

# THE MODAL FORM AND CHALLENGES FOR INTERPRETERS OF NEW MUSIC

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## **The aim of the presentation**

Most people will agree that interpretation is strongly related to creation: new composition techniques and aesthetics create new possibilities and new challenges for musicians. In this keynote presentation I speak about my work “Sandwriting” (2018) for two keyboards and computer (2018) and about a topic which I think is closely related: interpretation vs. creation. The form of “Sandwriting” is modular, and specific technology was created to support it. The lecture was complemented with practical demonstrations by Indrė Baikštytė on the piano.

## **The context of the work**

Music is a time-based medium or “art in time.” Linearity as a specific way of thinking in music, which reached its peak in the classical-romantic era, but remains strong in the musical thinking of today. In the linear perception, musical changes are seen as events in time. This is related to the way we perceive, organize, and memorize temporal information. Often this type of linearity will be seen as a “musical narrative.”

As a composer, I am rather interested in a musical structure that involves changes but is not based on narrative. Since music is time based, it is effectively impossible to escape temporality, but I do think it is possible to unravel the linearity of it.

In 2017–2018 I wrote “Sandwriting,” a work for two electric pianos and electronics. It was commissioned by the WDR Cologne (Wittener Tage für Neue Kammermusik) and realized in close cooperation with the Experimentalstudio des SWR, Freiburg. This instrumentation in combination with the use of electronics provided the perfect conditions to experiment with different strategies for a non-linear model.

## **Composition vs. freedom of interpretation**

I want to start with a question about interpretation: where is the dividing line between the freedom of interpretation and a lack of responsibility towards the score? In other words, where does creativity end and artistic stagnation begin?

The relationship between composer and performer is a relationship of trust. A composition represents a set of rules, which a responsible performer understands and respects. Beyond these

rules there is freedom of interpretation. Different composers offer different levels of interpretational freedom.

“Sandwriting” represents an open set of rules meant to encourage performers to use their auditive sensitivity and creative spontaneity to support the musical momentum and achieve unexpected musical results. It gives significant freedom to performers but expects them to use this freedom responsibly.

The form of this work is not fixed; it depends on the interpretation. I call this a modal form.

### **Structure of the work**

Every piano part contains around 20 musical episodes, which emphasize certain aspects of the initial material and together create a sort of continuous variation.

These episodes offer different perspectives of one and the same object: comparable to a side view, a front view, a 3/4 view, etc. Depending which musical elements are emphasized, different musical aspect of the object can be seen.

Regardless of which musical element is emphasized, in every sequence there will be a strong link to the original material. Structuring the material in this way gives me, as a composer, the possibility to variate the order of the sequences.

Operating prepared algorithms, the computer plays an important role: it adapts the texture by adding and removing notes, changing the harmony or timbre depending on the pianist’s interpretation. This in turn creates additional musical possibilities for the interpreter and extends the possibilities of the traditional instrument: for example, stronger accents can create new layers or change harmony or rhythm, or the velocity can change the timbre.

### **Open musical context supports the creativity of the interpreter**

The order in which these episodes appear is not fixed. The computer monitors the overall result and chooses the best episode for continuation by operating the prepared algorithms. Different episodes can be chosen for both pianists. The moments of change are not synchronized between musicians. This creates a situation where the performers have to react to new musical situations every time. The demonstration shows that even if the same episode is repeated by pianist 1, a different musical context (created by pianist 2) encourages pianist 1 to react creatively. At one point the episode is in the foreground, at another point it is in the background. One situation asks the interpreter to emphasize the accents, another asks them rather to avoid anything that would disturb continuity.

*Simulation of two keyboards performing together: Pianist 1 (from recording) is randomly changing the sequences, Pianist 2 keeps the same sequence in loop and musically reacts to different musical situations. We can observe how different the realization of musical details is every time, dependent on the musical context.*

## **Interpretation and form**

Structurally, such composition methodology creates a morphing process: the gradual transformation of one sound into another. The actual path or direction of the episodes is not essential anymore. The change is important but not the direction: this creates a sort of musical labyrinth. I call the structure that emerges in this way the modal form.

The performer has significant power over the form and will influence the final shape of the work.

## **New challenges for the performer**

The pianist is involved in a different way of creating music, where the effort goes more towards the active creation of the overall sound and less to the precise vertical synchronization of the musical material. The articulation, dynamics, and attack immediately affect the texture, timbre, and even the form of the piece. The emphasis shifts for the interpreter towards co-creation instead of realization.

The presentation was supported by Indrė Baikštytė, piano / keyboard.

## **References**

“Sandwriting” (2018) for two keyboards and computer

Commission: WDR, Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik

Realization: Experimentalstudio des SWR Freiburg

Complete information about the work: [www.baltakas.net/work/sandwriting](http://www.baltakas.net/work/sandwriting)

The complete studio recording: <https://soundcloud.com/vykintas-baltakas/sandwriting-2018-for-2-keyboards-live-electronics>