

Doppelgänger Sweet – Ten mirror sketches for Disklavier(s)

- 1 In C
- 2 Major Triads
- 3 Alberti
- 4 Real Fast
- 5 Minor Thirds
- 6 Waltz
- 7 “I do, I don’t”
- 8 Premonition (Overwhelmed)
- 9 Underwhelmed
- 10 Whelmed

Improvised by Stephen Emmerson – Piano/Disklavier(s)

Ian Hanger Recital Hall
Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University
6pm 28th October 2015

Programme notes

A few words on musical interactions between humans and computers:

The suite of pieces presented on the two Yamaha Disklaviers in this evening’s programme grow from Professor Andrew Brown’s research into interactive computer music systems. To quote Andrew:

“For me the interesting part of human-software musical improvisation is the stimulation of human creativity with fairly minimal automated input. In some of the research we have been doing with an Australian Research Council Discovery grant, we have been examining the notion of a reflexive approach to creativity, that is, via a system that reflects back at the performer – in a slightly distorted way– their own inputs. There is a psychological history here around a fascination with the self that is manifest in things, like a hall of mirrors where one sees oneself in altered ways or, in the more modern sense, of taking *selfies* with a phone camera – that is, wanting to see oneself from an external perspective in all these different ways.

Much interactive computer music software works with extensive computational machinery, that is, with complicated algorithmic systems. Part of what we are interested in with our research is ‘how simple can it be?’. ... And so we have been experimenting with the notion of just employing simple reflections of what musicians play. ... In a way what we are doing with simple echoing strategies is assuming that musicality is already there in the human performed data, and the computer software just has to grab bits of it and throw it back out during its performance.”

Andrew’s concept was developed for this performance within the program PD (Pure Data) by Lloyd Barrett who has provided me with templates that offer endless possibilities for variation and experimentation. Within these I could control the responses in terms of various parameters (such as interval, register, delay and duration) while still reflecting back essentials of the musical gestures I play. There are two types being used: the first reflects back directly making the response predictable (and

resulting in strict rhythmic canons) while the second adds a level of randomness that can be challenging to control but also at times delicious to play with. I am hugely grateful to Andrew and Lloyd for their assistance, patience and enthusiastic support of my relatively recent entry into this Brave New World of interactive music-making. Thanks also to Kai Morholz for helping to set up and trouble-shoot more than once.

A few words on *Doppelgängers*:

Stories and folklore around the idea of *Doppelgänger* (literally a "double goer") can be found across many cultures and date back as far as Ancient Egypt and Greece. The relationship between a person and his/her double varies from culture to culture – in some cases they share the same memories and feelings (from Egyptian mythology through to Kieslowski's *The Double life of Veronique*) or alternatively, they may share the same physical appearance but have opposed characters. Norse and Finnish mythologies describe doubles that can be observed performing a person's actions in advance. In many folklore traditions a *Doppelgänger* is a personification of death and seeing one's own is an omen of impending doom.

In the West, a rich literary tradition involving *Doppelgängers* began with Jean Paul's novel *Siebenkäs* (1796) where the term was first introduced (and explained in a footnote) and continued through the 19th century most notably through poems by Shelley and Heine, and novellas/stories by Dostoyevsky and Edgar Allan Poe. Fascination with the idea of a double continued throughout the 20th century across literature, film and television and is showing no signs of abating in the 21st. For example, not one but two Hollywood feature films about *Doppelgängers* were released in 2013; one called *The Double* was based loosely on Dostoyevsky and the other, titled *Enemy*, was based on José Saramago's 2002 novel *The Double*. The *Doppelgänger* as an Alter Ego or Evil Twin (from *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* through to *Fight Club* or *Black Swan*) has become commonplace across our contemporary culture in the contexts of both drama and comedy. Memorable episodes of both *The Simpsons* and *South Park* (Butters and Professor Chaos!) have, unsurprisingly, had a very good time playing with the idea.

In musical terms, Schubert's song "Die Doppelgänger", the emotional climax of his *Schwanengesang*, is the outstanding example that explores the subject and is a landmark of German Romanticism. Schubert's setting of Heine's poem captures the horror of a man who, in the depth of night, sees his double wracked with anguish outside the house where his long-lost beloved used to live. Though Schubert's song will be cited, the Suite played this evening takes as its starting point a rather different take on the idea of the double, one in fact closer to Dostoyevsky. For Schubert and Heine, the *Doppelgänger* was ominous premonition. For Dostoyevsky the double is more directly threatening and intrusive. He seems to be the protagonist's friend for a time before showing his true colours as a despicable foe who mocks and disrupts his life, takes credit for his work, undermines his professional and social standing and ultimately leads to his complete humiliation. Dostoyevsky's writing is virtuosic and wonderfully humorous but steeped in irony – irony of the most exquisitely painful variety (in a way that anticipates Kafka). Not unlike K in some respects, Dostoyevsky's Mr Golyadkin is a character full of self-righteous justifications but with tragically little insight into his own nature or the world around him. While not intending to capture any of the tragedy of his ultimate demise, the *Doppelgänger Sweet* nods in the direction of Dostoyevsky's hapless protagonist and his grotesque treatment while playing irreverently with some musical imagery of its own.

Notes by Stephen Emmerson