



Toccata

For Solo Piano

Nigel Morgan

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About the Music

The toccata as a musical concept has become an important feature of my musical development since 1996 when this short piece was written. The idea of music that was ‘touched’ but not sustained is something that continues to appeal to my thoughts about how musical performance might deliver particular kinds of musical content. Originally the word *toccata* denoted a style of keyboard composition popular in 15 and 16C Italy. Such keyboard toccatas were improvisatory preludes often played between items of vocal music. It is this kind of toccata that I have sought to reinvent for our time rather than the complex multi-sectioned compositions found in Bach’s keyboard toccatas BWV 910-916.

The music of my toccata is based entirely on the patterns 1-5 found Nicholas Slonimsky’s celebrated *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns*. Since it appeared in the 1950s the Thesaurus has become an indispensable resource for both jazz improvisers and composers. John Coltrane is said to have played these patterns daily. John Adams created a whole orchestral work out of the patterns in his *Slonimsky’s Earbox*. Pattern 1-5 are found in the section titled Tritone Progression: Equal Division of One Octave into Two Parts: Interpolation of One Note.



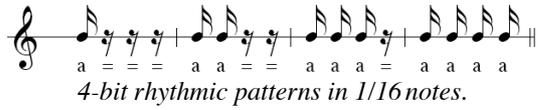
Patterns from Slonimsky’s *Thesaurus*.



Example distribution of patterns in *Toccata*.

The patterns are selected, juxtaposed and reassembled into scales, chords and hybrid arpeggio figures using a computer algorithm. This algorithm pours the ‘new’ material into rhythmic patterns that are assembled from libraries of 4-bit and 8-bit binary rhythmic patterns. For example, a 4-bit rhythmic pattern is expressed and stored as a sequence of text: a = =, a a = =, a a a =, a a a a and all other 4-bit

combinations of *a* and =, rather than musical symbols. This means that the patterns are essentially templates that can be filled with different rhythmic values:



The toccata concept has subsequently reappeared in my music as the predominant musical form in *Schizophonia*, a large-scale choral and instrumental work written in 2001. This work has two toccata-like movements lasting some fifteen minutes each. Again, this music is derived from algorithmic computation, only in these movements the rhythmic material is based on a sung and spoken text.

Toccata was written for the pianist Joanna MacGregor during her period as artist-in-residence at Liverpool Hope University College.

Toccata for Solo Piano

♩ = 105-110 with energy

The musical score is written for piano in 5/4 time. It consists of five systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The first system starts with a dynamic marking of *f* and includes a crescendo hairpin. The second system begins with a measure number '3' and includes dynamic markings of *mp*, *meno*, and *f piu*. The third system starts with a measure number '5'. The fourth system starts with a measure number '7'. The fifth system starts with a measure number '9'. The score features various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. There are several slurs and accents throughout the piece.

11

meno mosso

13

15

17

19

21

Musical notation for measures 21-22. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with various ornaments and slurs. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a bass line with similar ornaments and slurs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

23

Musical notation for measures 23-24. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with various ornaments and slurs. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a bass line with similar ornaments and slurs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). A dynamic marking *Red.* is present in the lower staff.

25

Musical notation for measures 25-26. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with various ornaments and slurs. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a bass line with similar ornaments and slurs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

27

Musical notation for measures 27-28. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with various ornaments and slurs. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a bass line with similar ornaments and slurs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Dynamic markings *mp* are present in both staves.

29

Musical notation for measures 29-30. The system consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and contains a melodic line with various ornaments and slurs. The lower staff has a bass clef and contains a bass line with similar ornaments and slurs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). Dynamic markings *f*, *p*, and *mf* are present in the lower staff.

31

pp mp f mf dim.

This system contains measures 31 and 32. It features a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The music is characterized by complex, overlapping textures with many beamed notes and rests. Dynamic markings *pp*, *mp*, *f*, *mf*, and *dim.* are placed between the staves. A large slur covers the entire system.

33

This system contains measures 33 and 34. It continues the complex texture from the previous system. A large slur covers the entire system.

35

(pp) *p* *(like an afterthought)* *for Marian*

This system contains measures 35 and 36. The texture is less dense than the previous systems. A large slur covers the entire system. The text *for Marian* is written in the upper right corner, and *(like an afterthought)* is written below the bass staff at the end of the system.