



# THE ART OF THE TOY PIANO

A Toy Piano Homage to John Cage  
on His 100th Birthday

MARGARET LENG TAN (Singapore/US)

PAWEŁ ROMAŃCZUK (Poland)

# THE ART OF THE TOY PIANO

performed on toy pianos & toy instruments

PROGRAM NOTES BY **MARGARET LENG TAN** AND **PAWEŁ ROMAŃCZUK**

*MUSIC FOR AMPLIFIED TOY PIANOS* (1960), John Cage 12'

*FANFARE* from *THE WINGED ENERGY OF DELIGHT\** (1997), John Kennedy 1' [toy cymbals]

*SUITE FOR TOY PIANO* (1948), John Cage 7'

*ELEANOR RIGBY* (1966), John Lennon/Paul McCartney 3' [arranged for toy piano by Toby Twining]

*CAROUSEL* (2010)

*COBWEBBED CAROUSEL\** (2010), Phyllis Chen 8' [toy piano and hand-cranked music box], Video by Rob Dietz

*FÜR ENOLA* (2011), James Joslin 3' [toy piano, jack-in-the-box and spinning top]

*CHOOKS!, BICYCLE LEE HOOKER\** from *OLD MacDONALD'S YELLOW SUBMARINE* (2004), Erik Griswold 5' [toy piano, woodblocks, bicycle bell, bicycle horn, train whistle]

## INTERMISSION

*MUSIQUES NOCTURNES*, Béla Bartók 6'

from *OUT OF DOORS* (1926)

*BERCEUSE* from *STUNDENBUCH* (1997), Hans Otte 1' [version for toy piano and toy percussion by M.L. Tan]

*MIRABELLA\** (A Tarantella) (1995), Stephen Montague 3'

*EXTENDED LULLABY* (1992/1994), John Cage 6' [version for multiple toy pianos created by M.L. Tan]

*MODERN LOVE WALTZ*, Philip Glass 3' [arranged for 2 toy pianos by M.L. Tan]

*PLAY IT AGAIN, CHARLIE BROWN* (excerpt) (1971), Charles M. Schulz, Direction: Bill Melendez

with *SONATA in C MAJOR*, op. 2 no. 3 (1792), Beethoven 3', Allegro con brio (excerpt) [arranged for 2 toy pianos by M.L. Tan]

*RYOANJI* (1985), John Cage 15' [performed on one stringed double bass and percussion]

All works are Polish premieres except for *Suite for Toy Piano*.

\*written for Margaret Leng Tan

The image of *Extended Lullaby* is provided courtesy of the John Cage Trust.

Photographer: Emily Martin

Image of *Chickens with Piano Mountain* courtesy of Phyllis Chen.

The excerpt from *Play It Again, Charlie Brown* is made possible through the courtesy of Lee Mendelson and Bill Melendez Productions in cooperation with United Feature Syndicate, Inc.

SEPTEMBER 5, 2012, 7.00 P.M., TEATR MUZYCZNY, LUBLIN, 5 M. CURIE-SKŁODOWSKIEJ STREET

### **MUSIC FOR AMPLIFIED TOY PIANOS** by John Cage

This is the second piece by Cage for toy piano. This time the sound matter is a derivative of an object treatment of the toy piano in the process of amplification. The score does not specify the number of toy pianos or performers. The performer's experience with toy pianos as part of the Small Instruments project has allowed him to move beyond the range of existing interpretations. He works with a wide array of instruments: not only the traditional toy piano, but also books-as-instruments, string instruments and others. This version is Paweł Romańczuk's first solo performance.

### **FANFARE** by John Kennedy

*Fanfare* is the prelude to *The Winged Energy of Delight*, a four-movement suite written for Margaret Len Tan's toy piano by her composer-friend John Kennedy. He thought it would be fun to have her stage a grand entrance crashing her toy cymbals!

A composer, conductor and percussionist, John Kennedy is a dynamic and energetic figure in American music. He has conducted celebrated performances of opera, ballet, standard orchestral and new music. His own compositions, from operas to chamber works, are praised for their new lyricism and luminous sound. [www.johnkennedymusic.com](http://www.johnkennedymusic.com)

### **SUITE FOR TOY PIANO** by John Cage

Written for Merce Cunningham's dance *Diversion*, the *Suite for Toy Piano* is the first-ever serious composition created for the toy instrument. Its five short movements use only nine consecutive white notes and can ostensibly be performed on any toy piano, perhaps even one with painted black keys. One of the most charming and whimsical of Cage's compositions, the Suite is filled with Cagean irony and humor as in the exaggerated dynamic extremes from *sfz* to *ppp*. As if a toy piano could have such capabilities! Nevertheless, the pianist tries his/her best and from the effort subtle differences do emerge. [www.johncage.org](http://www.johncage.org)

### **ELEANOR RIGBY** by John Lennon/Paul McCartney

American composer Toby Twining created the toy version of Eleanor Rigby for Margaret Leng Tan's 1997 *Art of the Toy Piano* album because she thought this popular Beatles song would be a potent evocation of 60's nostalgia when heard emanating from a toy piano.

### **CAROUSEL/COBWEBBED CAROUSEL** by Phyllis Chen

*It seems natural to love music boxes as a toy pianist; both instruments have metal tines and rely on a resonating chamber to sound. Both Carousel and Cobwebbed Carousel are composed on the same punch tape strip but for Cobwebbed Carousel the reverse surface of the punch tape passes through the music box mechanism. In this "counter-piece", Margaret suggested that I attempt to capture the mysterious, darker aspect of childhood. Cobwebbed Carousel is dedicated to and written for Margaret Leng Tan with great admiration – Phyllis Chen.*

Phyllis Chen is a pianist/toy pianist/composer currently living in New York City. Her work uses unconventional instruments and sound-making devices that are integral to the visual and theatrical components of her work. She created the annual UnCaged Toy Piano Competition in 2007 and in 2011 hosted the UnCaged Toy Piano Festival, the first of its kind in New York.

[www.phyllischen.net](http://www.phyllischen.net)

### **FÜR ENOLA** by James Joslin

*Für Enola* seeks to revert the toy piano back to its playful origins by accompanying it with a jack-in-the-box. The score denotes when the box's handle should be turned leading ultimately to the release of the jumping jack. At this moment the performance pauses as a spinning top is spun, creating a stillness and suspense until it falls. When it does so, the piece continues minus the jack-in-the-box... like awakening from a mischievous dream.

James Joslin (b.1987) is a composer and performer based in England, where he is currently completing a degree in *Music, Technology and Innovation* at De Montfort University. His compositions cover a wide field from toy piano compositions, pieces for instruments with electronics, and sound installations. Most notably James' composition *Für Enola* (for toy piano and jack-in-the-box) won the UnCaged Toy Piano Competition's "Most Ingenious Combo" award. [www.jamesjoslin.weebly.com](http://www.jamesjoslin.weebly.com)

### **CHOOKS!** and **BICYCLE LEE HOOKER** by Erik Griswold

*Chooks!* and *Bicycle Lee Hooker* are from *Old MacDonald's Yellow Submarine*, a six movement work Griswold wrote for me in 2004. "Chooks" is Australian for chickens. *Bicycle Lee Hooker* is a mini-tribute to the great blues musician John Lee Hooker. A tour-de-force of multi-tasking, the piece explores the potential of making music with the humblest of toys – a bicycle bell, bicycle horn and train whistle heard in tandem with the toy piano.

*Old MacDonald's Yellow Submarine* was generously funded by the Australia Council for the Arts and was the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's official entry at the 2010 International Rostrum of Composers conference.

Australian-American composer-pianist Erik Griswold performs in Clocked Out Duo with percussionist Vanessa Tomlinson. He not only creates works for prepared piano, percussion and toy instruments, but he also explores the possibilities of music boxes, found object percussion and microtonality. [www.erikgriswold.org](http://www.erikgriswold.org)

### **MUSIQUES NOCTURNES** from **OUT OF DOORS** by Béla Bartók

The "Nocturnal Music" movement from the piano suite *Out of Doors* is an uncanny anticipation of Minimalism and ambient music. Since the piece is, for the most part, made up of repeated motivic fragments above an ostinato, Margaret Leng Tan had little difficulty deriving a toy piano version from the original piano score. In "orchestrating" the piece, she has taken the liberty of complementing Bartók's evocative sounds of the night with ambient effects drawn from her arsenal of toy percussion instruments.

### **BERCEUSE** by Hans Otte

During the 1990's Hans Otte composed 48 one-page piano miniatures collected into four volumes. Together they make up his *Stundenbuch* or *Book of Hours*. To be savored at will, these simple, profound haikuesque statements are akin to essences, fleeting, yet haunting in their lingering traces. Otte initially sent Margaret Leng Tan one selection, *Berceuse*, thinking it would lend itself to the toy piano. She has since adapted several others in the collection as well.

The Bremen composer, pianist and sound artist Hans Otte (1926-2007) was a close friend of John Cage.

### MIRABELLA (A TARANTELLA) by Stephen Montague

Montague's toy *Tarantella* has all the hallmarks of the dance reputedly capable of exorcising the Tarantula's sting: great rapidity, perpetual motion and the use of 6/8 time. Designed to show off the virtuosic capabilities of Margaret Leng Tan's newly-acquired Schoenhut toy grand piano, Montague wrote *Mirabella* sight unseen (sound heard over the telephone), with strict admonitions not to exceed its three-octave compass.

American-born and educated, Stephen Montague has lived in Britain since 1974 and is widely renowned for his pioneering works combining live instruments with live electronics.

### EXTENDED LULLABY by John Cage

One of Cage's last works, *Extended Lullaby* (1992), was executed posthumously in 1994 as a musical sculpture of acrylic, spruce brass, and twelve 36-note Reuge music box mechanisms mounted adjacent to each other. The encircling acrylic tunnel serves as a modest resonating chamber. The dimensions of the piece are 17.8 x 182.9 x 12.7 cm. *Extended Lullaby* was produced in an edition of ten, one of which, belonging to the John Cage Trust, will be on exhibit at the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon in a show entirely dedicated to works by John Cage that engage with the French composer, Erik Satie (Sept. 28–Dec. 30, 2012).

The melody heard on the music boxes is a re-working of the *cantus firmus* and counterpoint of Erik Satie's *Vexations*. Hence its chromatic, modal nature. Activated at random intervals the twelve unsynchronized music boxes, playing at different speeds, make for a delightful chaos that dissipates as the mechanisms peter out.

Margaret Leng Tan has made a performance version of *Extended Lullaby* wherein she plays one toy piano live against eleven pre-recorded tracks. She chose a toy piano closest in timbral quality to a music box... sweetly beguiling, yet faintly disquieting at the same time.

### MODERN LOVE WALTZ by Philip Glass

In the mid 90's Margaret Leng Tan was desperate for repertory for her new-found instrument. She thought Glass' *Modern Love Waltz*, with its limited range and naive music-box-like figurations, would be an ideal candidate for the toy piano. Happily, it has turned out to be one of her most successful transcriptions and lends credence to her conviction that certain pieces were *meant* to be heard on the toy piano!

### PLAY IT AGAIN, CHARLIE BROWN (excerpt) by Charles M. Schulz

with *SONATA IN C MAJOR*, Op. 2 No. 3 (excerpt) by Beethoven

On the original soundtrack of *Play It Again, Charlie Brown*, Beethoven's *Sonata in C Major* is played on a regular piano. Margaret Leng Tan thought it would be more authentic to hear Schroeder, the toy pianist in the *Peanuts* comic strip, perform it on an actual toy piano. The toy piano's intimate quality is ironically closer to the *fortepiano* of Beethoven's day than is the modern piano's full-bodied voice!

### RYOANJI by John Cage

This is a version of the graphic score derived by drawing around the stones Cage selected for the composition, dedicated to the most important element of this composition is the flow of time, important also because of its relation to the place that inspired it – the 16th century rock garden in the Temple of the Dragon at Peace in Kyoto, Japan.

In the premiere performance Paweł Romańczuk will play a one-string metal-drum-resonator bass constructed by himself, accompanied by a percussive instrument.

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