

Years ago—it was somewhere in the mid-1980s—there was a concert of extended-instrumental music by Richard Teitelbaum at the Paula Cooper Gallery in Downtown-est New York; Richard and George Lewis were the performers. I've known Richard, and his music, since the mid-1960s, but this performance was—almost non-metaphorically—an eye-opener. Because what I saw was as integral to my sensory-affective experience as what I heard—sound and sight could not, truly, be described separately. George's sonic/corporeal choreography, moving in its contained-energy polyphony of sound/body configurations, surrounded by the imposing visually silent but looming powerful presence of two grand-looking pianos, Richard floating serenely within the space of all the sonic overdrive, creating a totally contrapuntal experiential redefinition of what was otherwise a hyperkinetic collision of irresistible forces and immovable objects. And the stunningly resonant swirl of vivid, totally self-specific sound, coming together from a stark disparity of sources, acoustic, electronic, amplified, straight, bent out of shape, struck, swept, blown. . . . It was, as you can tell from my unfaded recollection, one of those one-only aesthetic events in my life; but even beyond the absorbing experience, there was a revelation (the eye-opener)—specifically mind-blowing to an introverted soundfreak like me: how musical performance, the global art of music, has really always been a multimedia environment: the tableaux vivants and movements of performers and ensembles, the massing of audiences, the kineses of sweat and applause, the under-pressure psychic energy of attention and reaction. “The score,” “the sound,” “the piece” in this perspective, through this experience, recede into the event, as causes rather than effects, as little the surface of consciousness as the script and the camera in the experience of a movie-event.

So now, here, you have, in your possession presumably, this disc: all and only sound. Of course, you can experience it as mere documentation, as the extracted minimal-cue traces of real multidimensional happenings, to be experienced as such speculatively, virtually: that would make sense. But there's another level of experience available here; paradoxically, it's a richness that becomes available only in the context of a certain degree of sensory deprivation, that is, in the restriction to a purely auditory experience. I invite, I implore, I propose you listen to it straight through, front to back, 70-plus minutes, as a totally focused immersion in the expressive being, over a good bit of a lifetime, of a compositional voice and ear whose completely ungeneric intuitions of sound and time make any talk of schools, influences, styles seem rather unhelpful. In fact, I recommend (strongly) that you listen to this disc without further information, with whatever capacity you have to imitate a tabula rasa of affective and cognitive receptivity, before you proceed to learn and ponder all the comforting superveniences that we use to tell us what our experience is, has been, should be—so that we can align with our cultural companions. You, dear reader/listener, will want technical/technological/conceptual/historical information to explicate how what you are hearing was caused to come into being; I am suggesting that you first undergo the powerful experience of a purely aesthetic exposure to this self-contained CD event. And so, here, I'm going to talk first about my (not necessarily anyone else's) perception of what is arrived at in this music of Richard's before I talk about how it is arrived at.

*Intersections* and *SEQ TRANSIT PARAMMERS*: The best way to hear *Intersections* (1963) is retrospectively from the ear of *SEQ TRANSIT PARAMMERS* (performances to die for, as everywhere on this CD, this one written for and played by Ursula Oppens in 1998). Because whatever the mythology about evolutions of musical/social ideology and style (and they're all meaningful and relevant and true) the most indelible impression I get is of a totally individual musical and expressive personality, in progressive modes of development. *SEQ TRANSIT*

*PARAMMERS* resonates with me (in this context) as spectacularly amplifying and intensifying the special qualities of *Intersections*: the crisp articulate sense of a tangible crack-space between adjacent keystrokes flying by at warpspeed, the distinct personality of every well-spoken interval in the reflective “walking” passages, the hint of jazz sensibility in the “lean” and attack-space of sounds, especially the anchoring tasty lower-depth crunchy chords (they don’t sound like chords, but like effervescing sound-clusters)—coming out in its third part onto a dynamically accelerating image of the “pointillistic” tendency of *Intersections*, arriving by stunning sonic metamorphoses at a inundating cascading scintillation that keeps coming on toward becoming impenetrable soundwall—but stops short then, retrieves its natal space and color, transformed now as polytextured allregister soundride, which . . . vanishes.

...*dal niente*... (1997) evolves me into an even newer world (compositionally it’s the second most recent of these pieces); it comes at me with a multi-simultaneity of radically transformed qualities and issues that I recognize with astonishment as familiar from my life experience with music—so, for one, my rockbottom intuition of “harmony” is atomized but somehow manages to retain just enough cogency to make sense of what I’m hearing—but it’s never going to be the same. For—whatever I said above—there is no question with ...*dal niente*... that what I’m hearing is an output of technique/technology—it becomes the very aesthetic character of what I’m hearing to almost get lost in the sense that things are coming at you from very mysterious and previously unimaginable places, alongside things that are close to home. Back in the 1970s, Lukas Foss and I used to talk about things we were doing as approaching the idea of “real-time composition.” But Richard has actually designed a physical and biological system which creates a literal “real-time composition” mechanism (a comparison of the “score” with what you’re hearing will leave no doubt, but I guess that’s cheating). And I think that the persistence of experiments in mutable modes of music-creating that have been verbally and performatively shared among composers, performers, and perceivers over the last 50 years (at least) have seeped enough into the cultural substratum to be an aesthetic (perceptual, experiential) reality. Perhaps we—collectively, as a music-receiving community—have learned to process “a performance,” or “a real-time event” rather than “a piece” as a real—rather than a symbolic, or an ideological, art-experience. So to the essential question: is the “real-time-ness” essentially meaningful to the progenitor, the performing participants, or to the receivers . . . I think the answer is: yes.

There is much more to be said about ...*dal niente*..., as there is hugely more going on within it as you listen; as I said above, in its very aesthetic it seems to raise issues about music in a more general sense: for instance, in some ways I hear it as sensitizing a new level of consciousness about the ontology of “the note” (the musical “note” that is, like: a sounded pitch). You could historicize a dualism of notes in music: back to the Wagner/Brahms dualism: the note as absorbing into a suffusing blanket of sensibility; the note as extruding a sharp and particular architectural individuality making a distinctive episode in an unfolding thought or narrative. ...*dal niente*..., fascinatingly, goes both ways: notes extruded as cumulating events in a succession/notes absorbed as inflections of a seamless texture. Stylistically, this is a clue as to how I hear Richard’s music in relation to the surrounding musics of our time: in a possibly music-Heraclitean world, the way Uptown and the way Downtown may, perhaps, have turned out to be the same. But after *SEQ TRANSIT PARAMMERS* and ...*dal niente*..., it seems that an entirely different music-environmental geography may be imagined.

*In the Accumulate Mode* (1982)—familiar as are the last two pieces on this CD from Richard’s old *Blends & The Digital Pianos* Lumina LP—takes one aspect of what you’ve heard up to here

(temporally on the CD not chronologically as composed) and explodes it into a massive soundstorm like Conlon Nancarrow's nightmare vision of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (I wrote this before remembering that Richard has written that the piece was explicitly inspired by Conlon Nancarrow—but anyone who knows that music will know it anyway). The governing image of relentless sharpened player-piano hammers hitting—hitting on, really—hardass piano strings to the threshold of articulative possibility, coming into the range of perceptual foldover (like the other end of Stockhausen's pitch-into-time progressions, in, e.g., *Kontakte*); here pitchtime pushes over the discriminative limit to transform genetically discontinuous pianosound into pure streaming texture-scades swooping and darting like a sonicized surreal anime, where pulsations materialize and disappear like plosive foam bubbles on a roiling surf. More than a hint of jazz in the innards and outards of this music; it's even a kind of apotheosis of the free-jazz sensibility of the soundworld between Ornette Coleman and Anthony Braxton, in a highly idealized metastasis.

*Interlude in Pelog* and *Solo for Three Pianos*, written (1982) just before *In the Accumulate Mode*, come off in this listening sequence as studies for that transcendent soundflight, each concentrating (using the music-making multipiano-computer machine invented at that time by Richard, under the inspiration, he says, of Conlon Nancarrow's music) on some aspect of that music. In particular, the metamorphic creation, out of the dissolution of individual sounds, of a larger-than-sound multisound is a conspicuous preoccupation of both pieces; *Interlude in Pelog* is shaped formally and sonically by the resonance and time of Indonesian gamelan music; its melodic curves and flavors and harmonic/rhythmic/percussive contours are unmistakably evocative but—as I've come to expect from Richard—totally nonliteral and newly invented. The fadeout at the end is evocative of that sense of unending perpetuity that you hear (sometimes it seems literally) in Indonesian gamelan music. And *Solo for 3 Pianos* is the wildest ride in place you're likely ever to hear (George Antheil would have killed to compose this piece). It fades out too—there simply isn't anything else it could possibly do.

Since in this music the performances are, as I've said, integral aspects of the composition, the compositional presence, not just the execution and interpretation, of Fredric Rzewski, Ursula Oppens, Aki Takahashi and Richard himself as performer should be understood to be inseparably fused into the fundamental being of each of these works. The deep social and artistic meaning of this sense of collaboration is itself a new dimension of musical artmaking, promising perhaps a renewal of relevance for original music in our time. At the close, it feels as if I've been witness to a revelation of the true meaning and substance of musical improvisation.

— Benjamin Boretz

*Benjamin Boretz, composer and writer, was music critic for The Nation, founder of Perspectives of New Music and The Open Space magazines, and currently serves as co-editor for both. His music, video, and print works are recorded and published by Open Space Music.*

### **Composer's Note**

*Intersections* is a strict twelve-tone piece with regard to pitch. I wrote it while studying composition with Mel Powell at Yale in 1963.

*SEQ TRANSIT PARAMMERS*: Since Ursula Oppens expressed the strong desire to participate creatively, I conceived the work as a kind of “toolkit” for real-time interactive composition. It consists of hardware (two Disklaviers and a MAC laptop), interactive real-time software (the

Marx Brothers 4.0 patch program written in MAX), and notated music. The compositional attitude roots itself in the tradition of Earle Brown, John Cage, and David Tudor. Brown's pioneering "open form" pieces of the early '50s (*Folio, December 1952*) and Cage's works, like *Variations II* and *Cartridge Music*, provided material for the performer (usually Tudor) to construct and perform the piece, thus requiring him to complete the compositional process and thereby collaborate in the compositional act. Mastering this challenge inspired Tudor to try his hand at composing music of his own, and in so doing, he has left us an extraordinary legacy of work and new compositional concepts, creating an extended instrument system, and regarding the total configuration as the composition.

*...dal niente...* is dedicated to the memory of Aki Takahashi's husband, the noted music critic Kunihara Akiyama, and to some of the American experimental composers—Cowell, Cage, Feldman, Nancarrow and Tudor—whose music he loved, and did so much to make known in Japan. Most of those who founded this tradition no longer walk among us, but the beauty of their ideas and creations continues to inspire. In an "homage" to them, I have sought to adopt some of their attitudes and concepts: from Henry Cowell, an awareness of new sounds and harmonic structures, and the invention of unusual methods of obtaining them; from Cage, an openness to whatever eventuality the chance nature of the universe brings to us; from Feldman, an intense awareness of the sheer beauty of sound; from Nancarrow, the use of machines to create musical patterns and structures beyond the humanly playable, and pleasure in their wild exuberance; and from Tudor, the inspiration to invent new instrumental systems and to consider such a configuration itself to be the score of the music.

In my piece, I have employed today's digital electronics to realize or elaborate these ideas in ways that only such technology makes possible: a real-time iterative computer system "listens" to the material played by the pianist on a specially adopted MIDI piano, and responds instantaneously with transformations of what it hears, as well as additional utterances of its own.

*In the Accumulate Mode, Interlude in Pelog, and Solo for Three Pianos* (from ICMC Proceedings at IRCAM, 1984): The Digital Piano System is a computer-controlled, electro-mechanically driven acoustic player piano system. As configured in the performances recorded here, it interfaced three Marantz Pianocorder-equipped pianos and three micro-computers to create both a multi-instrumental composing and a real-time performance system: musical material played on one piano keyboard was picked up by switches under the keys on the piano I was playing and instantly read into computer memory where it was processed, stored, and/or simultaneously output for playback by two Marantz Pianocorder Vorsetzers attached to the two additional pianos. The musical data manipulations and responses, all under immediate, run-time control of the performer, were programmed with a high-level, modular Patch Control Language (PCL), which was designed in collaboration with software engineer Mark Bernard and implemented by him. PCL currently consisted of some thirty-five software modules and their interconnections, much as Robert Moog, Don Buchla, Serge Tcherepnin and others utilized universal hardware patching for their analog synthesizers. A module is a building block that performs certain functions, such as track record/playback, transposition, inversion, delay, randomization, etc. . . . Prior to a concert, the composer-performer writes a patch, using English commands to define the modules that are to be used, and their interconnections. As many of each module-type as desired can be used simply by "defining" (listing) them. The patch as written here is four tracks, each configured in its own way.

**Richard Teitelbaum** (b. 1939) has been active as a composer and performer for more than four decades, performing throughout the world. His music includes notated compositions and free and structured improvisations in acoustic, electronic, and electroacoustic media, often combining traditional Western and non-Western instruments with electronics.

After receiving his Master of Music degree from Yale in 1964 he spent two years on a Fulbright in Italy where he studied with Luigi Nono. While there he co-founded the pioneering live-electronic music group Musica Elettronica Viva with Frederic Rzewski and Alvin Curran in Rome. In 1970 he formed one of the first intercultural improvisation groups, the World Band, at Wesleyan University and has continued to work with traditional musicians from many non-Western cultures. In 1976–77 he spent a year in Tokyo on a Fulbright, studying shakuhachi with the great late master Katsuya Yokoyama, while composing *Blends* for shakuhachi, Moog synthesizers, and percussion.

He has worked with many jazz and improvising musicians such as Steve Lacy, Anthony Braxton, George Lewis, Derek Bailey, Evan Parker, Carlos Zingaro, and many other important artists, including John Cage, Morton Feldman, Philip Glass, Nam June Paik, and The Living Theater. In the 1970s he began composing live interactive computer music. His “digital piano system” combined human and mechanically-played acoustic pianos with computers to produce complex “acoustic computer music,” playing on three grand pianos simultaneously. He performed solo with this system in Berlin’s Philharmonic Hall, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Pompidou Center in Paris, Almeida Theater in London, and many other venues. While on a DAAD residency in Berlin, a commission from the West German Radio in Cologne enabled him to compose *Concerto Grosso* (1985), which expanded the piano system by adding synthesizers and two wind players as part of the interactive mix. The piece was awarded a prize from the Austrian Radio and the Ars Electronica Festival, and a recording was released on the Hat Art label. Teitelbaum has created two operas dealing with Jewish mystical expressions of redemptive hopes: *Golem, An Interactive Opera* (1989), and *Z’vi*, (2001–) based on the seventeenth-century Jewish-Moslem Messiah figure Sabbatai Z’vi, for which he received a Guggenheim Fellowship. *SoundPaths* for chamber group and computer was commissioned by the Fromm Music Foundation and the Da Capo Chamber players and premiered in New York City in 2009. Teitelbaum is a Professor of Music at Bard College, where he has taught in the undergraduate and graduate programs for more than twenty-five years.

**Ursula Oppens** has long been recognized as the leading champion of contemporary American piano music. She is a four-time Grammy Award nominee, including *Oppens Plays Carter: The Complete Piano Works of Elliott Carter* (Cedille Records), John Corigliano’s *Winging It*, and Frederic Rzewski’s *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*. She has premiered works by William Bolcom, Tania León, Tobias Picker, Amy Williams, and Charles Wuorinen, among others, and has performed with the New York Philharmonic and American Composers Orchestra, the orchestras of Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco; the Berlin Symphony, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and the London Philharmonic. She is a Distinguished Professor of Music at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City.

Born in Massachusetts in 1938, pianist/composer **Frederic Rzewski** studied with Walter Piston, Roger Sessions, and Milton Babbitt at Harvard and Princeton universities. He moved to Italy in 1960, where he studied with Luigi Dallapiccola, and met and performed with flautist Severino Gazzelloni, thus beginning a career as a performer of new piano music. His early friendship with Christian Wolff and David Behrman, and acquaintance with John Cage and David Tudor, strongly influenced his development in both composition and performance. While in Rome he co-formed, with Richard Teitelbaum, Alvin Curran, Allen Bryant, and Jon Phetteplace, the ensemble Musica Elettronica Viva (MEV), known for its pioneering work in live electronics and improvisation. Bringing together both classical and jazz avant-gardists such as Steve Lacy and Anthony Braxton, MEV developed an aesthetic of music as a spontaneous collective process. Along with recordings of his compositions, his discography includes early releases with MEV, the seven-disc collection *Rzewski Plays Rzewski: Piano Works 1975–1999*, and his 2007 Miami Piano Festival performance of *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, which has been issued on DVD.

Since her student days at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts & Music, **Aki Takahashi** has been active in performing new music by such composers as Messiaen, Boulez, Xenakis, Takemitsu, and her contemporaries. Her landmark recording, *Aki Takahashi—Piano Space*, featuring twenty contemporary piano works, received the Merit Prize at the Japan Art Festival in 1973. Her series of Erik Satie concerts (1975–77, Tokyo), conceived and produced by Kuniharu Akiyama, triggered a Satie boom throughout Japan. In 1980 she was invited by Morton Feldman to become a Creative Associate of the Center of the Creative and Performing Arts at the State University of New York at Buffalo. John Cage, Morton Feldman, Peter Garland, Isang Yun, and her brother Yuji Takahashi, to name a few, have all composed works especially for her. In a project conceived and performed by Aki Takahashi, *The Hyper Beatles*, 47 composers from around the world were commissioned to create works inspired by various Beatles tunes. Since 2002, Takahashi has presented an annual recital series, Piano Dramatic, in Tokyo.

#### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

*Blends*. Katsuya Yokoyama, shakuhachi; Richard Teitelbaum, synthesizer, computer, keyboards; Trilok Gurtu, tabla; Mark Dresser, double bass; Gerry Hemingway, drums. New Albion 118.

*Concerto Grosso*. Anthony Braxton, reeds; George Lewis, trombone, computer; Richard Teitelbaum, keyboards, Pianocorders, computers. Hat Art CD 6004.

*Duet: Live at Merkin Hall*. Anthony Braxton, reeds; Richard Teitelbaum, Kurzweil keyboard sampler/synthesizer, computer. Music and Arts CD 4949.

*Golem*. David Moss, voice, electronics, percussion; Carlos Zingaro, violin, electronics; Shelley Hirsch, voice; Richard Teitelbaum, sampler, synthesizer, computer; George Lewis, computer, trombone, electronics. Tzadik 7105.

*Musica Elettronica Viva: MEV 40 (1967–2007)*. New World Records 80675-2 (4 CDs).

*The Sea Between*. Richard Teitelbaum, keyboards, sampler, computer; Carlos Zingaro, violin, electronics. Victo CD 03.

*Times Zones*. Richard Teitelbaum, Moog synthesizers; Anthony Braxton, winds. Freedom 32JDF–194.

Producer: Richard Teitelbaum

Mixed by Richard Teitelbaum and Bob Bielecki

Engineers: Takeyuki Rai (...*dal niente*...); Gerald Oshita (*In the Accumulate Mode, Interlude in Pelog, Solo for Three Pianos*)

Digital mastering: Paul Zinman, SoundByte Productions Inc., NYC

*Intersections* was recorded at the CBC Toronto, 1965; *SEQ TRANSIT PARAMMERS* at Merkin Hall, New York, 1998; ...*dal niente*... at Kunitachi College of Music recording studio, Tokyo, 2001; and *In the Accumulate Mode, Interlude in Pelog, and Solo for Three Pianos* at San Francisco Exploratorium, 1982.

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RICHARD TEITELBAUM (b. 1939)

*PIANO PLUS*

*Piano Music 1963–1998*

80756-2

1. *Intersections* (1963) 5:53

Frederic Rzewski, piano

2. *SEQ TRANSIT PARAMMERS* (1998) 17:07

Ursula Oppens, piano and Mac with interactive MAX software

3. *...dal niente...* (1997) 22:07

Aki Takahashi, piano; Richard Teitelbaum, computer

4. *In the Accumulate Mode* (1982) 14:13

Richard Teitelbaum, Digital Piano System (three computer-assisted pianos)

5. *Interlude in Pelog* (1982) 6:08

Richard Teitelbaum, Digital Piano System (three computer-assisted pianos)

6. *Solo for Three Pianos* (1982) 6:07

Richard Teitelbaum, Digital Piano System (three computer-assisted pianos)

TT: 71:35