

With *FAMOUS ACTORS* I wanted to develop a lexicon of techniques for the performers, which compounded the experimental music and theater methods we had been using, and would be used in our projects going forward. The script includes several scores by Travis Just, and is really an amalgamation of our work together- an exchange of influence, ideas and methodology. I believe the piece cultivates a highly disciplined, focused mental state that re-directs the performers away from their usual habits and engenders a different kind of virtuosity. Actors were asked to paraphrase texts rather than memorize them, to execute highly complicated sequences of action, and to work calmly and independently within an onslaught of simultaneous activity. I wanted to present the audience with an overabundance of material that moved exactly at the speed and agility of everyday experience, that demanded active rather than passive viewing. I wrote the text by collaging together words and actions from various sources- pedestrian activities like cooking or transcripts from radio talk shows are placed alongside more theatrically significant or traditionally dramatic sources, such as stage directions from a 19th century melodrama or an interview with the survivor of a plane crash. I treat all of these sources equally and make no attempt to reconcile them. Similarly, different performance modes and ways of addressing the audience happen simultaneously on stage. Task-based activities are executed alongside varying degrees of mimetic activity. I am actively working against what I see as the conventions of contemporary theatricality- moments of revelation, teamwork, sentimentality, and cohesion. I guess one of the main ideas is inconsistency- to make a piece with an inconsistent, continually fluctuating center, that really has no center. So that the process of viewing is not about piecing together meaning, but re-examining how we piece together meaning, getting used to discrepancy, finding that useful. -- K. Feely

*FAMOUS ACTORS*, like much of our recent large-scale collaborative work, seems to me to center around a kind of cataloging process. The music works with several theatrical elements: voice, movement, text (dialogue), objects (props). This material is organized and reorganized through a wide variety of techniques. For example, *Duo for Faces and Hands* takes Delsarte notation and organizes it into a contrapuntal arrangement of durations and activities. I was fascinated by the very 19th-century desire to dictate 'precise' emotional and psychological states of being, which is essentially the project of a madman. Neither this sort of enforced romantic humanism, which seems to me fundamentally false and manipulative, nor the 20th century's corrective solutions of fragmentation and pointillism (and the recent obsession with surface, pose, and simplistic lightness) hold any answers for us now. (This is as applicable to music as much as it is to theater.) Another section, *Elevens*, has the actor simply turning devices on and off -- no goal: activity is just oscillation between active and passive, all external from the actor. The second part of *FAMOUS ACTORS* is dominated by *The folks who sell food sell cars on the street*. To try and match Kara Feely's dense mass of text, I came up with as many kinds of vocal notation as I could that would extend the voice but not obscure the constantly shifting rhetorical content of the text (at least not *too* much). This required a type of singing (and to me it certainly is singing) not involved at all with melisma but with rhythm, rate of delivery, and pitch areas (as opposed to steady frequencies: harmony as simultaneity, not unity). All of these techniques and approaches are not involved with the old, simplistic polemics (narrative vs. non-narrative, melodic vs. unmelodic, xx vs. modern). The very terms used to describe these outdated, tired stances belie their small-bore concerns. Our work is all of these things, it is none of them, it doesn't matter at all. What is needed now is productivity: aesthetic and perceptual. Artwork needs to move faster than the thought that observes it. -- T. Just

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