

Improvisation #1

for piano

Nikolaos-Laonikos Psimikakis-Chalkokondylis

Improvisation #1 for piano

dedicated to Imogen Baylis

Program Note

This piece was written for pianist Imogen Baylis in the event of the Guildhall New Music Festival in July 2008. In the writing of this piece, I spent many hours improvising on the piano, and I wanted to write the improvisations down on paper, but quite a few difficulties arose in the process of doing so: if I played something and stopped to write it down, what I would play after I had written it down would not be the same improvisation, as I would have come out of the improvisational mindset to notate it; alternatively, if I recorded my improvisations and tried to transcribe them, firstly it would be an incredibly tedious task to do something like that (in terms of notating accurately the fluctuating rhythms, tempi and pitches), and it would be an even more tedious task for the performer to try and reproduce what I had written accurately. What's more, the performance of the piece wouldn't sound as fluid as an improvisation would sound, because the performer's concentration would go in trying to reproduce accurately the score, instead of improvising.

Therefore, I had to come up with an intermediate solution – and that solution was a new kind of quasi-familiar notation that gives as much liberty to the performer as it does not. I have borrowed symbols from both the traditional modern western notational system, but also from Klavarskribo, a notational system developed by Cornelis Pot in the 1930's. **Therefore, with this kind of notation I wrote down not what I was playing when improvising, but what I was thinking about playing when I was improvising;** this way the performers can retrace my steps in the performance of this piece, by following the same path but shaping it with their own footsteps. In writing this piece down, I worked very closely with the pianist, so what follows is just a summary of long discussions between me and the performer in explaining how the score is to be read.

The piece was premiered on the 4th of July at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, performed by **Imogen Baylis** (duration: 11 minutes)

Performance Instructions

- the **vertical lines** are a *visual representation* of a part of the keyboard, with the two dotted lines in the middle being the C# and D# above middle C
- the music moves **downwards**, and from **right to left** (in terms of systems – 3 systems per page)
- the **tempo** is *very slow*, and the **pedal** is *held throughout*, unless otherwise indicated (or at the discretion of the performer)
- the **horizontal position** of the notes indicates the *approximate position on the keyboard*, and the **vertical position** indicates their *approximate placement in time*
- the **white** noteheads mean that you must depress a *white* key in that approximate area; the **black** noteheads indicate you must depress a *black* key; the **X** noteheads indicate that you may depress *any* key
- **numbers** next to notes indicate the *fingering* (1 being the thumb and 5 being the little finger of the right hand; inversely for the left hand)
- **stems** indicate the *hand with which you must play the notes* (stem to the left = left hand, stem to the right = right hand)
- notes **beamed** with one beam mean that they should be played faster than the notes without beams, and slower than the notes with two beams
- a note **framed** in a box means that it must be played *inside the piano*, at that approximate register, by **plucking** the string with the nail (or a piece of folded paper, to avoid damaging the strings)
- **dynamics** are notated *traditionally*
- from the middle of the second system of page three, the whole system is framed with a box, and the box is divided in four sections with three thick black lines dividing each section: from that point on, the player plays mostly inside the piano, and the four sections correspond to the four divisions of the piano register within a grand piano, therefore the X noteheads' horizontal position now indicates the approximate position of the hand within that register of the piano's range; in that part of the notation, any white or black noteheads are meant to be played normally on the keyboard

IMPROVISATION #1 for a pianist

Slowly

et the chords
and notes be
heard

pedal hold
throughout, unless
otherwise indicated

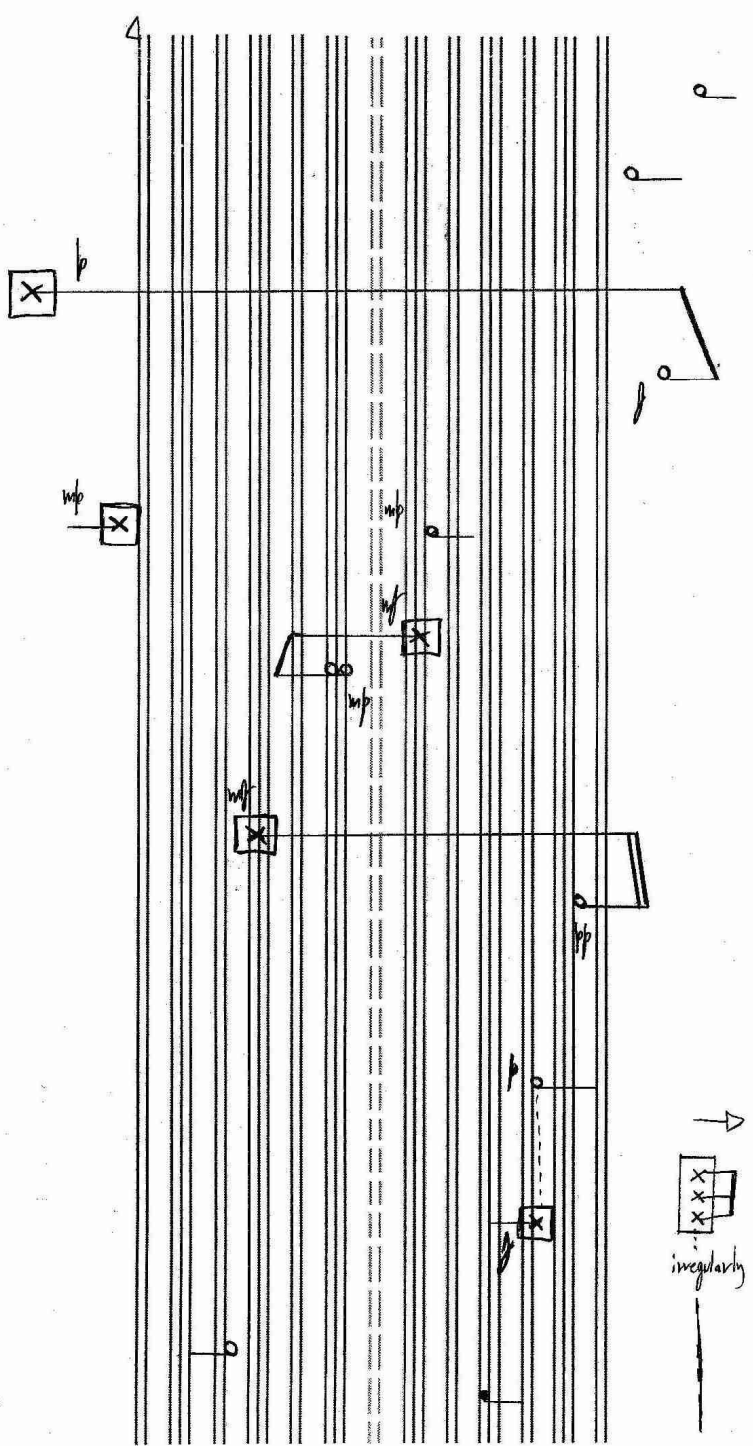
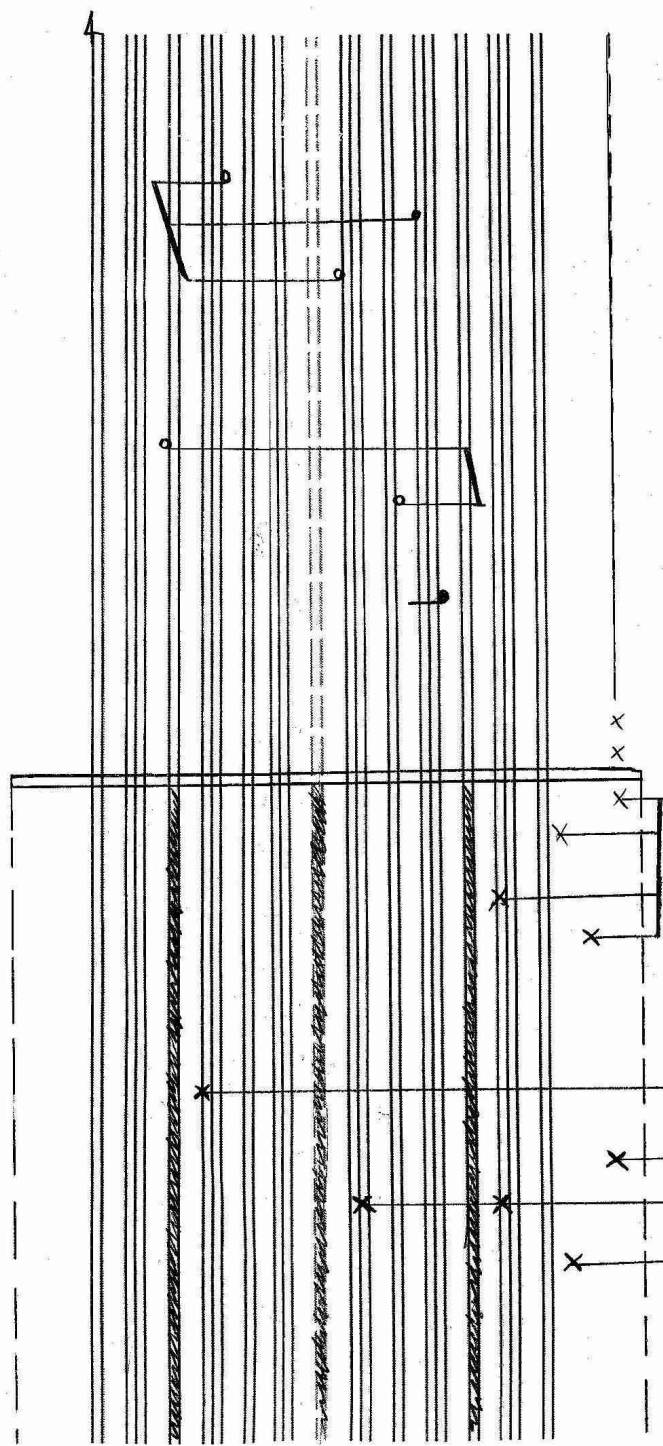
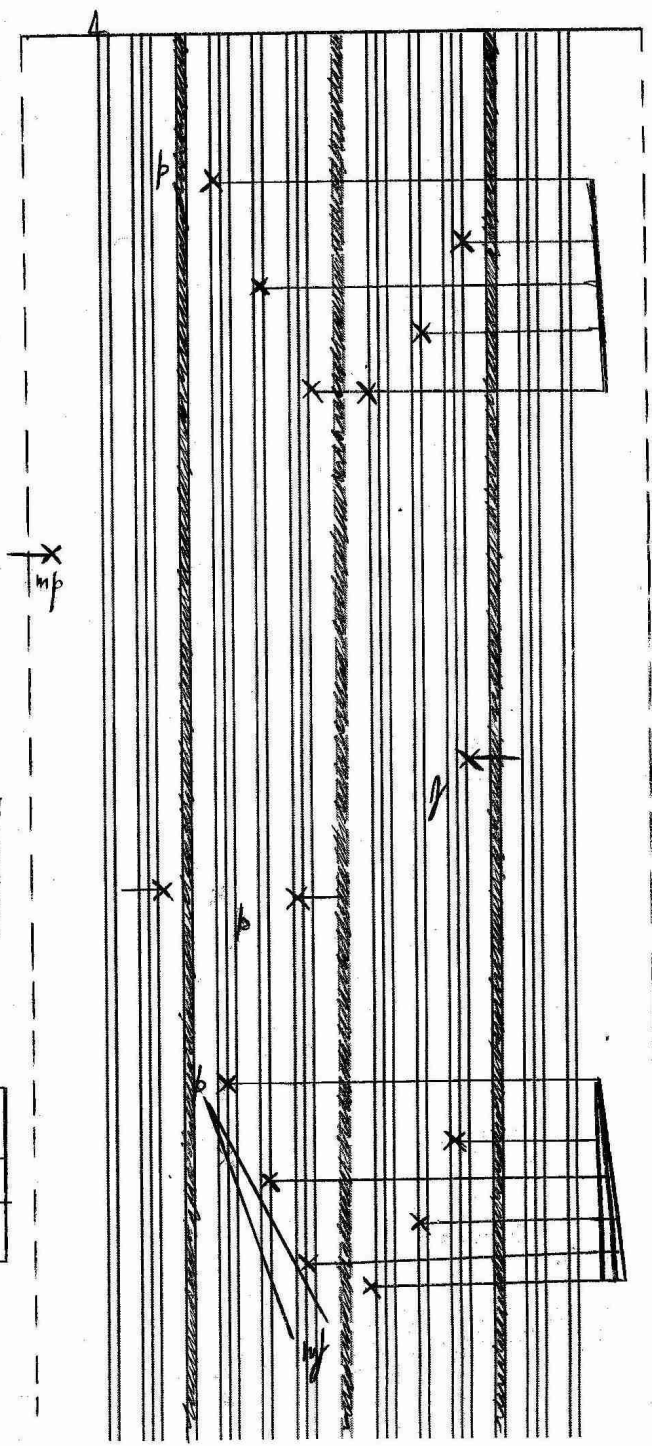
Pedal

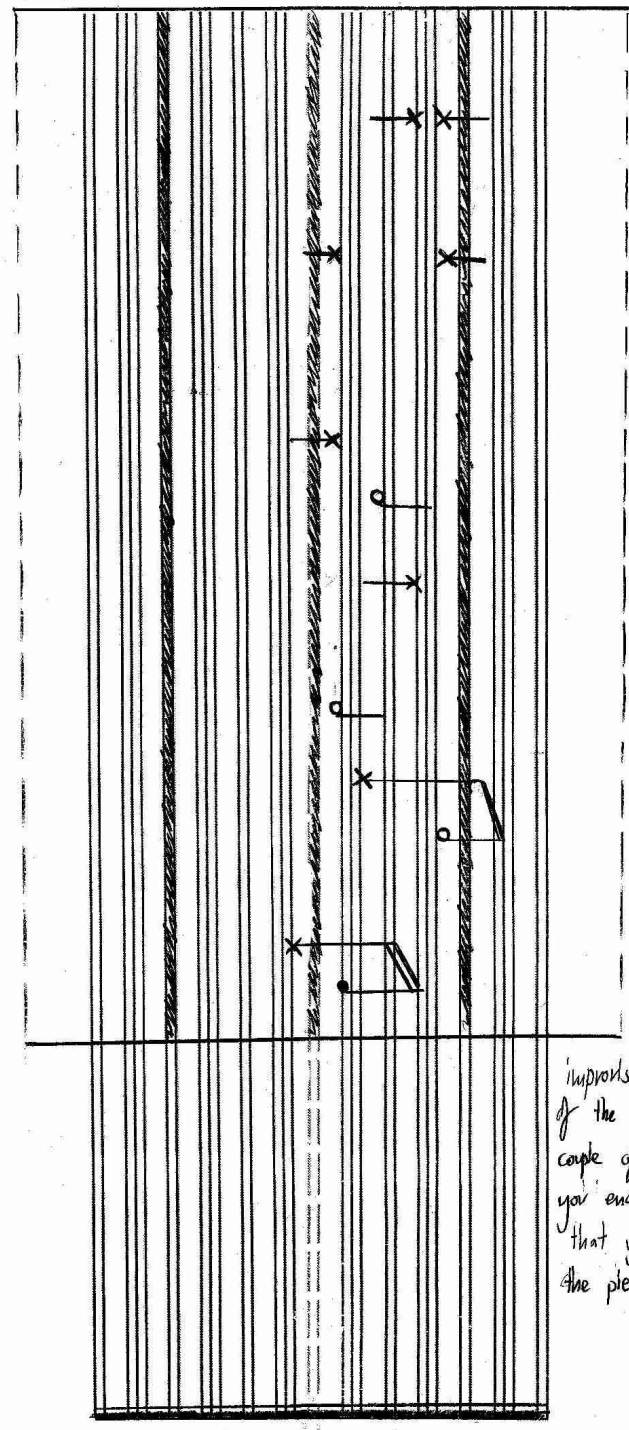
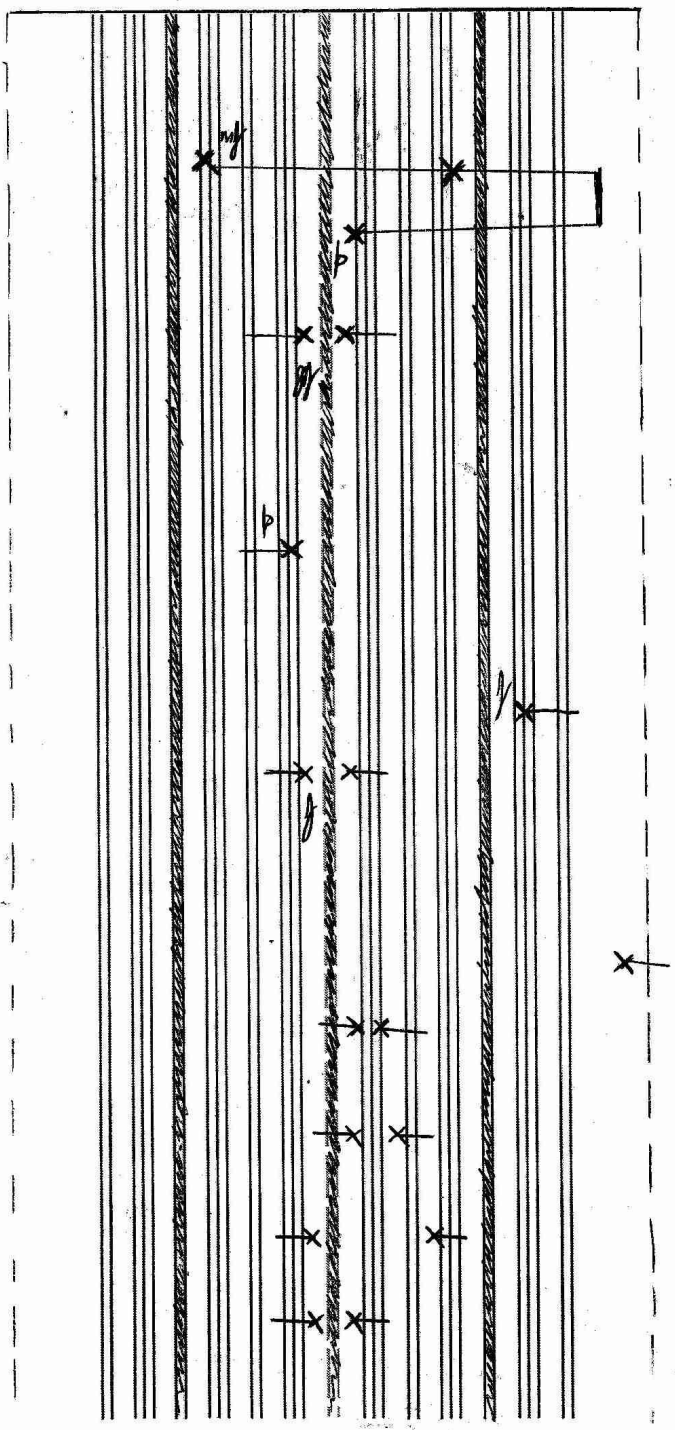
pizz
[X]

Handwritten musical notation on ten staves. The notation includes various notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The second staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The third staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The fourth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The fifth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The sixth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The seventh staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The eighth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The ninth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The tenth staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The notation includes various notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

A hand-drawn schematic diagram of a mechanical assembly, oriented vertically. The diagram features several horizontal and vertical lines representing structural members. Key components and labels include:

- Top Left:** A small square box containing an 'X' mark, with a vertical line extending upwards from it.
- Top Right:** A bracket-like structure with a curved end, labeled with the letter 'p'.
- Upper Middle:** A horizontal line with a small circle at its right end, labeled with the letter 'p'.
- Center:** A vertical line with a small circle at its top, labeled with the letter 'p'.
- Lower Middle:** A horizontal line with a small circle at its right end, labeled with the letter 'p'.
- Bottom Left:** A horizontal line with a small circle at its right end, labeled with the letter 'p'.
- Bottom Right:** A complex structure consisting of a horizontal line with a small circle at its right end, labeled with the letter 'p', and a vertical line extending upwards from it, labeled with the letter 'p'.
- Bottom Center:** A horizontal line with a small circle at its right end, labeled with the letter 'p'.
- Bottom Right (Shaded Area):** A rectangular area filled with diagonal hatching lines, representing a base or foundation.





improvise in the mood
of the piece for a
couple of minutes, until
you end on a chord
that you feel concludes
the piece nicely.

