Flightless Path

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1. PROGRAM NOTES

This is a proposal for the premier of *Flightless Path*, a new work for The *Terpsichora* Pressure-Sensitive Floors and Renaissance Violone. The *Terpsichora* Pressure-Sensitive Floors (The Floors) are a new digital musical instrument which uses whole-body motion to control electronic music. The instrument continues the development of early models for pioneering dancer Philippa Cullen (1950-1975), expanding its use as an expressive and versatile instrument for musicians to play. The Floors use a large interactive surface for fine control of many sonic parameters with a small number of sensors. The violone is the Renaissance precursor to the double bass. It is a large instrument that has six gut strings, gut frets and is played with a viol style underhand bow. This instrument also requires the whole body to play and physically support the instrument in performance. This new work brings these two instruments together and is an interplay between the definitions of instruments and controller as they relate to contemporary practices based on gesture. Working with the specific limitations of the body in relation to large objects, the Floors and the violone both function as controllers for affecting sound and as instruments for creating sound.

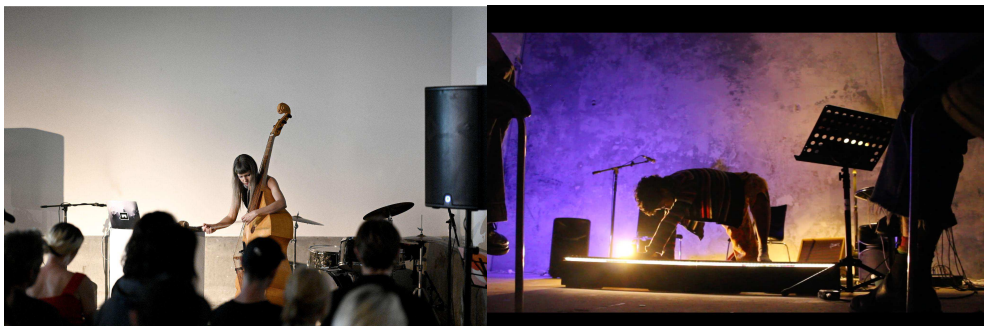

Fig. 1. The players and instruments.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The *Flightless Path* project developed out of a shared interest in large instruments that both act as controllers for electronic and digital processing and as instruments in their own right. This project explores the idea that the size of an instrument shapes the way the performer conceptualizes and expresses their musical language, shaping their cognition and thus their aesthetic choices. Large instruments can facilitate specific musical sensibilities that their smaller counterparts can not.

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Bringing The Floors and violone together in performance makes for an interplay between how reconceptualizing the role of a Renaissance instrument and the performance on a novel electronic instrument are both governed by the limitations that the body and interface of the instrument facilitate.

Treating the instruments' topography as a score, the authors align indicated gestures of the body, then translate them to the specifics of their instruments. The violone, a highly resonant wooden surface, turns into a controller for electronics, and the Floors, a wooden controller, transform into an instrument. The interplay between the musicians and these wooden objects reflects the materiality of creating sound with objects. Through acoustic and electronic sounds on both instruments, the feeling of working with a large wooden object is sonified. This work draws on the connection in gesture but difference in sound-making method across the two instruments, and its modular form unfolds increasing layers of complexity. This work is 20 minutes in duration but can be shortened if required.

3. TECHNICAL DESCRIPTION

There are 6 Pressure-Sensitive Floors used in this work, routed via a bespoke interface to Max/MSP and Ableton. Output to the speakers is stereo via a Focusrite interface. Foldback, stereo sound, power and 1.5 x 1.5 meters of space is required for this performance. The Floors are portable and pack down into three suitcase sized cases. All are transportable by the author.

The violone is fitted with a DPA mic that is run through volume and reverb pedals, for nuanced control over volume and to provide a naturalistic reverberant sound for the instrument in different performance spaces. This signal goes into a small mixer so that the DPA has phantom power before it is sent back through the volume and reverb pedals. The violone is also fitted with a contact mic that sits under one foot of the bridge. The contact mic runs into an effects chain; reverb, distortion, octave pedal, a granular processing pedal and another volume pedal in order to be able to switch back and forth between the more natural acoustic sound and the other processing. This electronic setup is often coupled with the collaging of the live processing of the violone with sliced up samples of the instrument, sometimes processed, further augmenting the instrument and its capabilities. These elements are also accompanied by field-recordings, samples of cymbals, drums and synthesizers.

4. PERFORMANCE NOTES

The authors require access to a PA (4 channels in total across both instruments), foldback, three music stands, two XLR cables and two ¼" to XLR cables for routing the outputs of both setups to the PA.

5. MEDIA LINK(S)

The following links are Google Drive links that will need to be downloaded. This was chosen for anonymity purposes.

- Video and Audio combined:
  https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eiJPQxeo2Pxcum0FCa_d5wfw3t0uO_om

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