

Fantasia for Unprepared Piano

For Greg Wagland

by Peter Cavell
February 20, 2009

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS:

The pianist confidently steps on stage, bows to the audience, and turns around to discover that the piano is still covered and tucked away in the corner of the stage (or off-stage, depending on the layout of the concert hall).

Suddenly flustered, the pianist hauls the piano to centre-stage, enlisting the help of audience members if necessary. Great care is taken in choosing the exact position of the piano, and the performer can feel free to try several different placements. The cover is then removed, and the pianist spends a moment trying to decide what to do with it – whether to toss it on the floor, drape it over a seat in the house, take it backstage, etc.

Next, the pianist opens the piano to full-stick, and in doing so realizes that the keyboard is locked shut. The pianist asks the audience if anyone has the key. They do not, so the performer goes backstage in search of a solution. After much noisy rummaging, he/she emerges with a crowbar, and tries to pry the lid open. Ultimately, she/he decides that this probably isn't the best course of action, and so goes to look for the key again, absent-mindedly leaving the crowbar on the stage. After another moment of noisy rummaging, the pianist gives a shout of victory and rushes triumphantly back to the stage, carrying the key. He/she unlocks the keyboard, and then has to take both the lock/key and crowbar off stage again.

Once this is done, the pianist re-emerges confidently, strides to centre-stage, and bows, ready to begin. She/he crosses to the piano, and only now realizes that there is no bench. Another search follows, and the pianist eventually finds a suitable bench or chair. With the seat in place, the pianist again bows to the audience, and sits at the piano. He/she may spend a moment or two carefully adjusting the bench, then spends another moment sitting with eyes closed, preparing to play. With a loud intake of breath, the pianist launches into motion and plays:

The image displays the first two systems of a musical score for piano. The first system is marked 'Allegro' and begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature. The music starts with a forte piano (*fp*) dynamic, followed by a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '6' above it. The dynamics shift to piano (*p*) and then mezzo-piano (*mp*). The second system begins with a measure number '5' above the staff and features a fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Immediately after finishing this phrase, the pianist jumps up, bows enthusiastically, and leaves the stage.

If the pianist wishes, she/he may employ the assistance of a page-turner.

This work may also be performed as a duet, in which case the title should be adjusted appropriately. The instrumental part can be taken from within the piano part, transposed as necessary, or can be improvised. The instrumentalist enters with the pianist at the beginning of the performance, and his/her behaviour is entirely at the discretion of the performers. For example, the soloist might be incredibly helpful, assisting the pianist in setting up the piano. Alternately, she/he might be a complete diva, and stand around impatiently while refusing to help. If the soloist plays a large or ungainly instrument, the performer may take several minutes deciding where to put it down in order to help the pianist.

The duration of this piece will vary from performance to performance, but should never be drawn out so long that it stops being funny.



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