

COMPOSER'S NOTES

MICHAEL HICKS • FELT HAMMERS

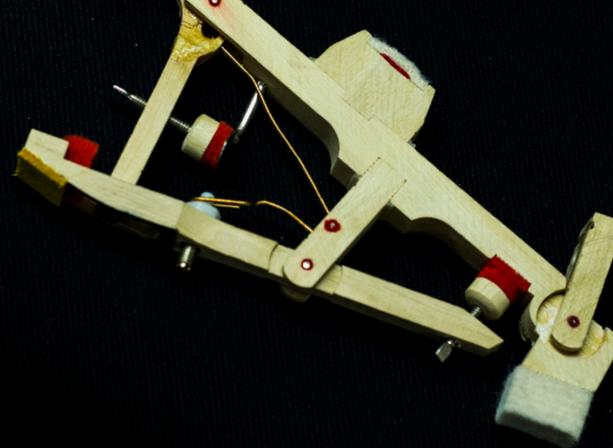
THE IDEA OF DOMES 8:00

The Idea of Domes (2003) was composed on and for a piano tuned in Werckmeister III, a Bach-era well temperament that refracts the harmonies in subtler ways than equal temperament can. The piece requires the player to occasionally pluck and mute the strings of the instrument. The player sings some of the pitches, often using disconnected solfège syllables. I wanted this work to convey a large sacred space that has as its sonic foundation the open strings of a guitar, whose pitches open the work, then return in mutations throughout, while a “boy soprano” adds small commentaries as the gestures unfold. It is probably the most colorful and accessible piece of the set, yet it is always, I would say, quasi-monastic.

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS 19:03

In *The Stations of the Cross* (2010) I tried to strip technique as far down as I could. Yet I joined the resulting sparsity to a grand pictorial form: a series of interlocked images that evoke the opposing wall panels in Catholic churches—snapshots, if you will, of Christ's passion, upon which one can meditate. In this work the juxtaposition, recurrence, and even-tone painting of sonic shards refract intense lights and colors from Christ's last mortal hours. These are the stations:

1. Jesus is condemned to death
2. Jesus receives the cross
3. Jesus falls the first time
4. Jesus meets His mother
5. Simon of Cyrene carries the cross
6. Veronica wipes Jesus' face with her veil
7. Jesus falls the second time
8. Jesus meets the daughters of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of His garments
11. Crucifixion: Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. Jesus' body is removed from the cross
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb and covered in incense



MANTIKOS 5:54

Mantikos (1982)—and its companion, *Sophikos*—muse on different modes of Greek thought and expression: the sophic (rationalized) and the mantic (prophetic). While both works have plenty of heady manipulations of pitch, all deployed in angular modernist gestures, *Mantikos* is much freer in its compositional method and more conventional in its form but still urgent, even ecstatic, in its rhetoric.

THE ANNUNCIATION 6:16

The Annunciation (2006) is actually the most severely methodical piece I've ever written, though I designed its methods to evoke an image: that moment when Gabriel announces to Mary what she will conceive and endure. The piece opens with flashes of light, suggesting the stunning unearthliness of the event, followed by a gradual dissipation as the mind quiets and the divine weight of the message sets in—leading to lengthening spells of muteness, occasionally interrupted by fragments (or granules) of the initial light.

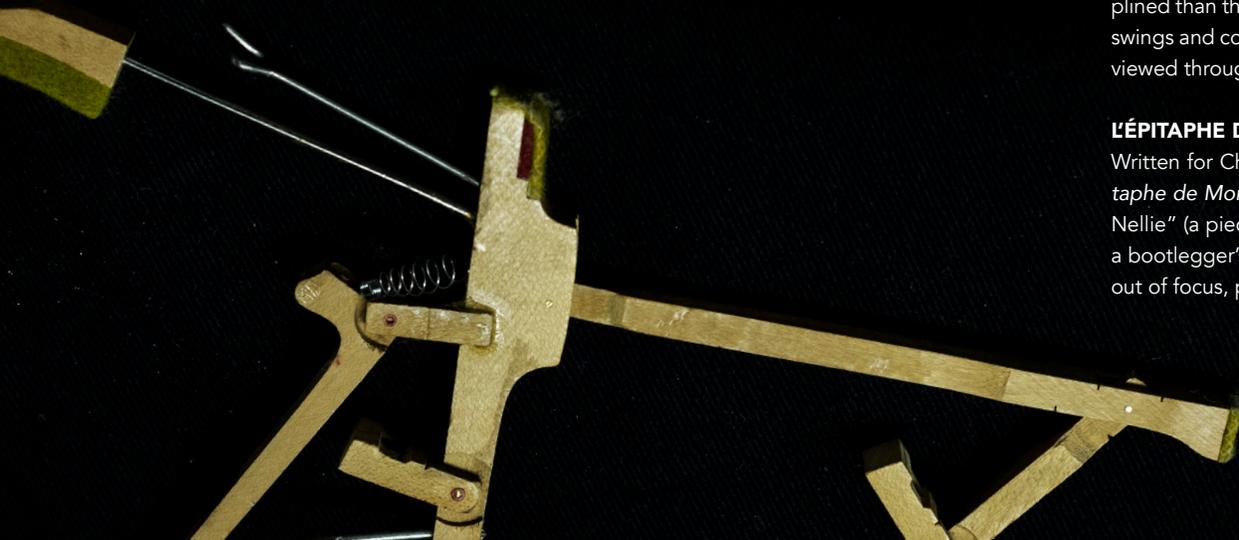
SOPHIKOS 5:49

Sophikos (1984) uses compositional procedures far more rigorous and intellectually disciplined than those of its counterpart. As with much of my music, one hears mercurial mood swings and contradictory ideas. This piece in particular I consider something like a mosaic viewed through a prism.

L'ÉPITAPHE DE MONK 3:49

Written for Christian Asplund's salon concert for Thelonious Monk's 90th birthday, *L'Épithaphe de Monk* (2007) eviscerates and reconstructs gestures in Monk's “Crepuscule with Nellie” (a piece I chose in part for my grandmother Nellie, who in her younger years was a bootlegger's wife). Throughout the piece, one hears Monk's sensibilities coming in and out of focus, punctuated by ringing, quasi-funereal chimes.

—Michael Hicks



PERFORMER'S NOTES

KEITH KIRCHOFF • FELT HAMMERS

A quarter-century is a long time. Twenty-five years after the Highland Park Ford factory produced the first affordable option to a horse and carriage, there was a car that could go seventy miles an hour and mass production had spread to every industry. Twenty-five years after the Wright brothers successfully demonstrated the first controlled and sustained heavier-than-air flight, Charles Lindbergh was crossing the Atlantic alone in an airplane.

For a composer, twenty-five years can seem like (or even be) a lifetime. That span allows time for self-discovery and experimentation and can help the composer find their true musical voice. It is not uncommon for the music of a composer's youth to barely resemble the music of their maturity. For example: twenty-five years separated Beethoven's First Symphony from his Große Fuge and Arnold Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* from his twelve-tone Suite for Piano, Op. 25. And twenty-five years also separated Michael Hicks's earliest piece on this album (*Mantikos*) from one of his latest (*L'Épitaphe de Monk*).

Like the music of Beethoven, Schoenberg, and countless other composers, the music on this album reveals a deep musical evolution. By assembling these pieces, Michael Hicks gives us the opportunity to watch him grow as an artist: stripping away excess complexity, over time he reveals the purest essence of his musical voice. And much like Beethoven and Schoenberg before him, the differences between his earliest works and his latest are so great that it would be easy for some listeners to mistake the works as music by different composers.

But for me as a pianist, what is far more fascinating than the differences in the works—differences that really need no further explanation—is how much they have in common. Though Hicks's voice has certainly changed, the core of his musical aesthetic has remained largely the same. It is clearly stated from the very first phrase of the first piece for piano: this music is about *gesture*.

A close attention to musical gesture sits at the heart of every one of his piano pieces and is what binds these works together, despite the years that separate them. Though the precise gestural style evolves over time, the construct of these works remains constant: each piece is comprised of short phrases of single-trajectory movement followed by a moment of repose in the form of a sustained tone, a rest, a breath, or a pause.

In the earliest works, *Sophikos* and *Mantikos*, these gestures manifest themselves in short, rhythmically complex outbursts. Using an abstract, angular, atonal language, those two pieces have an almost spastic quality, displaying a youthful restlessness balanced against a controlled sense of pacing and time.

In his 2003 composition *The Idea of Domes*, the metrical irregularities and gestural fragmentation of the earlier works are absent; they are replaced by gestures with an almost zen-like tranquility: a peace within the *now*. With a constant sense of ascent, each phrase is a single rising line, always pausing before the next gesture begins. Conversely, the gestures of *The Annunciation* are not lines at all, but rather a series of disjunct chords of gradually lessening density.

It is with *L'Épitaphe de Monk* that Hicks gives us a sort of “gestural-bridge,” linking the early works with the later ones. At times frantic, at times immutable, at times only a single note, the gestures of *L'Épitaphe* take on a pseudo-jazz quality with fragmented quotations drawn from Thelonious Monk and our free associations. Each gesture takes us on a journey we think we can foresee but always gracefully—and never abruptly—stops before it ends, leaving the arrival of our journey just out of reach.

Of course, nothing reveals Hicks's attention to gesture more than his most recent piece on this album, the fourteen *Stations of the Cross*. It is in these movements that his gestural writing thoroughly reveals itself: stripping away nearly every other musical element, he leaves behind only the purest manifestation of a single gesture. (One might even make a case that the entirety of the second and thirteenth movements are only a single gesture.) Yet even within this work of mature, distilled phrases, Hicks affords himself an occasional glimpse of his youth: though much less complex, the music of the tenth movement mirrors the gestural restlessness of *Mantikos*.

Equally as interesting as the gestures themselves is the space between the gestures. Whether the space is a short (or lengthy) silence or single sustained tone, Hicks carefully balances the moments of action with those of stasis. In his earliest works, these spaces serve as a counterweight to the frenetic energy of the wild gestures. Though these gestures may at times seem to teeter on the brink of chaos, Hicks uses a pause or sustained rest to provide the listener with a moment to comprehend and digest the music that came before. It affords both the pianist and the listener an equal opportunity to rest, regroup, and process before launching back into the maelstrom of sound. Thus, despite the abstract nature of these pieces, they are never rushed, never frantic, and never out of control. These silences, then, function not just as nice additions but rather as elements intrinsically bound to the works' structure and eventual success.

As the music becomes less harried in the later pieces, the role for these spaces between the gestures changes. Though they are no less important than they were in *Sophikos* or *Mantikos*, these silences now serve to expand the form and open up the structure. With rests sometimes lasting as long as fifteen seconds, Hicks invites the listener into a space of “the now”: a timeless space of self-reflection in which silence is just as important as sound.

Twenty-five years is a long time, and the evolution that happens between *Mantikos* and *Sophikos* and *The Annunciation* and *The Stations of the Cross* is immense. But whether in his early works or his later ones, there is always a mature sense of pacing, timing, and gesture. “*Mantikos*” is Greek for “prophetic,” and though Hicks couldn't possibly have known in 1982, his earliest of this set was truly a prophetic foreshadowing of a stylistic voice that would remain the hallmark of his aesthetic for decades to come.

—Keith Kirchoff





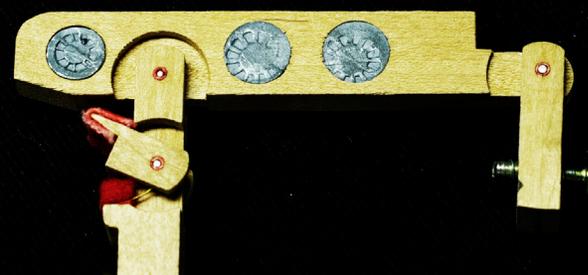
BIOGRAPHIES

MICHAEL HICKS • COMPOSER

Composer, performer, scholar, and poet Michael Hicks has written chamber and solo works that have been performed and recorded by BYU's University Singers, Concert Choir, and Group for New Music (which he founded in 1987); by other ensembles around the country (including the Black Swamp Saxophone Quartet, the Menlo Brass Quintet, and the Memphis Symphony Brass Quintet); and by solo artists (including himself) at events of the American Society of University Composers, the Cincinnati Composers Guild, the Subtropics Music Festival, and others. Some of his music can be heard on the CDs *Found Horizon* (1994), *Late Conversations* (1996), and *Ritual Grounds* (2003), all on the Tantara Records label, which in 2007 also issued his singer-songwriter album *Valentine St.* He is the author of six books (five of them published by University of Illinois Press): *Mormonism and Music: A History* (1989); *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic, and Other Satisfactions* (1999); *Henry Cowell, Bohemian* (2002); *Christian Wolff* (2012, coauthored with Christian Asplund); *The Street-Legal Version of Mormon's Book* (2012); and *The Mormon Tabernacle Choir: A Biography* (2015). His historical and analytical articles have appeared in books such as the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World* and the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook to Mormonism* as well as journals, including *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, *Musical Quarterly*, *Perspectives of New Music*, and *American Music*. He has won the ASCAP Deems Taylor Award twice for his writing about music (1994 and 2003) and a third time as editor of *American Music* (2010), a post he held from 2007–2010. His much-awarded poetry, meanwhile, has been published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, *BYU Studies*, *Literature and Belief*, *Sunstone*, and *Doves and Serpents*, as well as in the anthologies *Cadence of Hooves* (2008), *New Poets of the American West* (2010), *Fire in the Pasture* (2011), and *Psalmery and Lyre, Vol. 1* (2012).

KEITH KIRCHOFF • PERFORMER

Keith Kirchoff has played in many of the United States' largest cities as well as in major cities throughout Italy, England, Canada, Belgium, Mexico, and the Netherlands. He has appeared with U.S. orchestras performing a wide range of concerti and has been a featured soloist in many music festivals. Throughout his career, Kirchoff has premiered more than 100 new works. As a strong supporter of modern music, he has worked closely with many prominent composers including Christian Wolff, Frederic Rzewski, and Louis Andriessen. As a lecturer, Kirchoff has presented seminars, lectures, and master classes on the music of the 21st century at many of the country's largest universities. One of the nation's prominent performers of electronic music, his "Electro-Acoustic Piano" tour has been presented throughout two continents. As a composer, Kirchoff is equally comfortable in acoustic and electronic mediums. He has been awarded various residencies and has been a guest composer/pianist at several universities. Often performing his own works in recital, his music has also been performed by others throughout the United States, Canada, England, Turkey, Holland, Mexico, Australia, and Germany. The winner of the 2006 Steinway Society Piano Competition and the 2005 John Cage Award, Kirchoff was named the 2011 Distinguished Scholar by the Seabee Memorial Scholarship Association. In addition to his recordings on his independent label, Thinking outLOUD Records, Kirchoff has released recordings on the New World, SEAMUS, and Zerx labels.



1. THE IDEA OF DOMES (8:00)

THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS (19:03)

2. Jesus is condemned to death (1:20)
3. Jesus receives the cross (2:12)
4. Jesus falls the first time (0:27)
5. Jesus meets His mother (2:09)
6. Simon of Cyrene carries the cross (0:28)
7. Veronica wipes Jesus' face with her veil (2:13)
8. Jesus falls the second time (0:41)
9. Jesus meets the daughters of Jerusalem (1:47)
10. Jesus falls the third time (0:21)
11. Jesus is stripped of His garments (0:49)
12. Crucifixion: Jesus is nailed to the cross (1:08)
13. Jesus dies on the cross (1:32)
14. Jesus' body is removed from the cross (2:47)
15. Jesus is laid in the tomb and covered in incense (1:09)

16. MANTIKOS (5:54)

17. THE ANNUNCIATION (6:16)

18. SOPHIKOS (5:49)

19. L'ÉPITAPHE DE MONK (3:49)

Produced by Michael Hicks and Keith Kirchoff

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