

L8Nite Performance

Quarter-Tone Accordion

Understanding what the instrument is through its resistances and affordances

My need to study and master the Quarter-Tone Accordion began at a concert given by Veli Kujala, in 2013; the vast sound-world created by the sonic capabilities of this instrument instigated my obsession with performing on my own quarter-tone accordion. However, two vital components stood in the way of my microtonal journey: a technically unimpeded instrument on which to play, and a generous body of repertoire from which to choose. As such, the next natural step was to design, develop and manufacture a Quarter-Tone Accordion.

To understand what the quarter-tone accordion is and to explore its technical, practical, and sonic characteristics or (un)limitations, collaborating with various artists became necessary. As such, I have worked with nine composers and created ten pieces; within these collaborations, both resistances and affordances of the instrument have emerged.

As such, I have found that the understanding of the resistances and affordances of the quarter-tone accordion that were able to be perceived directly from playing the instrument has allowed me to find affordances for the former (resistances), and resistances for the latter (affordances); that is, when exploring each resistance, affordances are found, and vice-versa:

RESISTANCE ➡ AFFORDANCES
 AFFORDANCE ➡ RESISTANCES

In this performance, Christopher Fox's *Die Stimme der Stadt* (2021), Electra Perivolaris' *Crystalline Air* (2022), and *Feast* (2022) by Mioko Yokoyama will be utilised to explore one of the resistances, and one of the affordances of the quarter-tone accordion:

Resistance as a Means for Affordance

Left-Hand Register Changes: Even if the range of the quarter-tone accordion is very extensive, it is dependent on the registers used. For example, before a three-octave leap – and in some cases a two-octave leap - on the left hand's Free Bass, registers must be changed, and this action requires (relative) time. When seen through a pragmatic lens, this results in frequent register changes, and as such, it creates resistance when it comes to playing the instrument.

However, this resistance leads to a brainstorm of solutions that is an affordance in itself - the act of re-voicing the chorale section of *Die Stimme der Stadt* by Fox, for example. Moreover, the choreography created with the left-hand adds a certain degree of drama to the piece, and this, alongside its consequent awareness of the body, can also be seen as an affordance. In Perivolaris' *Crystalline Air* for instance, each body-part movement adds another layer to the work, ornamenting the whispered atmosphere that the piece is based on.

Affordance as a Cause for Resistance

Extended Techniques: Just like the classical accordion, the quarter-tone accordion affords a huge variety of techniques that could be used to enrich the music. Yokoyama's *Feast* is a clear example of how bellows-shakes, bellow taps and scratches, and 'insonorous' keyboard *glissandi* add virtuosity, or sparkles, to a piece. *Crystalline Air* also takes advantage of the bellows-shakes to imitate tremolos, and reaches the desired shimmering effect.

This affordance may become a resistance with the overuse of these techniques though, as the focus could shift from the poetry - or the meaning - of the music to these potentially gimmicky effects. Moreover, it becomes apparent that, as it is the case of *Feast*, the piece gains a certain degree of difficulty when performing it.

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Lore Amenabar Larrañaga completed both her Bachelor and Master's studies at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, with Prof Matti Rantanen, Dr Mika Väyrynen and Dr Veli Kujala, having graduated with first-class honours. At present, she is pursuing a PhD at the Royal Academy of Music in London and is generously supported by 'La Caixa Foundation'. An accomplished

performer across styles – from folk music to the classical canon – Lore is especially passionate about artistic collaboration and performing new music.