

# The Sabotaging Piano Concert

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Additional Key Words and Phrases: piano performance, sabotaging, improvisation, composition

## 1 PROGRAM NOTES

In this concert, we want to explore the edge between composition and improvisation. We will invite a pianist to perform a half-improvised, half-composed piece written by Teodoro Dannemann, a piece specifically written for the Sabotaging Piano.

The Sabotaging Piano is an electronic prepared piano that challenges performers through the remapping of keys to unexpected pitches. For every new performance, a new remapping pattern is given, so performers face a continuously surprising new element. The performer is provided with an expression pedal (a “sabotaging pedal”) to modulate the amount of keys that will be remapped, going from none to all of them.



Fig. 1. The premiere of the Sabotaging Piano, held in August 2022 for the International Conference on Haptics and Audio Interaction

When the pedal is not pressed, the pianist can easily follow the notes of the score. However, the use of the pedal will inevitably bring notes that the pianist can't predict. This uncertain piano, at this point, forces the pianist to improvise by using the in-the-moment remapping pattern. In this way, the performance turns into a hybrid of score-following and improvisation, going back and forth depending on the level of pedal pressing. As the pressing level of the sabotaging pedal is annotated by the composer, the improvisation moments are quite planned in regards of *when* will they happen. Still, *what* specific keys to press in these parts is often left to the performer. The score in these moments is more open in regards to the notes to play, and the composer can go from specify only the rhythmic patterns of the notes to annotate

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very general sound ideas like “play quick loud glissandos with no much importance on which specific keys”. The piece lasts approximately ten minutes.

## 2 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Sabotaging Piano is a first exploration of its author towards sabotaging as a source of creativity. It builds up from well-established examples like indeterminate composition (e.g. John Cage’s I Ching [4]) or Witold Lutosławski controlled indeterminacy [8], but it also motivates from ideas coming from improvisation and jazz like mistakes as a source of creativity [2, 5].

As Hamilton describes [3], an old discussion in music comes from the question of whether the main value of music comes from the abstract composition (the score; the composer) to which the performer has to subserve, or either from the improvisational, spontaneous and contingent factors of the specific performance. In other words, is it the core of music in the composition or in the contingent performance?

In a premiere concert held on August 2022 in the International Conference on Haptics and Audio Interaction [7] at Queen Mary University of London, we explored how our Sabotaging Piano can promote the improvisation side of the above dichotomy (video of the concert available in attached media). In particular, the impossibility to completely control the Sabotaging Piano emphasises the fact that it will always have an explicit improvisation aspect. For that concert we asked three pianists to perform a 15-to-30 minutes improvisation each. We aimed to explore different strategies that they could develop through rehearsing something that will behave somehow always different.

For our proposed concert, we plan to explore the edge of the composition-improvisation dichotomy. As described above, we will present a scored piece that, at the same time, opens to a high relevance of how the performer reacts in the moment to the Sabotaging Piano remapping patterns.

## 3 TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

A detailed technical specification of the Sabotaging Piano functioning can be found in [1].

The Sabotaging Piano can be implemented in any piano controller. The core of it is constituted by a Pure Data [6] patch that receives the controller key presses and remaps them to sound synthesis software. The requirements for the concert are:

1. A dark performance space and a projector where we will display the real-time information about the remapped keys (see attached video for an example).
2. Stereo output for computer (audio interface)

## 4 MEDIA LINKS

- Videos: <https://teodannemann.wordpress.com/sabotaging-piano-concert/>

## ETHICAL STANDARDS

The concert and any data, audio or video recording to be made on it, was approved by the Queen Mary University of London Research Ethics Committee and agreed by participants.

## REFERENCES

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