

Louis D'Heudieres – Laughter Studies 3 (blog post for OUT-TAKE ensemble concert, 19/6/17)

I first experienced Louis d'Heudieres' music during the 2014 'Occupy the Pianos' festival at St. John's Smith Square in London. Louis' piano duo 8x6 was one of the highlights of a programme that featured many new works. I was struck by its unique approach to the instrument, minimising the focus on sound and pitch and instead exploring the choreographic potential of piano performance.

A year or so later, I had the opportunity to get to know more of Louis' music, as we exchanged a series of emails in which we sent each other examples of our work and discussed our compositional aims. I discovered that Louis' work has highlighted a variety of artistic interests in recent years, including vulnerability in performance, rehearsal as performance and personal relationships between performers and their favourite pieces. However, it seems to me that all these threads are closely linked because of the way that they investigate different aspects of the performers' individual personalities and capabilities, whether that is how long they can sustain a note with one breath, their process for learning a piece or their idiosyncratic physical movements while playing their instrument. There is something disarming about the way in which Louis reminds us that every musician is unique and brings their own individual personal characteristics to each performance (beyond clichéd considerations of expressive interpretation).

Many of Louis' recent pieces continue this investigation of performer individuality through the use of an ingenious device: 'audio scores'. In the *Laughter Studies*, for example, each performer wears headphones, and listens to a different audio file containing various recordings of environmental sounds and human voices, which they are instructed to 'describe' or 'imitate' using their own voices (in some of the more recent pieces in the series, the performers also imitate music on their instruments). Although the audio files provided for each part in a piece will always be the same, each group of performers will produce markedly different results in response to these stimuli, due to the different vocal capabilities of each person involved and their unique reactions to what they hear. In the explanatory notes that accompany *Laughter Studies 3*, Louis writes that 'the focus of the piece is the performers' individual interpretations of the sounds that are transmitted to them through [the] headphones'. In our performance of this piece in our next concert, then, you will have the opportunity not just to admire the cleverness of Louis d'Heudieres' approach to ordering sound, but also to get to know something of the individual personalities of the members of OUT-TAKE ensemble. Perhaps the performers will even learn something new about themselves!