

Brian Ferneyhough

Complete
Piano
Music
1965-2018

Ian Pace
&
Ben Smith



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BRIAN FERNEYHOUGH
COMPLETE PIANO MUSIC 1965-2018

Ian Pace, piano
with Ben Smith, piano (disc A track 8)

Disc A	1	<i>Invention</i> (1965)	1:55
		<i>Epigrams</i> (1966)	
	2	I	1:12
	3	II	0:48
	4	III	2:02
	5	IV	1:49
	6	V	1:08
	7	VI	1:48
	8	<i>Sonata for Two Pianos</i> (1966)	16:04
		<i>Three Pieces</i> (1966-1967)	
	9	I	3:37
	10	II	7:52
	11	III	6:42
		<i>Lemma-Icon-Epigram</i> (1981)	
	12	I. Lemma	5:51
	13	II Icon	6:22
	14	III Epigram	1:34
Disc B		<i>Opus Contra Naturam</i> (2000)	
	1	I	2:41
	2	II	10:46
	3	III	3:08
	4	<i>Quirl</i> (2011-2013)	11:28
	5	<i>El Rey de Calabria</i> (c. 2018)	2:39
		Total duration	89:50

THE PIANISTS

Ian Pace is a pianist of long-established reputation, specialising in the farthest reaches of musical modernism and transcendental virtuosity, as well as a writer and musicologist focusing on issues of performance, music and society, and the avant-garde. He studied at Chetham's School of Music, The Queen's College, Oxford, and, as a Fulbright Scholar, at the Juilliard School in New York with Hungarian pianist György Sándor, and later obtained his PhD at Cardiff University, on 'The reconstruction of post-war West German new music during the early allied occupation and its roots in the Weimar Republic and Third Reich.'

Based in London since 1993, he has pursued an active international career, performing in 24 countries and at most major European venues and festivals. His vast repertoire, which extends to all periods, focuses particularly upon music of the 20th and 21st centuries. He has given world premieres of over 300 piano works and has recorded 34 albums.

He is Reader in Music and Head of Department at City University, London, where he has worked since 2010. He previously held positions at the University of Southampton and Dartington College of Arts. His areas of academic expertise include 19th century performance practice, issues of music and society, contemporary performance practice and issues, music and culture under fascism, communism and the Cold War, modernist music and the post-1945 avant-garde, especially in Germany, critical musicology, music historiography, and issues relating to ethnography and auto-ethnography.

The volume *Critical Perspectives on Michael Finnissy: Bright Futures, Dark Pasts*, co-edited with Nigel McBride, was published by Routledge in April 2019, and the volume *Researching and Writing on Contemporary Art and Artists: Challenges, Practices, and Complexities*, co-edited with Christopher Wiley, by Palgrave Macmillan in June 2020. He is currently working on histories of musical modernism in Weimar and post-war Germany, and a history of specialist music education in the UK.

<http://ianpace.com>

Ben Smith is a London-based performer and composer specialising in contemporary music. He is interested in – amongst other things – phenomenological and semiotic approaches to musical analysis, and compositional encounters with silence and repetition. Ben graduated from City, University of London in 2015, and is currently a Junior Fellow at Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he previously studied with Laurence Crane, Rolf Hind, and James Weeks.

THE COMPOSER

Brian Ferneyhough is widely recognized as one of today's foremost living composers. Since the mid-1970s, when he first gained widespread international recognition, his music has earned him an enviable reputation as one of the most influential creative personalities and significant musical thinkers on the contemporary scene.

Ferneyhough was born in Coventry, England, in 1943 and received formal musical training at the Birmingham School of Music and the Royal Academy of Music, London. In 1968 he was awarded the Mendelssohn Scholarship, which enabled him to continue his studies in Amsterdam with Ton de Leeuw, and the following year obtained a scholarship to study with Klaus Huber at the Basel Conservatoire.

Following Ferneyhough's move to mainland Europe, his music began to receive much wider recognition. The Gaudeamus Composers' Competition in the Netherlands awarded Ferneyhough prizes in three successive years (1968-70) for his *Sonatas for String Quartet*, *Epicycle* and *Missa Brevis* respectively. The Italian section of the ISCM at its 1972 competition gave Ferneyhough an honourable mention (second place) for *Firecycle Beta* and two years later a special prize for *Time and Motion Study III* which was considered the best work submitted in all categories.

Recent works have included *Inconjuncts* (2014), *Contraccolpi* (2016), and a collection of encounters influenced by Christopher Tye, *Umbrations* (2001-2017), premiered by the Arditti Quartet and Ensemble Modern at Wittener Tage für Neue Kammermusik.

Associated with the most prestigious teaching institutions and international summer schools for contemporary music, from 1984 to 1996 Ferneyhough was Composition Course Co-ordinator at the biennial Darmstädter Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. In 1984 he was made Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and he has since been named a member of the Berlin Akademie der Künste, the Bayrische Akademie der Schönen Künste and a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music. Most recently, he was awarded the 2007 Ernst von Siemens Music Prize.

THE MUSIC

Notes by the composer and pianist

Invention (1965)

Ferneyhough has written about a series of ‘small-scale “autodidactic projects”’ in his output from 1963-66 (see note for *Epigrams* below). His first acknowledged piano piece (unpublished at the time of writing), *Invention*, takes its title from the Renaissance concept with the dual meaning of both discovering music and inventing it through compositional processes. Here Ferneyhough employs a discursive framework between three essential types of material: (a) periodic repeated notes or occasionally chords in several different metres; (b) angular gestures encompassing a wide tessitura; (c) short groups of more sustained chords. These material types are both juxtaposed and superposed, with some limited degree of synthesis, before Ferneyhough dissolves the music into some more hushed ruminations, fading into nothingness, as would become a characteristic means of ending works.

Ian Pace

Epigrams (1966)

During the years 1963-66 my output consisted of a series of small-scale ‘autodidactic projects’, each of which consciously set out to formulate and resolve specific issues of musical technique and form. The six *Epigrams* for piano faithfully reflect these concerns in that each brief movement enunciates and elaborates on a single premise. Thus, for instance, one of the movements is a miniature set of variations, another deals with palindromic procedures while a third focuses on the temporal disposition of chordal densities. The first and last movements stand perhaps the furthest apart, the former treating received conventions of melody/accompaniment, the latter progressively expanding a series of independently-proliferating lines across the entire keyboard.

Brian Ferneyhough

Sonata for Two Pianos (1966)

The *Sonata for Two Pianos* was completed in 1966, along with *Epigrams* for solo piano and *Prometheus* for six wind instruments. The three works thus have a number of "family traits" in common, particularly certain structural and developmental processes involving continuous elaboration and transformation of the basic material, which in the case of the Sonata is presented at the outset in the form of a series of harmonic and rhythmic "cells". Throughout the course of the work these cells are expanded and contracted so as to produce an ever-proliferating sequence of phrases and it is the collision and interpenetration of these small motives which fuels the Sonata's eruptive and febrile discourse.

Although in one continuous movement, the Sonata falls into seven large sections, delineated mainly by contrasts in tempo. These divisions can themselves be further broken down into smaller sections closely examining different types of texture. The first section begins slowly, builds rapidly to a climax, then falls away onto held chords. This is a feature which occurs at many points in the score, culminating just before the final, slow coda in a held chord of indeterminate length, utilising the full power and range of the two instruments.

The main body of the piece consists of alternations of this slow tempo with a faster one, which is nevertheless based on the same musical material. The intention in using the medium of two pianos was first, to provide the opportunity for the complex passing of phrases from one instrument to another and, second, to exploit to the full the virtuosity of which the modern performer is capable. It is seen to the best advantage in the two short cadenzas which occur towards the end of the Sonata.

Brian Ferneyhough

Three Pieces (1966-1967)

Even though these three movements are highly contrasted in almost every respect I was very concerned with gradually revealing a larger unifying formal motion manifesting itself through the increasingly insistent emergence of static, iterative textures marshalled into massive self-enclosed blocks. On this level, the overall tendency is thus a sense of increasing entropy countered, in part, by the evolution of the nervous, evasive

flickerings characterising the first movement into more consistently stable (and thus recognizable) textures.

At the outset, all levels of articulation – alignment of tempo and figure, register, degree of transformation – are mobilized in the service of an urgently energized and mercurial field. In the second piece, the longest, this type of activity is progressively degraded by the unexpected incursion of brutally invariant chordal blows. The ambiguous, unremitting encounter of these incompatible materials gives rise to a form in which disballace, frustration and unpredictability are the norm. I see a sort of “negative resolution” being achieved in the third movement, in that all types of activity, whatever their putative origin, are held forcibly isolated from one another, almost as if they belonged in distinct, mutually incomprehensible universes of discourse.

Brian Ferneyhough

Lemma-Icon-Epigram (1981)

The title of this work refers to a poetic form, the *Emblema*, developed most notably by the Italian poet Alciati during the first half of the sixteenth century. In general usage, the term is taken to mean an epigram which describes something so that it signifies something else. Later developments distinguished three components:

1. *Lemma* A superscription (or adage)
2. *Icon* An image
3. *Epigram* A concluding epigram in which the preceding elements are commented on or explained

Lemma-Icon-Epigram was given its first performance during the La Rochelle Festival on 28th June 1981 by Massimiliano Damerini. The work was commissioned by the Venice Biennale.

Brian Ferneyhough

Opus Contra Naturam (2000)

I.

II. [Katabasis]

III. [Kataplexy]

Text: Brian Ferneyhough (I), Charles Bernstein (II)

This piece forms part of my opera project *Shadowtime*, built around the death of the influential German-Jewish cultural philosopher Walter Benjamin on the Spanish border in 1940.

It plays a key role in that work in that it represents the orphic descent of Benjamin's avatar into the Underworld, through whose portals he is welcomed – to the strains of a series of sclerotically repetitive fanfares – by a Dante-esque gathering of demons and the feral shades of historical figures (some of whom were, at that point, still living).

'*Opus contra naturam*' is a term taken from renaissance alchemy and signifies one of the essential moments of transition/transformation which typify that arcane discipline. The piece itself is to be played by a Liberace-like figure or Joker and is to be accompanied by a silent film projection encompassing the chaotic intersection of scenes from fin-de-siècle Berlin cabaret, medieval labyrinths and images from the hyper-dissimulatory environment of present-day Las Vegas. Formally, the work is composed of a large central body of disordered and clamorous fragments framed by a lyrical Introit and a concluding Processional, both of which latter, in the opera, are accompanied by distorted and superposed plainchant quotations.

In keeping with its hallucinatory imagery, the central segment is a piano transcription, commentary and prolongation of an entirely disorderly and prolix body of materials assembled over the space of several months as a form of musical diary or monstrously autonomous memory trace. Apart from rendering it for piano, little has been done to suggest spurious criteria of coherence: given his fascination with the Surrealistically orderly disorder manifest by Parisian passages, I imagine that Benjamin himself would not have been entirely unappreciative of this aesthetic strategy.

Brian Ferneyhough.

Quirl (2011-2013)

- (1) A coil, curl or intricate entanglement; a series of writhing distortions.
- (2) The act of abstractedly winding ringlets of hair around the forefinger.

'Quirl' was conceived as an extended study in self-similar fractal rhythms which are folded up and constrained one within the other, often on several levels of replication. The overall tempo of the piece is thus defined by the speed at which the most densely compacted figurations in this severely plicated time-space can be executed.

'Quirl' was composed at the request of Nicholas Hodges, to whom it is warmly dedicated.

Brian Ferneyhough.

El Rey de Calabria (c. 2019)
for Trifolio 1988-2005

This piece was written in memory of Brian and Stephanie Ferneyhough's three-legged cat Trifolio, who lived to the age of 17. In a huge shift away from the dense, frenetic writing of his three previous piano pieces, Ferneyhough returns to the 'classical' cellular atonal idiom, derived from the work of the Second Viennese School, found in his own *Epigrams*, written over a half-century earlier, and hearkening further back to Schoenberg's *Klavierstücke* op. 33a and 33b. This short work, at a measured pace throughout, makes extensive use of imitative counterpoint and developing variation, using small changes in texture and more significant ones of register.

Ian Pace

Absorbing and Enacting the Piano Music of Brian Ferneyhough

My first encounter with the music of Brian Ferneyhough was in my teens, in the early 1980s, when I was showed the excerpt from the Second String Quartet (1980), which graced the cover of the vinyl LP featuring this work alongside quartets of Jonathan Harvey and Elliott Carter, recorded by the Arditti Quartet.¹ This excerpt (bars 112-116), featuring some of the most intricate and diffuse writing for the four members of the quartet, became a somewhat iconic example of a ‘new complexity’ score amongst that small community of musicians and others who like myself found this fascinating. The recording was every bit as compelling as the image; the music had a vehement quality, but also moments of eeriness and strained lyricism, as well as a level of linear clarity through which one could identify some classicising tendencies in Ferneyhough’s idiom. There was also a characteristic use of gesture which was identifiably rooted in earlier (primarily Central European) traditions, albeit executed at an especially frenetic pace, and with extremes of density and contrast which exceeded most other music which preceded it.

A few years later, I bought a score of the Three Pieces for piano, in the first of which I encountered a relatively abstract distant precursor of the language of the Second String Quartet, whilst also recognisably belonging in a category with a number of other short pieces from the period (the mid-1960s), by British composers more open to the achievements of the Second Viennese School than had been their predecessors. But if some such works by others could tend towards academicism, Ferneyhough’s piece had a more pronounced rhetorical quality and consequent grandiosity which appeared almost deliberately arch. In the second piece, somewhat lighter, even playful, writing gradually gives way to an evocative late expressionist idiom (with a particular fixation on repeated pitches and chords), which dominates the third piece, all the while continuing some of the more ‘theatrical’ qualities of the first. Then – after awaiting for a while a copy on order – I finally received a copy of the score for *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*. Here were many of the qualities I had found in the Second String Quartet, though with if anything a more transparent structure. This was a piece then being performed by my British pianist contemporaries James Clapperton and Jonathan Powell. Whilst at first somewhat daunted by the challenge of this black and dense score and especially the extremely detailed rhythms, knowledge of others’ achievements with it and also an

encounter with the magnificent recording of the work by James Avery,² together with the sketch-based analysis of the work by Richard Toop,³ made me determined to tackle the work. I first performed it while a student at the Juilliard School in the early 1990s, together with a range of other 'complex' piano music then little-known in New York City.

From my return to London in 1992 and beginning of my professional career in 1993, during which year I had the chance to hear a complete performance of the *Carceri d'invenzione* cycle by the ensemble Lontano mounted by the BBC for the composer's 50th birthday, I came to play *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* often, combining it with *Epigrams* and the Three Pieces for a concert featuring the then-complete piano works in Hungary in 1996 (at this stage *Invention* had not yet been uncovered; a score of this was eventually provided to me by the composer Michael Finnissy). I recorded *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* on my debut CD, *Tracts*, recorded in 1997, released in 2001,⁴ then commissioned *Opus Contra Naturam* together with the TRANSIT Festival (then part of the Flanders Festival) in Leuven, Belgium, where I gave the world premiere of the work in October 2000, a performance which was also recorded for CD, the first such of the work.⁵ The works up to and including *Opus Contra Naturam* which feature here were recorded in 2003, with release delayed by a number of diverse factors, and with *Quirl*, the Sonata for Two Pianos and *El Rey de Calabria* recorded in 2018-20. For a period of almost 30 years, Ferneyhough's piano music has been a central part of my contemporary repertoire.

These eight works, diverse though they are, provide only a partial picture of Ferneyhough's output as a whole. The fourteen years which separate the completion of the Three Pieces in 1967 and the composition of *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* in 1981, contain some of the extremities of Ferneyhough's output: the large-scale orchestral works *Firecycle Beta* (1969-71) and *La terre est un homme* (1976-79); the work which definitely established Ferneyhough's name, *Transit* (1972-75) for six solo voices, chamber orchestra and electronics;⁶ the three *Time and Motion Studies* (1971-77) for bass clarinet, cello and electronics, and 16 solo voices with percussion and live electronics respectively; and the work which would inspire a younger generation of post-Ferneyhough composers through its 'decoupled' approach to the various parameters of playing the instrument, *Unity Capsule* (1975-6) for solo alto flute.

These works explored extremes of virtuosity, radical defamiliarization of instruments and voices, and sheer abundance of dense material (though always carefully gauged in terms of texture, as comes through in a good performance). Ferneyhough appears to have viewed them as the end of a stage of his compositional development (as did Ferneyhough's contemporary Finnissey with his *alongside* (1979) for chamber ensemble, another type of extreme),⁷ and various commentators soon identified a shift in emphasis. Toop in particular demarcated a period beginning with the composition of *Funérailles II* (1977-80), and continuing with the Second Quartet and *Lemma-Icon Epigram*, in which the music had 'acquired a new expressive richness that even at first hearing is able to burst through its hermetic surface', making comparisons with late Beethoven and early Stockhausen.⁸ *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* is a key work from near the beginning of a new period of composition, somewhat less epic but also tighter and even more ferocious than in many of the 1970s works. This period reached its apotheosis in the cycle *Carceri d'invenzione*, inspired by the writhing drawings of imaginary dungeons by Giovanni Battista Piranesi. But if one only knew the piano works, one might imagine a relatively unbroken line of development between 1967 and 1981 which is contradicted by the reality.

Other aspects of *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* belie any attempts to fit such a work into pre-existing categories. Much of the music shows a pronounced emphasis on the horizontal properties of line and gesture, with relatively little perceptible use of functional harmonic progressions other than on a very small scale, in line with a longer current of development in twentieth-century music which was heralded by a series of writings in the 1910s urging a move away from a purportedly excessive vertical, harmonic focus in late nineteenth-century Central European music, toward one based upon line and counterpoint.⁹ Yet in the *Icon* section (anticipated briefly in some of the earlier material), one encounters what in the context of another composer's work Ferneyhough has called 'radical de-polyphonisation'.¹⁰ This whole section is held together by harmonic sequences (some of them produced by silently depressed chords) which, while not tonal in any conventionally recognisable sense, nonetheless demonstrate careful voice-leading and long-range harmonic progressions.

The 19 years separating *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* from *Opus Contra Naturam* witnessed the development of Ferneyhough's idiom from the Second String Quartet onwards to

encompass a new type of virtuosity distinct from that found in the works of the 1970s, maintaining a good deal of the composer's later gestural and discursive idiom. This development is manifested in the intensification of the musical language of the Second Quartet in that of the Third (1987), and the ferocious demands of *Kurze Schatten II* (1988) for solo guitar, *Trittico per Gertrude Stein* (1989) for solo double bass and the concertante works *Terrain* (1992) for solo violin and wind ensemble, *Allgebrach* (1990-96) for solo oboe and nine solo strings and *Incipits* (1996) for solo viola and seven players. These entail a shift from the world of *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* in which, notwithstanding brief moments of explosive violence, the music maintains for most of its course a degree of clear and even relatively smooth linear development of multiple ongoing musical materials. Ferneyhough speaks of a 'pseudo-developmental' quality in the work,¹¹ and elsewhere of a search for 'non-discursive argumentation' in this work,¹² but I focus more on the sounding surface which at the very least provides a passable imitation of development and discursivity. Furthermore, the work is structured in a type of ternary ABA' form, with the B section made up of a series of medium-length episodes.

All of these factors stand in palpable contrast to the audacious writing of *Katabasis*, the central section of *Opus Contra Naturam*, and probably the most demanding of all Ferneyhough's piano writing, with its relentless montage of highly contrasting materials with little respite in terms of density (mostly written on three packed staves), while sustaining an astonishing range of heterogeneous characterisation. At the same time there is some rapprochement with older musical languages, not least the almost alarming (and most 'dissonant') occasional triads, especially a prominent 'A major' chord in a 6-3 position, diminished and other stock harmonies, as well as ventures into almost parodistic realms of the macabre and gothic, or calculatedly vulgar elements such as the choppy series of hammered chords in periodic rhythms in the later sections, demonstrating a brash quality only glimpsed elsewhere in Ferneyhough's output, in particular in his 'big band' work *Carceri d'invenzione III* (1986) for fifteen wind instruments and percussion. All of this is of course set into dialogue with the flashes of text, often at the most intense moments, quite different from the regular interplay between text and music in the first piece. The third part (which I play here in its original version, prior to the addition of text and the title 'Kataplexy' in connection with its use

in the opera *Shadowtime*) alternates a semi-pointillistic idiom reminiscent of the music of Jean Barraqué with ‘fanfares’ in the form of hammered ostinati.

But there are also continuities between the two works. Some of the above-mentioned elements are anticipated in *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*, for example in the staccato section which is the last episode in the *Icon* section, which also incorporates a passage which Ferneyhough himself noted in the sketches approximates the key of B-flat.¹³ Furthermore, for all the rapid shifts in texture, configuration, gestural characterisation and other collage-like elements in *Katabasis*, Ferneyhough nonetheless employs linear and discursive elements which maintain coherence, so the music sounds more than just a series of wholly disconnected (notwithstanding the composer’s own comments suggesting this is indeed the case!)

Written after a further 14-year hiatus from solo piano composition, *Quirl* is a recognisable ‘Ferneyhough piece’ from the outset, once again through the nature of the gestural and discursive language (not least between highly angular figurations and others inhabiting a narrower tessitura), some stratification of register to distinguish various materials, highly volatile, rapidly-changing and often quite extreme dynamics and a broad spectrum of articulation. But the rich and dense textures of *Opus Contra Naturam*, with overlapping materials, are replaced by a consistently dry pianistic idiom, to be played with almost no use of the sustaining pedal, a product in part of Ferneyhough’s more regular engagement with Renaissance music, evidenced in the cycle *Umbrations* (2001-17), and keyboard idioms developed then on earlier instruments. At the same time, most of the material categories are sharply delineated with relatively little overspill of materials between them, making the structural processes relatively straightforward to follow. Nonetheless, there are many echoes of the third section of *Opus Contra Naturam*, with several otherwise uncharacteristic interspersions as in the earlier work, such as the use of rhythmic gestures on a single note, or even a high figure in ascending thirds reminiscent of the music of Rimsky-Korsakov or the early Stravinsky. In some ways this can be considered a reconception of the idiom of Ferneyhough’s works from the 1980s in light of the compositional experience gained in the subsequent period.

All these three major mature works present different challenges, and aspects of their idioms will be familiar to a pianist with a broad awareness of styles and repertoires: a combination of the piano writing of the Second Viennese School with aspects of later serial and post-serial composition of the 1950s and 1960s in *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*; the intersection of contrapuntal writing with expansive textures similar to some of the writing of Sylvano Bussotti or Iannis Xenakis in *Opus Contra Naturam* (while the first section, entirely employing the extreme registers of the instrument, recalls some of the 1970s piano writing of Finnis); or the dry and super-clear detailed writing in *Quirl*, resembling not only Renaissance keyboard works but even some of the neo-classical and 'objectivist' music of Stravinsky and Hindemith. The performer can bring such knowledge to bear upon their interpretations relating to wider styles and genres, whilst taking care to distinguish and illuminate what is unique to these works of Ferneyhough. In this respect a central concern is the nature of the notation.

The most obvious challenges for the performer of Ferneyhough's piano works (or other music) relate to the level of detail of his notation, and especially the rhythmic complexity entailed therein.¹⁴ Questions regularly encountered by performers of Ferneyhough's music, asking of how one can 'play the rhythms accurately', or whether it is even possible to do so, can become tiresome. These lay at the heart of a 1994 article by the composer Roger Marsh, in which he used empirical means to analyse and transcribe durations from recordings of the Second String Quartet and solo violin piece *Intermedio alla ciaccona* (1986) played by the Arditti Quartet and Irvine Arditti alone respectively, in order to argue that the sounding result differed significantly from that implied by the notated duration values, and therefore could have been notated much more simply. Without denying the possibility of some flexibility on the part of the performer, Marsh argued that the results actually exhibited a smaller degree of rubato than one might encounter in a good deal of music notated in a more conventional manner.¹⁵ Similar if more moderate conclusions followed in later articles by Christoph Keller and Klaus Lippe.¹⁶

Marsh's arguments and methods have received some sustained critique, not least by Stuart Paul Duncan, who notes how the results of performers playing from Marsh's transcription rather than Ferneyhough's score would be so very different, and the fact that Marsh is very selective in his use of particular passages in order to emphasise a

point.¹⁷ Nonetheless, some aspects of Marsh's critique cannot and should not be dismissed in all respects – if the results of performing complex notation easily slip into more normative patterns, the value of such notation at least demands some consideration. At the time of writing, the tradition of Ferneyhough performance was considerably less extensive than it is today, with a greater number of performers having learned from the achievements of their predecessors and developed new strategies as a result.

Marsh assumes, without making this explicit, a synonymy between what the ethnomusicologist Charles Seeger calls 'prescriptive' (for use to produce a performance) and 'descriptive' (describing a performance after the event) notation.¹⁸ Furthermore, Marsh adheres to what I would essentially characterise as a *positivistic* model of notation, entailing a relatively clear one-one relationship between notational symbols and sounding results, with the possibilities for flexibility (for example *rubato*) as a type of 'extra' on top of this. It requires such a model for even Jonathan Cross, while defending Ferneyhough's notational practices, to maintain that the scores are 'impossible to realise'.¹⁹ What does 'impossible' mean in this context?

A long period of study and performance of Ferneyhough's music and that of some others has led me to employ a non-positivist model, one which I believe facilitates the process of developing interpretations of his scores. Ferneyhough writes that 'A notation which specifically and programmatically deconstructs the sound into its subcomponents sensibilizes the mind towards aspects of the work which a seemingly more straightforward image would not be in a position to do.'²⁰ The importance of the details of the scores is through their *negation* of more habituated patterns, and as such channel the performer's creative imagination towards different types of results.

In a work for piano or any other discretely-tuned instrument, a pitch is unambiguous in the sense that it cannot be nuanced by the performer, but simply indicates that a particular key is to be struck. Rhythm, dynamics, articulation, voicing, and more are however quite different. There is no singular dynamic which is *mp* or *ffff*, but a bounded spectrum of different dynamics; going beyond the boundaries (whose location may be somewhat ambiguous) moves the dynamic into a different category. A metronomically exact rendition of a triplet, quintuplet or other periodic pattern is one of various ways of *reading* such a written figure, which bring with them the history of various stylised

practices. A literally even-voiced chord, in the sense that every note is struck at the same dynamic, is not necessarily the same as one in which the audible result sounds evenly distributed across the component pitches. In light of this, in a model I have outlined elsewhere,²¹ I consider many aspects of notation not to imply a sounding result for which there might be some variants viewed as minor deviations, but as placing boundaries around a range of possible audible results, each of which can be considered playing ‘what is there’. So there is no such thing as playing such a score ‘correctly’, just remaining within the boundaries which exclude approaches which would be definitely ‘incorrect’. Performance possibilities are defined by what they are *not* rather than what they *are*, in a manner akin to structuralist conceptions of language. The hugely intricate nested tuplet patterns in *Opus Contra Naturam* and *Quirl* are strategies to *avoid* the performer executing more regularised and familiar patterns, and to learn these patterns, over and above simply being able to strike the correct pitches, is about ensuring the avoidance of such things, which requires careful attention and incremental practice focusing on different layers. Instead of asking what one should play, one should ask what sorts of experiences can be generated through engagement with this particular notational practice.

Ferneyhough’s indications of rhythm, dynamics, articulations, etc. can be markedly counter-intuitive, in the sense that they exist in a dialectical and sometimes antagonistic relationship to one another. For example, the peak in terms of pitch for some line may not coincide with the peak of the dynamic envelope, while types of articulation or rhythmic nuance may be at odds with what could be considered implied by other aspects of the material, as might be implemented by what Ferneyhough describes pejoratively as ‘a performer undifferentiatedly applying his conservatoire technique, learned via Viotti, Tchaikovsky, etc., to whatever contemporary pieces happen to cross his path’.²² Once again, careful attention to the notation, avoiding more familiar and perhaps intuitively ‘right’ approaches, makes more engaging and distinctive performances possible.

Ferneyhough has claimed that any performer of his music would affirm that ‘the relationship of performative difficulty to actual sounding result is quite carefully calculated’,²³ and I would in general concur. Whilst it is possible to attain fluency with most of the musical material, some sections will almost inevitably entail a degree of

physical awkwardness, and this is not necessarily any bad thing, because over-fluency can diminish the degree of conscious engagement at the moment of performance. No performer could realistically pay conscious attention to every parameter in a Ferneyhough score at the moment of performance, but must be selective, which can affect which such parameters are foregrounded and have the most spontaneous qualities when played live. Physical qualities can also condition these choices.

There can be a utopian quality to a Ferneyhough score, not in the sense of pointing at some ultimately ungraspable ideal, which would suggest all the problems of singularity of implied sounding result I have outlined, but rather because of increased potential projection of different parameters and their interrelationships. As a performer, I continue to reconsider the scores and the possibilities contained therein, which are more than anyone could hope to exhaust. As such, these recordings embody a particular set of takes on the works in question as part of an ongoing interpretative work-in-progress.

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¹ Arditti Quartet: Brian Ferneyhough String Quartet No. 2; Jonathan Harvey String Quartet No. 2; Elliott Carter String Quartet No. 3, RCA Red Seal, LP RS 9006 (1983).

² James Avery, piano: Brian Ferneyhough, *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*, on *Perspectives of New Music*, CD PNM 28 (1990). Later re-released on CD of Brian Ferneyhough, *Allgebrach; Lemma-Icon-Epigram; Coloratura; Incipits; Composers' Art Label* CD cal-13013 (2004).

³ Richard Toop, 'Lemme-Icon-Epigramme', *Contrechamps* 8 (1988), pp. 86-127; reprinted in English as 'Brian Ferneyhough's *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*', *Perspectives of New Music* 28/2 (1990), pp. 52-100.

⁴ Ian Pace, piano: *Tracts*, piano music of Brian Ferneyhough, James Erber, Christopher Fox, Chris Dench and Richard Barrett. NMC CD D066 (2001).

⁵ Ian Pace, piano: Brian Ferneyhough, *Opus Contra Naturam*, live recording of world premiere, October 2000. CD Klara (2006).

⁶ On this see Roderick Hawkins, '(Mis)understanding complexity from *Transit* to Toop: "New Complexity" in the British Context' (PhD dissertation, University of Leeds, 2010); Ian Pace, 'Positions, Methodologies and Aesthetics in the Published Discourse about Brian Ferneyhough: A Critical Study', *Search: Journal for New Music and Culture* 11 (Fall 2015), pp. 1-72, especially pp. 3-7; and Hawkins, 'Brian Ferneyhough's "Transit", the London Sinfonietta, and the Emergency of Complexity in 1977', *Music & Letters* 101/1 (2020), pp. 89-119.

⁷ See Richard Barrett, 'Finnissy's alongside', in *Critical Perspectives on the Music of Michael Finnissy: Bright Futures, Dark Pasts*, edited Ian Pace and Nigel McBride (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 328-43.

⁸ Richard Toop, 'Ferneyhough's Dungeons of Invention', *The Musical Times* 128/1737 (November 1987), pp. 624-628 (quote from p. 624). Other related delineations of 'periods' in Ferneyhough's output can be found in Peter Reynolds, 'The Music of Brian Ferneyhough' (MA dissertation, University of Wales, 1983), in which *La terre* is seen as the beginning of this particular period; Malcolm Hayes, 'Ferneyhough's *Carceri d'Invenzione I*', *Tempo* 144

(March 1983), pp. 30-33; Francis Courtot, *Brian Ferneyhough: Figures et Dialogues* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), a book structured in this fashion, with a period of 'redeployment' identified from *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* through to the Fourth String Quartet (1990); and Lois Fitch, *Brian Ferneyhough* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013), with a similar gesturally-oriented period identified from the early 1980s until the time of the range of chamber concerts beginning with *Terrain* (1992).

⁹ In particular Paul Bekker, 'Neue Musik' (1919), in Paul Bekker, *Neue Musik. Gesammelte Schriften III* (Stuttgart and Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1923), pp. 85-118; Hermann Scherchen, 'Neue Musik', *Freie Deutsche Bühne*, 1/2 (9 July 1919), pp. 35-39 and 1/4 (21 September 1919), pp. 80-83; and various of the thought of Ferruccio Busoni expressed in a series of writings and letters. Several of these and other writers were influenced by the publication of Ernst Kurth, *Die Grundlagen des linearen Kontrapunkts. Bachs melodische Polyphonie* (Bern: Paul Haupt, 1917).

¹⁰ This was a comment made in my presence by Ferneyhough to the composer Roger Redgate in 1996 when I was performing the latter's piano piece *Pas au-delà* (1989).

¹¹ Cited in Toop, 'Ferneyhough's *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*', p. 64.

¹² Brian Ferneyhough, 'Interview with Paul Griffiths', in Brian Ferneyhough, *Collected Writings*, edited James Boros and Richard Toop (Amsterdam: Harvard Academic Publishers, 1995), p. 245.

¹³ Toop, 'Ferneyhough's *Lemma-Icon-Epigram*', p. 92.

¹⁴ For a more extended consideration of some of the issues here, see Pace, 'Positions, Methodologies and Aesthetics', pp. 39-44.

¹⁵ Roger Marsh, 'Heroic Motives: Roger Marsh Considers the Relation between Sign and Sound in "Complex" Music', *The Musical Times* 135/1812 (February 1994), pp. 83-86.

¹⁶ Christoph Keller, 'Die Ferneyhough-Familie', *Dissonanz* 51 (1997), pp. 34-36; Klaus Lippe, 'Komplexität als Programm für ein Beobachten zweiter Ordnung. Zur (Un)Spielbarkeit der Werke Brian Ferneyhoughs- mit Anmerkungen zu *On Stellar Magnitudes*', in *Ans Licht gebracht. Zur Interpretation Neuer Musik*, edited Jörn Peter Hiekel (Mainz et al.: Schott, 2013), pp. 104-121.

¹⁷ Stuart Paul Duncan, 'Re-Complexifying the Function(s) of Notation in the Music of Brian Ferneyhough and the "New Complexity"', *Perspectives of New Music*, 48/1 (Winter 2010), pp. 136-172, esp. pp. 160-63.

¹⁸ Charles Seeger, 'Prescriptive and Descriptive Music-Writing', *The Musical Quarterly*, 44/2 (April 1958), pp. 184-195.

¹⁹ Jonathan Cross, 'A necessary violence', review of scores of *On Stellar Magnitudes* and *Bone Alphabet*, *The Musical Times*, 137/1841 (July 1996), p. 21.

²⁰ Brian Ferneyhough, 'Interview with Philippe Albèra', in *Collected Writings*, p. 319.

²¹ Ian Pace, 'Notation, Time and the Performer's Relationship to the Score in Contemporary Music', in *Unfolding Time: Studies in Temporality in Twentieth-Century Music*, edited Darla Crispin (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), pp. 151-192. In this article there is a brief discussion of how one might approach the opening bar of *Opus Contra Naturam* from this perspective (pp. 189-192).

²² Ferneyhough, 'Interview with Philippe Albèra', p. 318.

²³ Ibid. p. 320.

Brian Ferneyhough on Métier



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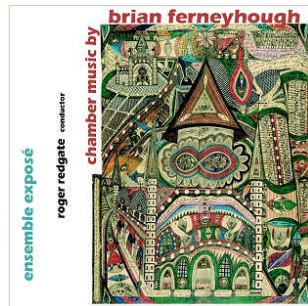
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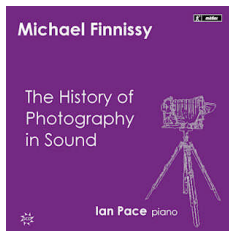
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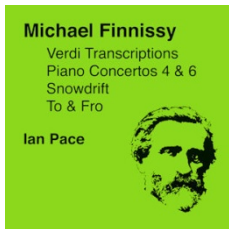
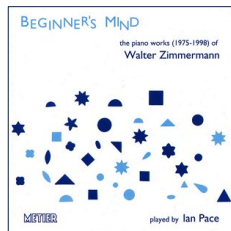


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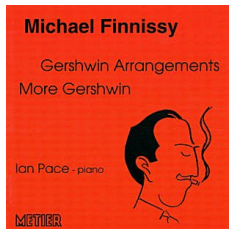
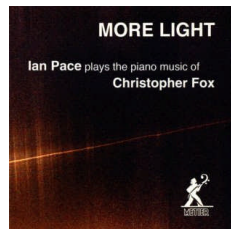
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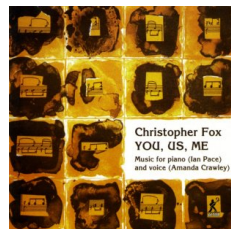
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