



Fig. 6: Scene “The attic”: boxes. Photo by Stu Allsopp

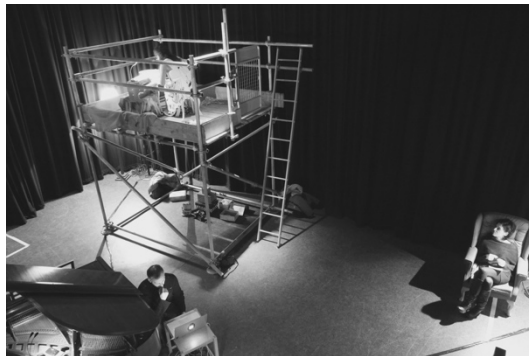


Fig. 7: Scene “The attic”: Music – *Ludvan ven Beethowig* (by Daniel Moreira). Photo by Stu Allsopp

4. Results

4.1. Audience’s feedback

At the end of the performance I told the audience that I would appreciate to know their comments about the project, and I handed them a short questionnaire with questions about their impressions of the show and how the extra-musical elements impacted their engagement with the music. I informed them that answering it was optional, and 16 audience members were pleased to complete it and return to me either immediately or later by email. Also three people preferred to meet me on the days after to talk about their impressions.

A great majority of the responses were positive. Many of the reactions were considerably emotional, with people mentioning thoughts and feelings which were triggered by the work, including memories of childhood and feelings of homesickness: “I became quite nostalgic and my thoughts dwelt on my childhood home and the security provided by my parents, and the house” (Anon. audience, by handwritten feedback).

The welcoming aspect of the performance was received positively, and it was especially helped by the fact that I greeted each person personally as they entered into the room: “I found myself at ease from the beginning. Partly because of your warmth and openness in welcoming your guests, and also by the intimate nature of the arrangement of the studio, light and furniture, space to be in” (Anon. audience, by handwritten feedback). Additionally, “the fact that you were coming and going with freedom and barefeet” helped to enhance the impression of a homely environment for some people (Anon. audience, by email, translated from Portuguese).

The comments about the exploration of space generally featured considerable enjoyment, especially regarding the possibility of the audience to experience the work from different angles: “I enjoyed being able to move around so as to view the events from different angles, and the acoustics from different points made for a deeper level of experience” (Anon. audience, by email). However, there was one negative feedback from a member of audience who felt uncomfortable about standing and did not feel confident of what he/she was allowed to do: “I didn’t feel quite comfortable standing. Wasn’t sure if I could/ should be moving, so I couldn’t settle and really listen”. (Anon. audience, by handwritten feedback).

The other extra-musical elements such as the quotations included on the programme, the objects, actions in between the music, and lighting, were generally well received. Apart from one person that found they “made it harder to listen to the music” (Anon. audience, by handwritten feedback), those elements were mostly appreciated as helpful to enhance the experience of the music:

“[The quotations] helped to set the music into a context that was both in the geography of ‘casa’ and also helped the listener to understand the reasons you had chosen each piece” (Anon. audience, by email).

“The movement of the performer between the pianos and objects created spaces between the pieces for me to absorb each piece and to reflect on the quotes and the connections between the pieces and the theme” (Anon. audience, by email).

“[The extra-musical elements] created the context and made me listen to music as not an abstraction, but filled it with a certain visual images, directed my mind in a way” (Anon. audience, by handwritten feedback).

Also, a sense of narrative was highlighted in the general impressions about the project, including comments of feeling “as if I had been in a journey” (Anon. audience, by email), and observations about “the sense of a story, but not necessarily a linear one” (Anon. audience, by informal spoken feedback).

4.2. Reflections from the performer’s point of view

Casa was a project that challenged me in both introspective and expansive directions, respectively during the creative process and in the moment of the performance.

Firstly, the autobiographical and reflective character of the work required me a process of introspection which included searching memories from family and from different phases of my life. The introspective process helped me to define the tone for the project, which affected my choice of the repertoire and the way that I approached the pieces. In that respect, the literary reference influenced my musical interpretation directly. The reflections on the quotations inspired gestures and instigated me to create mental images, which influenced my choices of dynamics, phrasing and tones in my playing.

Subsequently, during the performance, I found myself challenging some paradigms that had been usual in my practice as a classical pianist. From the beginning, the usual isolation of the musician before a concert was prevented by the fact that I ushered the

audience in myself. If, in the past, I enjoyed that isolation to help me to concentrate, I now had to find a way to maintain a relaxed and outgoing attitude, and yet to be able to focus despite the change on my usual “before-the-concert ritual”.

The physical relationship between audience and performer was changed from its usual setting in a classical music context: there was no barrier, i.e. considerable distance, between me and the audience, I could feel people watching me from all directions, and eventually moving around even while I was playing technically demanding passages. That situation turned to be a great challenge to keep focused and yet to feel at ease within the whole context.

Also I was required to step out of the usual still position of the pianist by having to move from one piano to another, walk around the space and do the actions in between the pieces of music. These changes of paradigms were challenging but also brought me a sense of liberation and deeper integration with the work. I was urged to become more aware of my whole body, also to explore a much larger repertoire of movements and my corporeal expressivity. Instead of feeling as if I was performing one piece after another, as it has happened in some of my previous conventional recitals, I could immerse myself more effectively in the context and shape my performance as a whole.

5. General Reflections/ Conclusion

The *casa* project was a proposal to shape a piano recital following a sense of narrative, also to explore space and an alternative setting for the audience. Having Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* as the starting point, the project developed into an autobiographical aspect. Thus, I found it useful as a method to allow the work to develop organically, and subsequently engage in reflections about the elements which emerged in the creative process, searching for meanings and potential materials that could help to structure the piece.

The standing audience and the expanded performance area with no clear definition of a stage area made reference to the category “immersive theatre”. These elements seemed effective strategies to bring the audience closer to the action and to envelop them in the work, also allowing the experience from different perspectives. My exploration of the space as a performer - from welcoming the audience myself to moving from one piano to another and doing some actions between the pieces - broke paradigms in my practice as a classical musician, and could suggest some dialogues with theatre and performance art. Those factors brought new insights for my musical interpretation: they allowed to immerse myself in the work and shape my performance as a whole, as well as feeling more connected and integrated with my audience. The sense of narrative, also explored through quotations from the literature, was an interesting tool to provide a context to the music repertoire, which was mentioned as helpful in engaging the audience with the work.

Casa has been one of the most challenging works I have presented, in which I could explore the idea of using concepts of dramaturgy to develop a piano recital/ performance, as a comprehensive artwork.

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ⁱ 72% of the audience members who shared feedback declared themselves considerably experienced in classical music, while 14% considered themselves just reasonably acquainted, and equally 14% declared themselves not experienced at all with classical music.

ⁱⁱ <http://institut-francais.org.uk/itsallaboutpiano/2015-edition/events/route-66/>. Accessed March 2016.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://sarahnicolls.com/review-moments-of-weightlessness/>. Accessed March 2016.

^{iv} <http://www.experientialdance.com>. Accessed 28 March 2016.

^v <http://www.ocmevents.org/ocm/events/olivercoateselainemitchener>. Accessed 02 April 2016.

^{vi} Many thanks to Joel Horwood, Rob Drummer, Nomi Everall and Ellie Aldegheri.