



TRIO

from TOUCHED BY MACHINE?

for violin, clarinet in A and piano

Nigel Morgan

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About the piece

Between 1988 and 1991 Nigel Morgan created a sequence of four works, DUO (bass trombone and percussion), TRIO (violin, clarinet and piano), QUARTET (string quartet) and EDGE (wind quartet). These pieces, forming a CD-length concert called *TOUCHED BY MACHINE?*¹, were part of a sustained project to explore computer-assisted composition using the tools of the MIDI studio.

MIDI systems tend to encourage interaction with real-time processes: recording, improvisation, multi-tracking, complex layering, even sequencing, ordering and editing. However, the major factor of the composition act the composer wished to explore in *TOUCHED BY MACHINE?* was this new environment's support for pre-composition: the considered creation and organization of composition material; working off-line rather than on-line. This is nowhere more intensively investigated than in the TRIO for violin, clarinet and piano.

TRIO uses as its composition environment a component of the music sequencing software KCS (Keyboard Controlled Sequencer) created by Dr Emile Tobenfeld in 1985. This component, known as PVG (Programmable Variations Generator), was probably the first menu-driven algorithmic generator and editor commercially available that did not require any specialist knowledge of computer languages. In many aspects its design enabled the composer to explore quite elaborate 'what-ifs' in a multi-part composition. Whole chains of edits, processes, and transformations were possible to execute simultaneously, taking in conventional musical devices such as transposition and inversion as well as more novel procedures such as the application of Gaussian distribution and probability curves to musical parameters.

In composing TRIO the whole mechanism of PVG was brought into play. The opening section explores the variation mechanism itself, the middle section

¹ This title comes from an article by Stephen Travis Pope called *Touched by Machine? – Composition and Performance in the Digital Age*. This text presents responses from composers who were asked the following questions: How have new technologies changed the process of composition and performance? What new possibilities are aesthetically and artistically relevant? How do the new tools allow us to use musical material differently?

Computer Music Journal: vol 19. No.3. Cambridge MA. MIT Press.

focuses on transformation and the ending celebrates the morphing process where one musical 'state' is sequentially transformed into another. The entire composition is derived from the opening arpeggio in the piano part.

Surrounding the technical aspect of TRIO there were two important elements:

The first was the composer's interest in the artist Bridget Riley, in particular her ability to engage the viewer actively in her monochrome paintings and then later her work with colour stripes. It is the viewer's position in, and movement across, the pictorial space that appears to make the image 'move' playfully. The music that makes up all the pieces in the *TOUCHED BY MACHINE?* sequence attempts something of the same, only with sound and the listener.

The second was peculiar to TRIO itself, in that the work was commissioned with funds from the Eastern Arts Association by Polly Waterfield, a violinist and educator whose professional career began in associations with the pioneers of the Early Music Movement during the 1970s. For Polly, this new work had to speak to her unique relationship with chamber music of the past where democracy of content between parts was the norm and there was plenty of interpretative space for the player to extend and enrich a composition.

Notes for Performance

One of the prevailing ideas during the composition of this work was to create a very abstract and detached 'surface' of musical interaction between three timbrally different musical instruments. The performance articulation and sonic presentation aims to be in marked contrast to companion pieces in the repertoire for this ensemble such as Bela Bartok's *Contrasts* and Igor Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale*. Although a simple dynamic scheme has been put in place in the score this should be regarded as a starting point for more elaborate schemes devised by the performers: the work offers many possibilities for different perspectives to be opened up by altering the balance of the ensemble in much the same way as moving around a Bridget Riley painting engenders different qualities of experience for the viewer.

The open section to letter **F** is relentlessly democratic, the piano playing only melodically with the right hand. From letter **F** to letter **L** the piano and violin trade chords, the clarinet playing arpeggio figures from within the same pitch continuum. From letter **L** it is the clarinet whose part is most intricate and contains short figures which should 'jump out of the texture'. At letter **R** it is as though a fourth instrument has joined the ensemble in the guise of the left

hand of piano in the contrabass register. From here on each instrument gradually begins to occupy its own register space until at **W** these distinct registers (high violin, low clarinet, middle register right-hand piano and contrabass register left-hand piano) are rigorously maintained until **X**. From this letter until the end the instruments engage in a vigorous 'play' of hocketing and register entwining.

Performers are strongly encouraged to experiment with creating different sonic perspectives by using muting, movement within the performance area, gestures and extremes of articulation and tone.

To develop the potential of the work further three sections of the work may be repeated with instrumental parts swapping around if required and timbral devices such as tremolo being brought into play. These sections are from the beginning to **F**, from **F** to **L**, from **L** to **R**.

The Clarinet in A part is written in the score at sounding pitch

TRIO

for Polly

articulato e preciso ♩ = 102-112

Violin

Clarinet in A

Piano

7

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

A

13 B

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 13 through 18. The Violin (Vn.) part starts with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (B-flat, E-flat). It features a melodic line with various rhythmic values, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A box labeled 'B' is positioned above the fifth measure. The Clarinet (Cl.) part also has a treble clef and two flats, playing a similar melodic line. The Piano (Pno.) part consists of two staves; the right hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand has whole rests.

19

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 19 through 24. The Violin (Vn.) part continues with a treble clef and two flats, featuring a melodic line with accents and a plus sign (+) above the first measure. The Clarinet (Cl.) part has a treble clef and two flats, playing a melodic line with a slur over measures 20-21. The Piano (Pno.) part consists of two staves; the right hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand has whole rests.

25 **C**

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

31 **D**

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

37 E

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

Detailed description: This system of music covers measures 37 to 42. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin part begins with a melodic line in measure 37, marked with an accent (>) and a breath mark (+). The Clarinet part has a similar melodic line, also with an accent and breath mark. The Piano part provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines. A rehearsal mark 'E' is placed above the fifth measure. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

43

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

Detailed description: This system of music covers measures 43 to 48. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin part continues its melodic line, marked with an accent (>) and a breath mark (+). The Clarinet part has a similar melodic line, also with an accent and breath mark. The Piano part provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4.

49 **F** *energico con spirito e sonoramente*

Vn. *mf*

Cl. *mf*

Pno. *mf*

55 **G**

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

61

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

This system of music covers measures 61 through 66. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin part begins with a series of chords and includes a dynamic marking 'v' at measure 62. A box containing the letter 'H' is positioned above the staff at measure 64. The Clarinet part has a melodic line with a dynamic marking 'v' at measure 62. The Piano part consists of chords with a dynamic marking 'v' at measure 62. The bottom two staves of the piano part are empty.

67

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

This system of music covers measures 67 through 72. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin part has a melodic line with a dynamic marking 'v' at measure 68. The Clarinet part has a melodic line with a dynamic marking 'v' at measure 68. The Piano part has a melodic line with a dynamic marking 'v' at measure 68. The bottom two staves of the piano part are empty.

73 I

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 73 through 78. The Violin (Vn.) part features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The Clarinet (Cl.) part has a more active line with slurs and accents. The Piano (Pno.) part consists of chords and single notes, with a dynamic marking of *f* at the beginning of measure 74. A first ending bracket labeled 'I' spans measures 73 and 74.

79 J

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 79 through 84. The Violin (Vn.) part has a melodic line with slurs and accents, including a dynamic marking of *f* in measure 80. The Clarinet (Cl.) part has a melodic line with slurs and accents, including a dynamic marking of *f* in measure 80. The Piano (Pno.) part consists of chords and single notes, with a dynamic marking of *f* in measure 80. A first ending bracket labeled 'J' spans measures 79 and 80.

85 K

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

ff

ff

ff

91

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

97 **L** *soavemente e cantando*

Vn. *mp*

Cl. *mf* *f* *mf*

Pno. *mp*

103 **M**

Vn. *f* *mf*

Cl. *f* *mf*

Pno.

109

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

N

f *mf* *f*

+

3

3

3

115

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

mf *f* *mf*

+

(pizz.)

3

3

121 **O**

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

f *f* *mf* *f*

127 **P**

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

f *mf*

133

Vn. (pizz.)

Cl.

Pno.

f

mf

f

mf

Q

3

3

3

139

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

f

ff

(pizz.)

3

3

145 **R** *risoluto ed emphatico*

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

ff

ff

ff

151 **S** *piu memo mosso*

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

f

f

f

157

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

T

163

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

169 **U**

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

175 **V**

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

W *risoluto ed emphatico e preciso*

181

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

ff

ff

ff

ff

Detailed description: This system of music covers measures 181 to 186. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin part begins with a melodic line in measure 181, followed by rests in 182 and 183, and then a series of sixteenth-note runs in 184, 185, and 186. The Clarinet part has rests in 181 and 182, followed by eighth-note patterns in 183, 184, and 185, and rests in 186. The Piano part consists of a continuous sixteenth-note accompaniment throughout all measures. Dynamic markings of *ff* (fortissimo) are placed under the Violin and Piano staves in measures 184, 185, and 186.

187

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

f

f

f

Detailed description: This system of music covers measures 187 to 192. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin part has rests in 187 and 188, followed by sixteenth-note runs in 189, 190, and 191, and rests in 192. The Clarinet part has eighth-note patterns in 187, 188, and 189, followed by rests in 190, 191, and 192. The Piano part consists of a continuous sixteenth-note accompaniment throughout all measures. Dynamic markings of *f* (forte) are placed under the Violin and Piano staves in measures 189, 190, and 191.

194 **X** *con larghezza*

Vn. *mf*

Cl. *mf*

Pno. *mf*

Con Pedale

198

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

202

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

206

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

f

210 **Y** *subito intimo e cantando* *energico e con spirito*

Vn. *mp* *mf*

Cl. *mp* *mf*

Pno. *mp* *mf* *f*

214

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

218

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

f

ff

ff

ff

222

Vn.

Cl.

Pno.

mf

mf

mf

fff

fff

fff

220.