

Spring 2018

Imaginary Keyboards

Ethan Charles Isaac
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2018

 Part of the [Composition Commons](#), [Music Performance Commons](#), and the [Other Music Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Isaac, Ethan Charles, "Imaginary Keyboards" (2018). *Senior Projects Spring 2018*. 391.
https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2018/391

This Open Access work is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been provided to you by Bard College's Stevenson Library with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this work in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

An Imperceptible Future

Originally, the intention was to create a programmatic album of some nature. At first I had come up with the concept of cataloging sounds and experiences from restaurants across the area, an idea which I may come back to at another time. But as it usually happens things do not go as planned. At the start of my senior year, I was enrolled in an electro-acoustic composition workshop run by my senior project advisor, Matt Sargent. In which I began exploring microtonal composition, something I had been building knowledge of as I spent my years here at Bard, though it wasn't apparent to me until in that moment that my senior project would be focused on such music. I remember in my freshman year being intrigued by Pianoteq (which I use extensively in my project), a piece of software brought into class for one day by my professor Kyle Gann, a serious composer of microtonal music. In the spring after that I had made microtonality the focus of my projects in Psychoacoustics. In my sophomore year I took Arithmetic of Listening, A class focused microtonal theory with Kyle, which in his words was "probably the only class being taught on this subject in undergrad". I spent hours listening to strange chords using the archaic microtonal music program, Scala. I enjoyed the class very much, but was unable to hand in the mid-term or final projects. I was struggling to keep up with the demands of college. Depression strikes when you DO expect it to and when it is least convenient. I had been harboring a disability my whole life, and was taught to act as if it was not a part of who I am. ADHD is a debilitating experience. One that I pretended wasn't there. In a lecture for a conference on ADHD Dr. Russell Barkley a clinical psychologist at the Medical University of South Carolina states what I have felt my whole life "ADHD is not an attention disorder, It's a blindness to the future... ADHD creates a nearsightedness to time so that the person with the disorder cannot organize to the delayed future, but only to the imminent future and so everything in life becomes a crisis" and it shows in my work. I was unable to complete

classes every year. I did not moderate until my spring semester of junior year. My depression developed in part because I had lost faith in myself, I was no longer able to throw together work in the hours before it was due like I could in high school. My medication for depression couldn't be combined with my ADHD medication and no amount of intelligence can solve a problem that needed 50 hours of work in 5. But I couldn't give up, I love music and no matter how much I felt like I didn't deserve to spend my time here studying it with others who had so much more control and expertise, I worked in spite of my disability. Relying on the gifts I do have. Like improvisation, the source of all my compositional output in my senior project and my propensity to technology, a tool I have always used to find shortcuts in my process. I am no longer on medication for depression and am taking Amphetamines for ADHD. The stimulant makes my body hurt, my heart rate high, and causes my bones ache. In my first semester of senior year I was able to create over a half an hour of new material using Pianoteq, other various electronic instruments, and effects. At the recommendation of my board I changed my spring goal from the creation of an album to a concert. I am becoming proficient in use of the Roli Seaboard, a cutting edge Midi controller. My understanding of notation has evolved through transcription of my improvised works. By collaborating with other musicians this year in Matt's electro-acoustic ensemble, I have learned so much. Two poets in my year are offering me the opportunity to write song cycles of their work. I couldn't have seen this coming, in more ways than one, but my future is something I am excited for. In the months after graduation I will go on a personal quest for some inner peace and control over my disorder that no one could find within the confines of a dorm room. I remember Kyle during my moderation board that it was unfeasible to write orchestral works based on improvisation but knew of an exception. I hope that in my imperceptible future I will be yet another exception and continue as the one that I already am.

Here is a short paragraph detailing the adult outcomes of being diagnosed with ADHD as a child. I was diagnosed as a toddler. I didn't receive pharmacological treatment until I pursued it myself at 15 after failing multiple high school classes. My parents did not think I would attend college.

Adult Outcomes

It has been estimated that anywhere from 15 to 50 percent of those with ADHD ultimately outgrow the disorder. However, these figures come from follow-up studies in which the current and more rigorous diagnostic criteria for the disorder were not used. When more appropriate and modern criteria are employed, probably only 20-35 percent of children with the disorder no longer have any symptoms resulting in impairment in their adult life. Over the course of their lives, a significant minority of those with ADHD experience a greater risk for developing oppositional and defiant behavior (50%+), conduct problems and antisocial difficulties (25-45%), learning disabilities (25-40%), low self-esteem, and depression (25%). Approximately 5-10 percent of those with ADHD may develop more serious mental disorders, such as manic-depression or bipolar disorder. Between 10 and 20 percent may develop antisocial personality disorder by adulthood, most of whom will also have problems with substance abuse. Overall, approximately 10-25 percent develop difficulties with over-use, dependence upon, or even abuse of legal (i.e., alcohol, tobacco) or illegal substances (i.e., marijuana, cocaine, illicit use of prescription drugs, etc.), with this risk being greatest among those who had conduct disorder or delinquency as adolescents. Despite these risks, note should certainly be taken that upwards of half or more of those having ADHD do not develop these associated difficulties or disorders. However, the majority of those with ADHD certainly experienced problems with school performance, with as many as 30-50 percent having been retained in their school grade at least once, and 25-36 percent never completing high school. As adults, those with ADHD are likely to be under-educated relative to their intellectual ability and family educational background. They are also likely to be experience difficulties with work adjustment, and may be under-employed in their occupations relative to their intelligence, and educational and family backgrounds. They tend to change their jobs more often than others do, sometimes out of boredom or because of interpersonal problems in the workplace. They also tend to have a greater turnover of friendships and dating relationships and seem more prone to marital discord and even divorce. Difficulties with speeding while driving are relatively commonplace, as are more traffic citations for this behavior, and, in some cases, more motor vehicle accidents than others are likely to experience in their driving careers. Thus, they are more likely to have had their driver's license suspended or revoked.

(source <http://www.russellbarkley.org/factsheets/adhd-facts.pdf>)

Procession

Ethan Isaac

For Pianoteq or tuned piano, tuned to just intonation on Gb₃

A = 436

1/1- Gb

25/24-G

9/8- Ab

6/5- A

5/4- Bb

4/3- B

25/18- C

3/2- Db

8/5- D

5/3- Eb

9/5- E

15/8- F

2/1 - Gb

Procession

♩ = 50 Considerately, Intensely, Quietly

The first system of the musical score for 'Procession' consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The music begins with a treble clef staff marked *pp* (pianissimo) and a bass clef staff marked *pp*. A dynamic change to *p* (piano) occurs at the second measure. The piece features a complex rhythmic structure with frequent changes between 4/4 and 2/4 time signatures. A first ending bracket is indicated above the treble staff in the first measure, with an 8va (octave) marking above it. The system concludes with a dynamic change to *mp* (mezzo-piano) and a fermata over the final chord.

Ped. _____

The second system of the musical score starts at measure 8. It continues the complex rhythmic pattern with frequent changes between 4/4 and 2/4 time signatures. The dynamics are marked *p* (piano) in the first measure, *pp* (pianissimo) in the second measure, and *mp* (mezzo-piano) in the third measure. The system concludes with a fermata over the final chord.

The third system of the musical score starts at measure 14. It continues the complex rhythmic pattern with frequent changes between 4/4 and 2/4 time signatures. The dynamics are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) in the first measure and *f* (forte) in the second measure. The system concludes with a fermata over the final chord.

The fourth system of the musical score starts at measure 20. It continues the complex rhythmic pattern with frequent changes between 4/4 and 2/4 time signatures. The dynamics are marked *mp* (mezzo-piano) in the third measure. The system concludes with a fermata over the final chord.

_____ Ped. Normally

27

f *ff* *mf*

30

mp *f* *mp* *mf* *Widen*

34

f *ff* *subitop* *Justly*

40

pp *p* *mf*

45

p *pp* *Ped.*

Pillars

Ethan Isaac

For Pianoteq, tuned to a harmonic scale on Db. Additionally some sort of plug in or patch must be used to add pitches listed below above those notated. Major 3rd , Perfect 5th , and Major 6th

1/1- Db

17/16-D

9/8- Eb

19/16- E

5/4- F

61/47- Gb

11/8- G

3/2- Ab

13/8- A

27/16- Bb

7/4- B

15/8- C

2/1 - Db

Pillars

Ethan Isaac

♩ = 73 **Abrupt, Mysterious, Awkward**

Musical score for measures 1-9. The piece is in 3/4 time. The right hand has whole rests. The left hand plays a sequence of chords: G2-B2-D3, G2-A2-B2, G2-A2-B2-C3, G2-A2-B2-C3, G2-A2-B2-C3, G2-A2-B2-C3, G2-A2-B2-C3, G2-A2-B2-C3, G2-A2-B2-C3. The dynamic is *pp*. Pedal markings are present at the end of measures 5 and 9.

Resultant Pitches

Musical score for measures 10-17. The right hand has whole rests until measure 10, then plays a melodic line: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The left hand continues with the chord sequence from the previous system. Dynamics include *f* and *subitop*. Pedal markings are present at the end of measures 13 and 17.

Musical score for measures 18-25. The right hand plays chords: G4-B4-D5, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4. The left hand continues with the chord sequence. Dynamics include *pp*, *p*, and *mp*. Pedal markings are present at the end of measures 20, 22, 24, and 25.

Musical score for measures 26-33. The right hand plays chords: G4-B4-D5, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4, G4-A4-B4. The left hand continues with the chord sequence. Dynamics include *ff*. Pedal markings include *ped. simile* and *Ped.* with an asterisk. Pedal markings are present at the end of measures 28, 30, 32, and 33.

36

mp *pp* *mf*

Ped.

46

f *fff* *f* *subitopp* *mp*

8^{va} 8^{vb}

53

mf *p* *f*

8^{vb} Ped.

62

p *mf* *f*

molto rubato

Ped.

66 **Accelerate Slightly**

Ped.

71 **Rit. down below starting tempo**

ff *mp ff*

City of Gold

Ethan Isaac

Melancholic ♩ = 50

Piano

pp

Ped.

7 rit.

rit.

Majestic ♩ = 140

10

fff

Ped.

11 rit.

sim.

ppp

A tempo

rit.

Musical score for measures 13-15. The piece is in a minor key. Measure 13 starts with a piano introduction (Ped.) and a forte (sfz) dynamic. A sixteenth-note triplet is marked with a '6'. Measures 14 and 15 feature a melodic line with eighth-note triplets and a bass line with quarter notes. The dynamic changes to piano (p) in measure 14. A 'rit.' (ritardando) marking is placed above the staff at the end of measure 15.

Waterfalls ♩ = 84

Musical score for measures 14-15 of the 'Waterfalls' section. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 84. The key signature has two flats. Measure 14 begins with a piano introduction (Ped.) and a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. A 'poco cresc.' (poco crescendo) marking is present. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth notes, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Sixteenth-note triplets are marked with a '6'. A hairpin crescendo is shown at the end of measure 15.

poco rit.

Musical score for measures 16-17. Measure 16 continues the 'poco cresc.' and features sixteenth-note triplets marked with a '6'. Measure 17 shows a 'poco rit.' (poco ritardando) marking and includes a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '3'. A hairpin crescendo is shown at the end of measure 17.

A tempo

Half tempo

Musical score for measures 17-19. Measure 17 starts with a piano introduction (Ped.) and a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. A 'poco cresc.' marking is present. The right hand has a melodic line with eighth notes, and the left hand has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. Sixteenth-note triplets are marked with a '6'. Measure 18 features a 'Half tempo' marking and a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '3'. A hairpin crescendo is shown at the end of measure 19.

A tempo

poco a poco cresc.

rall. *laying down in the grass*

3

18

mf *f*

6

20

p **A tempo** ♩ = 60

Ped.

24

poco rit. ♩ = 50

pp

3 3

Ped.

28

p **Peaceful** ♩ = 50

pp

3 3

Ped. Simile

31

ppp **A tempo** ♩ = 60

Ped.

City of Brass

Ethan Isaac

♩ = 50 Distorted, Lovingly

Piano

pp

Ped.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 1 through 6. The music is written for piano in a 4/4 time signature. The right hand features a melodic line with various intervals and accidentals, including flats and sharps. The left hand provides harmonic support with chords and octaves. A piano (*pp*) dynamic is indicated. A pedal line is shown below the bass staff.

7 rit.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 7 through 9. The tempo is marked as *rit.* (ritardando). The right hand has a simple melodic line, while the left hand plays chords. A dashed line above the staff indicates the end of the *rit.* section.

Stormlike ♩ = 140

10

fff

7 5 3 3

Ped.

5

Detailed description: This system contains measures 10 and 11. The tempo is marked as *Stormlike* with a tempo of ♩ = 140. The dynamic is *fff* (fortissimo). The right hand has a fast, rhythmic melody with triplets and a fermata. The left hand has a bass line with a quintuplet. A piano (*fff*) dynamic is indicated. A pedal line is shown below the bass staff.

11 rit.

3 3 3 3 sim.

ppp

Detailed description: This system contains measures 11 and 12. The tempo is marked as *rit.* (ritardando). The right hand has a fast, rhythmic melody with triplets and a fermata. The left hand has a bass line with a quintuplet. A piano (*ppp*) dynamic is indicated. A dashed line above the staff indicates the end of the *rit.* section.

A tempo

rit.

Musical score for measures 13-15. Measure 13 starts with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff contains a sixteenth-note triplet (marked '6') and a series of eighth notes. The bass staff contains a sixteenth-note triplet (marked '3') and a series of eighth notes. Dynamics include *sfz* and *p*. A *Ped.* marking is present in the bass staff. A slur covers measures 13-15, with *rit.* written above measure 15.

Glistening Bronze ♩ = 84

Musical score for measures 14-15. Measure 14 starts with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff contains a series of eighth notes. The bass staff contains a series of eighth notes. Dynamics include *poco cresc.* and *mp*. A slur covers measures 14-15. A *poco rit.* marking is written above measure 15.

Musical score for measures 16-17. Measure 16 starts with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff contains a series of eighth notes. The bass staff contains a series of eighth notes. Dynamics include *poco cresc.* and *mp*. A slur covers measures 16-17. A *poco rit.* marking is written above measure 17.

A tempo

Half tempo

Musical score for measures 17-19. Measure 17 starts with a treble clef and a bass clef. The treble staff contains a series of eighth notes. The bass staff contains a series of eighth notes. Dynamics include *poco cresc.* and *mp*. A slur covers measures 17-19. A *Half tempo* marking is written above measure 19. A *Obscured* marking is written below measure 17, with a bracket extending to measure 19.

A tempo

poco a poco cresc.

rall.

the city is disappearing from sight

3

18

mf *f*

Realized

6

20

p

Ped.

A tempo ♩ = 60

24

pp

Ped.

poco rit.

Flexible ♩ = 50

28

p *mf*

Ped. Simile

poco accel.

32

33

ff

fff

Ped.