

Songs from the Machine

for piano

José del Avellanal Carreño
2019-20

Composer's Note

This piece was born out of a fascination with the mechanical and the artificial – to me, there is a deeply tragic, yet strangely beautiful quality to the thought of the faulty machine, the eternally imperfect entity. The image of a robot trying to dance was a constant thought in the writing of this work. The machine may be able to understand and recognise the human ideal towards which it aspires, but the same processes that allow this understanding impede it to fully realise the idea, and the machine is doomed to an existence of flawed efforts and glitches, awkwardness and imperfections. Never 'human' enough. One wonders if the intelligent machine is aware of its limitations and the futility of its efforts, but maybe it does not matter. After all, what can a machine do, other than try again, time after time?

The work's soundworld was built through a really strict compositional system which consisted in a rigorous counterpoint of different musical lines, all of them derived from one short line or cantus firmus which was treated and transformed in a serial way. As the piece progresses, this process is gradually 'humanized' by allowing greater human involvement, both from the composer and the performer, and tonal relationships, thematic elements and melodic and dynamic shapes make their way to the foreground of the work. As this journey unfolds new registers and sonorities of the instrument are uncovered, and moments of transcendence appear, only to in the end return to its original state – its inevitable circumstance, its inescapable nature.

And so, the robot keeps dancing, for all it can do is dance.

José del Avellanal Carreño (2020)

Performance Notes

There are several fragments of the piece in which the indication *poco meccanico* is used. In those instances the playing should be precise and impersonal, in contrast with other sections of the piece in which phrasing and expressive indications are introduced, but also allowing for clarity and musical flow.

There are specific moments in the piece in which the use of both the sustain and sostenuto pedals is notated, and should be followed as strictly as possible. When the pedaling is not indicated, pedal may be used but the general sound should be fairly dry, with special attention given to making the counterpoint of the different lines of the texture as clear and transparent as possible.

Diamond-shaped noteheads (e.g. bar 59) indicate depressing the indicated notes silently.

Duration: c. 10'

Written for Filip Michalak in October 2019-February 2020

For Filip Michalak

Songs from the Machine

José del Avellanal Carreño

Slow, crystalline (♩ = c. 60)

Piano

p
delicato, poco meccanico (sempre)

poco Ped. ad. lib.
(see performance notes)

4

7

10

13

(poco meccanico)

cantabile

p

(p) *cantabile*

16

poco

p poco meccanico (right hand)

mp

pp

p

19

p

p cantabile

pp lontano, sereno

Red

23

poco pesante

mp

mf

(p)

poco

25 *p cantabile* *pp* *mf* ^{very short} 3

p *dolce* *mp* *pp* Ped. _____

28 *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *marcato* *f* *mf* *mp* *mf*

p *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *marcato* *f* *mf* *mp* *mf* *dolce* (1/2)

31 *sfz* *f* *mf* *f* *sfz*

sfz *f* *mf* *f* *sfz* (1/2)

33 *sfz* *f* *ff* *sfz*

sfz *f* *ff* *sfz* *let sound ring and start dying away*

4

35 *8va* *sfz* *pp* *p* *pp* *dolce*

38 *p* *pp*

41 *meno pp* *pp* *delicato*

44 *espressivo* *ppp* *semplice*

47 *8^{va}* *sfz* *più pp* *ppp* *Ped.* *5*

50 *(pp) delicatissimo* *ppp lontano* *pp* *ppp but full* *8^{vb}*

52 *dolce* *pochissimo rit.* *ppp* *8^{va}* *ppp lontano* *(1/2)*

A tempo (*♩* = c. 60) *15^{ma}* *sfz* *pp delicato* *(pp)* *più pp* *ppp lontano* *Sost.* *(until sustained sound fades away)*

67

poco meccanico

f

sub mp

f

Ped. (1/2)

70

sfz

(f) luminoso

sfz

sub p

(1/2)

73

sub mp poco meccanico

sfz

f

sub mf

sub p

poco

sfz

(subito)

Ped.

76

ppp lontano

p sereno

(8)-----

sub *pp* *ppp*

79

ppp *pp* *ppp*

(1/2)-----

82

mf *pp* *sub mf*

(1/2)-----

8^{vb}

85

pp *delicato, poco meccanico* *pp* *mp* *p*

(8)-----

87

pp *ppp* *lunga* *ppp* *possibile*

(8)-----

Red.