

THE SWITCH

2004

for piano, computer, electronic voice, human voice, and video.

Sean Peuquet

William Wadsworth Longfellow's eulogistic poem, *Charles Sumner*, has a stanza which reads:

But in the dark unknown
Perfect their circles seem,
Even as a bridge's arch of stone
Is rounded in the stream.

Based on this excerpt, *The Switch* was composed to lyrically, musically, and visually represent the reconstructive nature of memory. The concept of a memory as a circular process directly influenced the general structure of the piece. First, an objective event (musical and visual) is presented clearly to the audience with just subtle echoing. Second, the event is then dissolved and relegated to a "forgotten" space, where it exists only as an after-image. Third, the piece is reconstructed in the likeness of the original by a new person. By using this metaphor of circular reflection within a musical and dramatic context, memory can be artistically demonstrated to have complimentary yet distorted characteristics. Blurring the lines between real and unreal, live and recorded, and natural and synthetic become of premier compositional importance.

In the first section, the tape voices are fluid, the performer is clearly defined, and the piano is being randomly sampled and layered as an echo. The individual elements of the piece are therefore salient and explicitly specified. In the second section, these elements are deconstructed; the tape voices become processed (reversed and pitch-shifted, with reverb), the performer stops playing and leaves the piano as the video recording of the first section is projected on stage, and the existing piano samples become progressively more processed beyond recognition. In addition to changing parameters within a MAX patch, the first performer also begins to speak into a microphone, sampling their own voice using the same MAX patch. This allows for the first performer to exist as the focal point of the piece, even though their presence is now visually and auditorily diminished. The voice sampling continues into the third section as a second performer begins playing the original piano theme, yet the video projection fades out. In this sense, the first section is rediscovered as a reinterpretation of the original event, maintaining the influence of the first performer whose voice is still echoing in the distance. The tape voices again return to normal fluid speech, and the piano fades out much like the piece began.

Ultimately, *The Switch* is a piece performed, a piece forgotten, and eventually a pieced reconstructed. The cyclical and reflective nature of memory is dramatized through sampling, destructive processing, and the re-emergence of a motive through another individual's interpretation. By not having a single performer dominate the piece, making it explicitly theirs, allows for the immediacy of memory, and more generally time, to become the focus of the audience's perception of the performance. *The Switch* is a collection of moments which attempt to present this idea of how we perceive what has already happened in a simple manner, by allowing the audience to exist within the process.

Synthesized Text

you go and do this and i have to nod my head.
everything you said is what you said but it's not what was.
i only heard the key words so i'll guess the meaning is intact,
i'll guess the details are filler, i fit my head around.
you go and do this and i have to go and readjust.
everything is not in place, its not where it was left.
i only misplaced the old things but it s the old things that need their place,
so i guess the old things will be assimilated by nodding my head.
you go and do this and the pictures begin to un-develop.
everything is somehow dulled and placed in a room farther away.
i have the key words, yet clearly cant find the switch
cant trace the change to fix the code to be crisp.
you go and do this and i feel it again...
facets are dying, blurring what was there.
i only know one thing for certain...that i was certain it was there to begin with,
that which now is washed out.
you go and do this, and i thank you for this time...but last time was intact;
last time made sense in my certainty of it.
everything you said is something said but now it's remembered different from before.
i nod my head trying to fix the code
cause it changed everything that i remember i was certain i thought.
And such is how you die again,
pushed to that room
where i can't tell you apart from the worn furniture, carpet textures and cracked paint
(which once might have been green);
apart from my ignorant constructions and imaginative lies.
you go and propagate your rebirth into the past, and now
you are no longer that which is certain.
you are unfamiliar and ill-defined.
you are no more than light's tricks on a water's surface; a house stood before a lake,
painted anew.
you are no longer what you never really were.

Live Text

there is a progression that is sliced/torn in half
and i leave the rest for you to complete.
but the same thing will happen to you and i will
get duller, though rounded in the stream.

Instructions:

1. This piece requires two piano performers, one computer, one video camera and projector, and a CD player.

2. Instrument configuration:

- The piano first serves as audio input to an MSP patch (one or two microphones).
- Another microphone must also be available at the computer, also audio input for the MSP patch.
- Video camera must be set up focusing on the piano player.
- CD player running independently.

3. MSP score:

0:00 - set patch to setting one:

Volume: 75%

Audio: clear signal

Playback rate: 1

4:40 - switch audio input from piano to microphone by the computer.

4:40 through 10:00 - slowly adjust settings dependent upon number and quality of samples. Create a thick sonic texture at around 7:30, and then sample playback and processing should become sparser as the piece subsides.

7:30 - turn off the random sampler, but keep the DAC on.

4. Human Voice:

4:40 - Performer 1 begins reading the live text into the microphone by the computer, continuously repeating the stanza

7:30 - Stop speaking the text.

4. Video and Performers:

0:00 - begin video recording performer 1 at the piano

4:00 - stop recording, and rewind the tape

4:30 - 4:40 - cross-fade-in video with exiting performer 1.

7:50 - 8:00 - cross-fade-out video with entering performer 2.

5. Piano score elaboration:

Optional Section: Each performer takes the main theme in their own personal direction for however many measures seem appropriate. This should be seen as an original bridge, not a spontaneous improvisation. The music should be pre-composed and rehearsed. Optional sections should vary between performers, and may vary between repetitions of the section by performer 1.

Piano and CD: The piano and the electronic voices are fairly independent of each other, but the tape can influence rhythmic decisions during the optional section. The score merely indicates starting and stopping reference points for the performers in relation to the electronics. Exact cohesion between the two instruments within the body of the piece is largely discretionary.

Performer 2: Though the score instructs for the two endings of the main theme to be repeated twice, due to time, these sections will only be played once by performer 2.

The Switch

Quarter note = 66
Nostalgic

Sean Pequet

Piano

(start MAX patch at setting 1)

p

Tape Voice

0:00 You go and do this and I have ...
8:00 I guess the details are filler (rhythm fading out)

Piano

Optional

mp *p*

Tape

Piano

11

mf *p* *mp*

1, 3

Tape

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2, 4

OPTIONAL SECTION

mf

p

(Repeat fluidly until 4:30, then fade out)
(Repeat fluidly until 10:00, then fade out)

Fine

2, 4

Tape

Blurring what was there (4:30) *Fine*
Tape ends (10:00)

5

Piano

4:40 Performer one is off of the piano (crossfade video and performer) APPROXIMATELY 3 min 7:50 Performer two approaches piano

5

Tape

D.C. al Fine