration of the two structural processes by means of a variable timeline, which is laid over it.

solo III, in contrast to the indeterminate compositions of Cage, which can arrive at completely different results, has a recognizable physiognomy. This is characterized, on the one hand, by an extremely low sound level which invites intensive listening, and on the other by a multilayered process in the construction of pitches and the design of timbres. According to the performance instructions concerning the timbres of the organ, there is a tendency toward increasing differentiation, especially in the structuring of the central tones. The present recording begins after an air sound with a seamlessly registered plenum of the organ, which is gradually dismantled over the course of various in-between registers, until only a single register is left at the end. The required variations in key pressure thus lead to sound distortions in pianissimo, which in the process, lose their stability. For the clarity of this process, the choice of instrument and performance space is already an important element in the preparation of *solo III* and its interpretation. The late baroque Holzhay organ of the Neresheim abbey church, with its distinctly characteristic timbre of the individual registers, is especially suited for generating these enigmatic and idiosyncratically complex sound states.

All audible sounds on the recording were created without electronic sound transformations of any kind. They are the result of the superposition of the different chaotic oscillation processes within the pipes and wind channels of the historic instrument. Keeping in mind the performance instruction that "any form of expression must be strictly avoided," the present interpretation endeavored to use key pressure and the choice of appropriate registers to create those unstable conditions that make it possible for the instrument and its timbres themselves to speak in an unfamiliar way. Throughout the course of the work, the performer's interpretational leeway in pressing the key is thus reduced to approximately one millimeter. In order for these difficult-to-control processes to be meaningfully included in the composition at all, Ullmann uses, among other things, color graphics as a precise form of notation. They make it possible for the interpreter's concept of the sound and the unstable sound behavior of the organ to enter into a reactive relationship of interdependence reflecting the compositional intent of *solo III*. Ullmann's use of graphics gives him the possibility of approaching a concept of music where all relevant parameters (which have been ordered into a scaled pattern in European music history since the beginning of composed polyphony) convert – if not revert – to a smooth glissando. The organ, due to its keyboard arrangement, produces clearly graduated pitches and was the driving instrument in the development of Western European polyphony. However, through the processes of this piece, it becomes a wind instrument. Both sides of the instrument are brought into a structural correlation in *solo III*.

The more traditionally notated structural processes derived from the central tones point to the tradition of the organ as a keyboard instrument. However, the use of the organ as a wind instrument, (within the timbres of the respective central tones, which are drawn through the piece like an extended cantus firmus without counterpoint) reveals another, aleatoric and intangible glissando-polyphony, which extends beyond all the systems.

While the interpreter preparing an indeterminate composition by Cage has more the role of a performer and must accept the results of the chance operations, the interpreter in *solo III* must choose the course of action in such a way that the predefined materials can be used in a structurally meaningful way. While the long sustained tones in fact push the timeless instant into center focus during listening and while they do come close to Cage's "zero time," they also refer to the rapid flashes of isolated sounds, which can appear at any time and, in turn, reflect the overall structure in compressed form. Memory does not remain suspended.

With his works *4'33"* and *Variations I*, Cage opened up musical space to encompass everything. In *solo III*, this emptied space is colored and carefully structured again using the cantus firmus, which is compressed into the sound phenomenon. Leftover elements of European music history appear allusively, briefly becoming form. Tone combinations, more or less closely related to the cantus firmus, become condensed and dissolve into musical dust at the limits of perception, as "emblematic traces of a past whose future is not yet settled" (Ullmann).

The minimum duration of *solo III* is 25 minutes. The present recording has duration of 66 minutes, whereby the character of the composition changes considerably. This temporal distension leads to distinct slow-motion transformations of the sounds, which sometimes reach the point of intersection between stasis and movement and then dissolve it. The lengthy processes at the beginning of the piece thus help the listener adjust his own perception to the temporal and structural processes within the composition.

In addition to the assistants at the organ, we would like to thank Gerd Matka, without whom the present version of *solo III* could not have been realized.

solo III begins with air sounds of the organ. We therefore recommend adjusting the levels of your speakers so that the room noise of the recording just barely disappears, at approximately 2 minutes after the beginning of the piece.

Hans-Peter Schulz

The parable of the receding shore

"Once upon a time, there was a country called the Land of Ten Thousand Lakes, and those landmarks were affectionately known to some of its inhabitants as Biggest, Second Biggest, ..., rth Biggest, etc., down to 10,000th Biggest. The widest was a sea 100 miles across, the width of the rth Biggest was $100/\sqrt{r}$, so that the smallest had a width of only 1 mile. But each lake was always covered with a haze that made it impossible to see across and thus identify its width. One would, of course, find out if one could discover its name; but the land was poorly mapped and poorly marked, and had few inhabitants whom the traveler could ask for instructions. The people of that land were expert at measuring distances, however; they also knew well all about the computation of averages and were great believers in expected utilities. They knew, therefore, that as one of them stood on an unknown shore, he had before him a stretch of water of expected width equal to 2 miles. He could very well travel 1 mile to reach the center of "the" expected lake; but he could never go beyond this point! Suppose, indeed, that he succeeded in sailing forth to a new total distance just short of $100/\sqrt{r}$ miles. In meantime, the other shore would have "moved on", to a new mean distance from him equal precisely to $100/\sqrt{r}$. It is clear therefore that those Lakes were ruled by Spirits who would never let them be crossed by a stranger. However far the traveler might sail, the Spirits would spread the lake even farther, and the stranger would always remain right in the middle of water; his boldness should eventually be punished by death, but all travelers were eventually relieved by a special grace."

Benoît Mandelbrot, *Forecast of Future Prices, Unbiased Markets, and "Martingale" Models*, Journal of Business vol. 39, issue 1, part 2: Supplement on Security Pricing, January 1966, p. 254/255

photos: barbara wieland and hans lorenzen · photos taken during rehearsal

