


PHYLLIS CHEN

little things



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| 1. Toy Toccata (in Black and White) for solo toy piano (2009) | 05:49 | Fabian Svennson (b. 1980) |
| 2. The Little Things for toy instruments and live electronics (2011) | 08:05 | Angélica Negrón (b. 1981) |
| 3. Okura for solo toy piano (2012) | 01:59 | Takuji Kawai (b. 1963) |
| 4. Mechanics of Escapement for toy piano and clock chimes (2008) | 15:30 | Nathan Davis (b. 1973) |
| 5. Pi (Obstruction) for solo toy piano (2008) | 06:12 | Andrián Pertout (b. 1963) |
| 6. Whatever Shall Be for toy piano, dreidel, chopstick, music box and electronics (2010) | 08:53 | Karlheinz Essl (b. 1960) |
| 7. Milliampere for solo toy piano (2007) | 03:23 | Dai Fujikura (b. 1977) |



A close-up, profile view of a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark red top, playing a small, light-colored toy piano. Her eyes are closed, and her expression is focused. The background is a solid, dark red color. The lighting is soft, highlighting her face and the keys of the piano.

As you will discover, the toy piano is a rich, playful and diverse musical instrument filled with potential. It can speak or sing, be percussive, introspective, serious or humorous. All the gems on this album were either written and/or dedicated to me between the years of 2008 and 2012.

Here are some of the little things I've found!

-Phyllis Chen

NOTES FROM THE COMPOSERS

Toy Toccata (*in Black and White*) is a short but intense piece for toy piano. Technically, the basic concept of the piece is the rapid alternation between white and black keys. On another level, the piece can be seen as a toy piano's (attempted) rebellion against its own inherent cuteness and innocence.—**Fabian Svennson** (www.fabiansvensson.com)

The Little Things (*for toy instruments and live electronics*) is a piece about those seemingly inconsequential moments and apparently insignificant objects that leave a meaningful and long-lasting impression. It's about finding magic in everyday things and the joy of discovering new tiny spaces to wander through within overwhelmingly large fields.—**Angélica Negrón** (www.angelicanegron.com)

Okura is based on a poem by Yamanoue Okura. This poem is about a mother who thinks of her child in each bite of a lovely food. In each line of the poem, she wishes to share her food with her little one.—**Takuji Kawai** (www.sepia.dti.ne.jp/kawai/)

The Mechanics of Escapement (*for toy piano and clock chimes*) is about the fragile athleticism of playing an instrument, and examines the musical, physical, and cultural aspects of making music despite the mechanical separation of sound source from the body. It was inspired by my encounter with the device Robert Schumann used to strengthen his technique, which ultimately ruined his hands, and by my own battles with performance injuries. It is written for toy piano and for a collection of clock chimes (long resonating rods, like those that are in the toy piano) built by the composer together with master carpenter John Roche. The clock chime instruments are placed on high poles around the audience and played by the pianist by pulling long strings connected to them. This commission was made possible by Concert Artists Guild.—**Nathan Davis** (www.nathandavis.com)

Pi (Obstruction) *for Schoenhut Concert Grand* represents a Hommage à Conlon Nancarrow (1912-1997). The title is in reference to the *I Ching*, or *Book of Changes*—originating in the Western Zhou Dynasty (1122-771 BC)—and highlights hexagram 12 (incorporating the trigrams of energy and space) from the 64 hexagrams of the oracle. The two possible transpositions of the whole-tone scale are adopted in juxtaposition as the basic pitch material, while the simple seven-limit frequency ratios associated with this hexatonic scale form the basis for rhythmic development.—**Andrian Pertout** (www.andrianpertout.com)

In **Whatever Shall Be** (*for toy piano, dreidel, chop stick, music box and live electronics*) I concentrated on the “ugly” parts of the instrument which are commonly not regarded as musical: the guts apart from the keys—the body of the instrument. When experimenting with the entrails of the toy piano, I realized that its sound board acts as a splendid amplifier for tiny sounds and noises. When putting a small music box inside, its lanky sound becomes strong and mighty. Everything that is heard in the piece—rhythmic cells, melodic motives, even the harmonic structure—has derived from this little music box melody which arose from the great movie *The Man Who Knew Too Much* by Alfred Hitchcock. And the refrain of the song reads: “*Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be.*”—**Karlheinz Essl** (www.essl.at)

Milliampere was taken and re-shaped from the toy piano section of my piano concerto *Ampere*, which uses grand concert piano and toy piano. *Milliampere* should create the world which is related to the real world we live in, but somehow it is imaginary, floating, maybe the extension of the reality.—**Dai Fujikura** (www.daifujikura.com)

Sincere thanks to Dan Lippel, Rob Dietz, and all the composers!

RECORDING ENGINEER

Aaron Nevezie (1,2,5)

John Davis (3,6,7)

Ryan Streber (4)

all tracks recorded at the Bunker Studio
except track 4 recorded at EMPAC

EDITING/MIXING

Aaron Nevezie (1,2,5) John Davis (6,7)

José Gomez and Angélica Negrón (3)

Ryan Streber and Nathan Davis (4)

MASTERING

Randy Merrill (1-3,5-7)

Ryan Streber (4)

PHOTOS

Carrie Schneider

DESIGN

Rob Dietz

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