

Piano Sonata

(2015/16)

Chris Dench

For **Peter de Jager**
who commissioned this work
&
in memory of **Robert Schuck**

friends, both

duration: circa 90'

Edited and engraved by Andrew Bernard.

My thanks go to Andrew for his invaluable assistance in the preparation of this work—CD

Performance notes and notational conventions

- This **Piano Sonata** is intended as a single arch. No provision has been made for the possibility of performing movements separately, and any proposal to do so requires the composer's explicit permission, which can be sought via his website.
- **Accidentals** only apply to the notes they directly precede except in the case of immediate repetitions or where score-space is lacking. Complex chords have the naturals omitted, but the letter-names are provided nearby for clarity. In some places naturals have been omitted for reasons of space—only inflections are shown. In the last two pages of **infallscape**, there are groups of repeated triads with rising internal pitches; for clarity the accidentals relating to the two outer pitches have only been given at the beginning of each group and continue until contradicted.
- The handwritten part of the score is largely notated at approximately 3cm = 1 second, except during *accelerandi* and *rallentandi*, or where entirely impractical such as during the **Photino birds** and **Lévy flights** sections, and with some subsections expanded for clarity. Gracenote notation is not rigorous—the player should use context as a guide.
- **Dynamic profile**: there are **ten** dynamic steps in this work—

ppppp—pppp —ppp—pp—p—mf—f—ff—fff—ffff

There is no **mp** dynamic; **mf** is considered to be midway between **p** and **f**. (*Poco*) written near a dynamic means to slightly understate it. A horizontal stroke (—) following a dynamic emphasises that it continues uniformly until contradicted; a slash (/) immediately between dynamics means an abrupt change.

Dynamics should be not be treated as a simple linear *soft*→*loud*: they function as variations in the *local* context. The *pppp* sections of the **three windows** movement should be treated as a “stage-whisper”, for example.

- **Pauses** are treated intuitively in this score. They are arranged hierarchically—the very small triangles are the briefest hint of hesitancy; the small triangles are fairly short, a momentary hiatus, about 1-3”; the medium triangles are of the order of 5”; the square pauses are longer and usually have a suggested duration attached. If no duration is given, then pause at the player’s discretion.

The pauses between movements are all notated in the score. No additional break should be introduced—the music is intended to run continuously.

- **Pedalling:** Normal pedal indications apply for the RH pedal: **PED**. In the engraved sections the word **PED** is not used, the bracketing line beneath the text suffices. A pedal line that has spikes without breaks indicates a degree of half-release, the player should assess degree of release by context; a “┌”-type break is a full release with all resonance ceasing; a curving line upwards at the end of a pedal line (and occasionally the beginning also, downwards) means a gradual release/(lowering) of the pedal. $\frac{1}{2}\mathbf{P}$ indicates that the pedal should not be fully depressed, to enable resonance to ring on but not overwhelm the texture; the degree of depressedness should be intuited contextually— $\frac{1}{2}\mathbf{P}$ is contradicted by standard **PED**, **PED (FULL)**, or bracket indications. **UC** means *una corda*; this is cancelled by either **TC** *tre corde* or the end of the **UC** bracket. **3P** with a broken line following to indicate duration means that the indicated pitches are held to the end of the **3P** bracket—the notes are usually given their full notated duration, except when they sit as a background sustain for a long period. At the front of many systems a bracketed pedal-release is indicated; this merely serves to remind the player that the resonance was half- or fully-cleared at the end of the previous system.

In the later sections of the piece block chords are notated **UC** with a specified duration, while the RH pedal allows the sound to ring on continuously. While it is likely that the effect on the sound will be barely perceptible, the performer should nonetheless follow the notation and treat these chords as disjunct objects ‘floating in a sea of resonance’.

In general, absence of pedal indication does not indicate absence of pedal use. Even the pedal indications provided are more in the nature of suggestions than instructions; the performer should pedal as they see fit to most clearly render the musical ideas.

- A small numeral **8** above a treble clef indicates that the entire system is to be played an octave higher; similarly, an **8** beneath a bass clef means that entire system is to be an octave lower. A normal clef or the indication **LOCO** returns the notation to normal pitch level. Standard **8va** notation is used for briefer transpositions.
- There are some—lefthand—chords that need to be sustained-through manually, by being held by hand to their full duration. These are indicated by the sign (**HOLD**). This is usually where the third pedal is disallowed by activity in the other hand.
- *Marcato* marks above beams indicate either same-note repetitions, or small emphases within the prevailing dynamic; these are in parenthesis if the music is quiet. In very loud dynamics the emphases indicate hard attacks, and the *inciso* marks indicate particularly hard attacks—they always occur at the beginning of groups.
- The small commas indicate that the sound should cease. This information is primarily provided by the notated durations; the commas merely reinforce the detail. They do NOT imply a hesitation.
- In the final, *Tombeau*, section, the segments are performed in strict number order with absolutely no pauses between—except where marked. The music is fragmentary, archipelagic even—“a labyrinth of ghosts”—but should not sound discontinuous, or incoherent.

This Piano Sonata took shape entirely in my studio in Brown Hill, Ballarat, and the writing occupied me for all of 2015 and the beginning of 2016. It is cast as a single arch in nine continuous, inter-related movements:

WHITEOUT¹

I THREE WINDOWS²

...interrupted by

II HEAT SINK³

III PHOTINO BIRDS⁴

IV GALLERY OF SPACES⁵

V LÉVY FLIGHTS⁶

VI EM FUGUE [A—B—C]⁷

VII $k = +1$ ⁸

VIII INFALLSCAPE⁹

IX TOMBEAU/ Ω POINT¹⁰—*Memento* Robert Schuck†

¹ Gregory Bear *Blood Music*, p 255

² Philip K Dick, Conversion of King Edwin of Northumbria, as paraphrased in *The Penultimate Truth*, p 59

³ Stephen Baxter, *Vacuum Diagrams*, p 4

⁴ Stephen Baxter, *Vacuum Diagrams*, p 334

⁵ John Barrow describing Luigi Bianchi's Classification of three-dimensional spaces which admit a continuous group of motions in *The Book of Universes*, p161

⁶ Albert-László Barabási, *Bursts*, p157

⁷ Gregory Benford, *Across the Sea of Suns*, p 133-144

⁸ John A. Peacock, *Cosmological Physics: the Isotropic Universe* 3.2: '...The Friedmann equation shows that a universe that is spatially closed (with $k=+1$) has negative total "energy": the expansion will eventually be halted by gravity, and the universe will recollapse'.

⁹ Collins Online Dictionary: **Infall**: the falling of matter to a celestial body from space under the influence of the body's gravity; Gerard Manley Hopkins: **Inscape**: the essential inner nature of a person, an object, etc.

¹⁰ Frank Tipler (from Teilhard de Chardin), *The Physics of Immortality*, pp xiv, 1 [The earlier musics are fragmentarily reincarnated in this final section.]

Movements	Traditional formal equivalents	Page
WHITEOUT	Prelude	1
I THREE WINDOWS	Sonata-Rondo	3
II HEAT SINK	Intermezzo I	19
III PHOTINO BIRDS	Scherzo I & Trio	24
IV GALLERY OF SPACES	Passacaglia	41
V LÉVY FLIGHTS	Scherzo II	75
VI EM FUGUE—A	Fantasia	90
B		117
C		122
VII $k = +1$	Intermezzo II	124
VIII INFALLSCAPE	Scherzo III	139
IX TOMBEAU/ Ω POINT	Elegy-finale	147