

Canto ostinato
for keyboard instruments

PREVIEW

Simeon ten Holt

DONEMUS AMSTERDAM

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PREFACE

The first performance of CANTO OSTINATO took place on April 25th 1979 in the Ruïnekerk in Bergen (Holland) and was realised using three pianos and an electronic organ. Other combinations are possible using keyboard instruments. But the performance with four pianos is preferred.

CANTO stems from a traditional source, is tonal and makes use of functional harmony, it is built according to the laws of cause and effect (tension-release). Although all parts of CANTO have their fixed position in its progress and are not interchangeable without violating the melodic line, the internal logic and form, beginning and end do not have absolute meaning as boundaries of form.

Time plays an important role in CANTO. Although most bars or sections feature repeat signs and although the performer(s) decide(s) on the number of repeats, one cannot speak of repetition-as-such. *Repetition in this case has as its goal to create a situation in which the musical object affirms its independence and can search for its most favourable position with respect to the light thrown on it, becoming transparent. Time becomes the space in which the musical object floats.*

The performers have a wide margin of contribution. They decide about dynamic contrast, duration (in detail as well as for the whole) about the use of opposing or non-opposing differentiation of timbres, whether or not to play passages in unison. Also about repetition and combination of bars and sections, depending on their place within the score.

The performers also decide, depending on available time and physical effort, whether they will take turns or if there will be a pause. At the first performance, which took about two hours, a pause was held at number 88 in the score, a pause in which a pre-recorded tape was played of the first sections (A, B and C) following number 88. The concert was resumed after 25 minutes (tape fade-out).

A performance of CANTO is more like a ritual than a concert. The piece is not in a hurry and has in common with so called

minimal music that one cannot speak of fixed duration. As stated the first performance lasted two hours but it could have easily been more or less.

The main part of CANTO is indicated by the bracketed systems in bolder type. For the right hand there are two systems on which alternatives (variants) have been notated. Likewise there is one alternative staff for the left hand.

Supposing that the piece is performed by just one musician (e.g. a pianist), then he can diverge from the basic part via the given alternatives in order to create variety. Apart from these alternatives each bar or section of the basic part itself has the possibility for variation: by displacement of accents and dynamic contrasts. Some suggestions for these are given in the score by thinly drawn stems connecting notes within each group.

A new episode begins at figure 88 in the score, a sort of interlude. Bars and sections are indicated now by letters (A,B,C, etc. to I). This episode and the transposed section from figure 91 consists of a number of sections which are more or less small commentaries on the basic structure A.

Through its constant return A forms a pivotal or rest point. The ordering of A and its satellite-sections as given in the score is, in a certain sense, relative.

The symbol \longleftrightarrow indicates that in many cases one can either go back or forward in one's choice of sections and that, depending on the harmonies, certain sections can be combined. The variants notated as footnotes from figure 88 (for the left hand) function as a sort of 'wandering part'. They do not have to be present all the time – they can disappear and return – and they need not be filed to the notated octave register.

Bergen, June 1979

Translation: Ted Szanto

Duration: indeterminate

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INSTRUCTIONS

The scheme of repeats, as a structural element of the piece, allows the player(s) to make their own choices regarding:

- a) the number of times the relevant sections will be repeated (the sections specified as a bridge are to be played just once),
- b) the intensities (*forte*, *piano*, etc.),
- c) the manner of playing (*legato*, *staccato*, *portato* etc.).

The piece develops within the frame of choices offered in these three points and it is worth remembering that the players are by no means allowed to act as composers and play notes not found in the score.

Octave transpositions in the wandering parts are to be applied with caution and restraint. Playing octaves, in the right as well as the left hand, is categorically prohibited.

The players should well remember that (as a starting point) the right hand of the main part and the (shifted) right hand of the part above should be played continuously and consequently in 'narrow spacing'.

The players should keep in mind that there is no conductor waving a baton over *Canto Ostinato* and that it is the inner strength of the players themselves that should perform this task. The control, even when looked after by one of the players, lies in the sum of interactions.

After some time has elapsed the different intensities alternate with a noticeable transition, from *forte* to *piano* and the other way around (terraced dynamics) and this happens collectively, which means that all players switch at the same time. This may coincide with a change in the manner of playing, from *legato* to *staccato* for example and vice versa and this is performed by all players at the same time as well. The composer has always insisted that the transitions in intensity and manner of playing be carried out with a maximum of control and distinction.

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6

7

8

9

brug/bridge

(idem) (idem) brug/bridge (idem)

1. 2. 1. 2.

NB
alternatively
(ad lib.)