

Some 21th Century Performance Practice Issues: The Piano in “Um Sino Contra o Tempo”

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“Um Sino Contra o Tempo” (A Bell Against Time) is an ensemble piece for flute, clarinet, percussion, and piano, composed in 2008 by the Portuguese composer Carlos Marecos. According to Marecos, this piece was devised having in mind part of a poem by Maria Martinho: “...o coração é um sino contra o tempo, é preciso correr...” (...the heart is a bell against time, one needs to run...). As a piece well within the avant garde repertoire of the XXI century, it presents as basic compositional processes an interesting interaction between a spectralism stance and interval structures. In this article, we will address this composition from the perspective of the pianist. In line with contemporary performance practice issues, we will look upon how different analytical principles and contexts come together for a better understanding and resolution of the technical and artistic difficulties that this piece present to the pianist. In this way, “Um Sino Contra o Tempo” is an excellent case study regarding the challenges of contemporary piano performance. Departing from the awareness of the different compositional processes, the contemporary pianist should integrate different music analytical tools as well as being able to embody and realize the metaphor present at the crux of the piece – the poetic phrase. We therefore conclude that many pieces of the contemporary piano repertoire (whether piano solo or in an ensemble setting) require from the performer an inclusive posture, deriving performance choices from many tools and concepts – from music theory and analysis, to theories of metaphors.

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