

# 16

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## Piano Tapestry

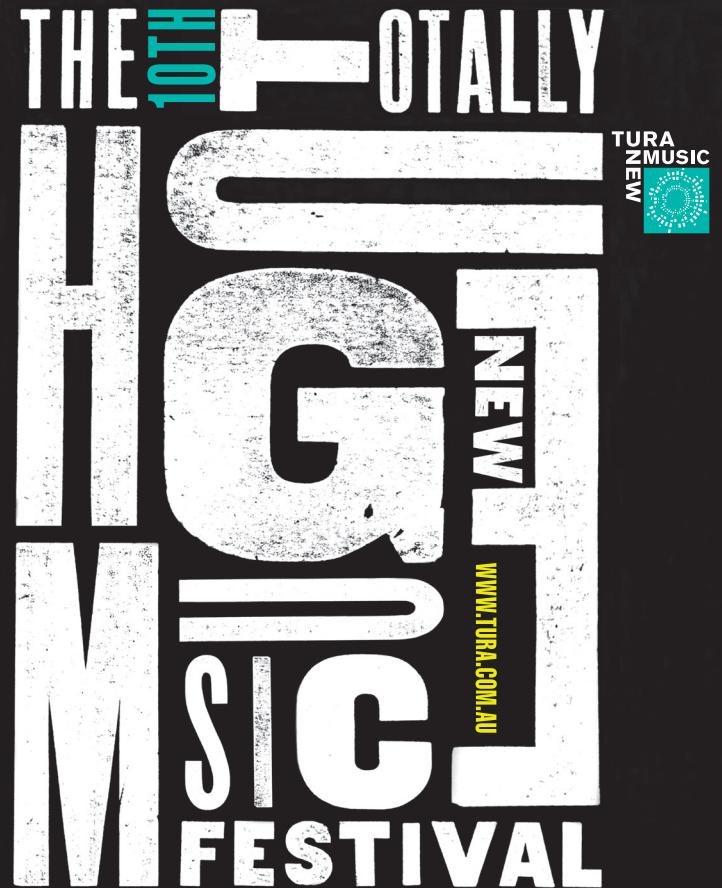
Mark Gasser (UK) Anthony Pateras (Vic)  
Ross Bolleter (WA)

A rich mixture of virtuosic and extremely different approaches to the piano in the 21st Century from three masters of techniques extending from scored works to improvisation for prepared piano to work for ruined piano.

Gasser performs Ligi Nono's ...sofferte onde serne ... (1976), Ronald Stevenson's *Peter Grimes Fantasy* and *Motus Perpetuus Temporibus Fatalibus*, and premiere's a new interactive work by West Australian composer, Lindsay Vickery.

Pateras presents the premiere performance of his work *BLEED DON'T BLOCK*, the outcome of a new approach to his composition for piano.

Bolleter performs *The Entropic Piano* – for five ruined pianos. The pianos have few working elements! However, the improvisations get them working as one. Each piano encodes memories and, here and there, they can be discerned in the improvisations.



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## Piano Tapestry

Mark Gasser, Ross Bolleter, Anthony Pateras

16 September 2011

Studio Underground | State Theatre Centre

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## A rich mixture of virtuosic and extremely different approaches to the piano in the 21st Century from three masters

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### Mark Gasser

#### Ronald Stevenson's Peter Grimes Fantasy

Ronald Stevenson's *Peter Grimes Fantasy* (1971) is based on themes from the opera by Benjamin Britten in the Lisztian tradition of the grand operatic piano fantasy. Stevenson sets the 'mob' perusing grimes as a fugue – although he transposes the theme into Locrian mode to reflect "the wilder sea of the coast of my native Scotland". The work was commissioned by BBC Television and was dedicated to Graham Johnson.

Stevenson was a close friend of both Britten and Pears and toured widely with Pears as his accompanist. Britten was so impressed by the work he arranged for it to be published by his own publisher Boosey & Hawkes. The pizzicati strings at the end of the work are to be seen in Stevenson's own words as "not a Cagian Gimmick: they reflect the stars coming out at night".

#### Stevenson's 'Motus Perpetuus (?) Temporibus Fatalibus'

Stevenson's 'Motus Perpetuus (?) Temporibus Fatalibus' – Perpetual Motion (?) in fateful times – is an apocalyptic Motus Perpetuus commissioned in 1988 by the American Virtuoso Joseph Banowitz. Described by Stevenson as "both my darkest most virtuosic work" it is based on a tone row derived from cryptograms of composer's names.

Stevenson realized that perpetual motion has never been possible in physics and therefore is it possible for the human race to survive – hence the unusual (?). Towards the end of the work the music slows and is suddenly frozen, crystalline at half tempo with an ominous quote superimposed from Busoni's equally dark Opera Dr Faustus. A Choral of warning appears (with the tone row now masterfully harmonized) until the music loses control once again and spirals into a wild climax. Stevenson does believe however, that humanity will always endure which gives hope to Humanity (i.e the Human Race) as a whole. He once told me, "If I didn't believe that, I couldn't go on writing."

#### Luigi Nono "... sofferte onde serene ..."

The composition "... sofferte onde serene ..." ("... serene waves endured ...") was written on the occasion of deaths both in Nono's family and that of his friend the great Italian pianist Maurizio Pollini for whom this piece was originally composed. The taped piano sounds, played with sustaining pedal always down, resonate like the sounds of bells reverberating over the lagoon and the sea near Nono's house. The interior of the piano is played with hand-muted strings and the striking of the other pedals to (re-)create natural environment-like timbres. The overall impression of the piece is that life goes on, and one necessarily endures at the "equilibrium of the profound interior" (Kafka).

#### Lindsay Vickery – Reconstruction of a Shifting Path (2011)

This work written for virtuoso Mark Gasser explores the Yamaha Disklavier an electronically enhanced version of a traditional piano that allows the piano to be triggered and performed by a computer in addition to its traditional function as a medium for the pianist. Since Mark seems just as able to push the piano to its limits as my laptop – one of the chief roles it plays in this work is to add extra fingers (fists and forearms) for the ten fingered, two armed human performer. The work uses the piano as a trigger to generate additional material and textures to the pianist's performance and the triggering map of the keyboard is altered from section to section. The score is presented on a laptop allowing with a dynamic clicktrack allowing for the precise coordination of the evolving textures.

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### Ross Bolleter

#### Daughters of Time – for one performer on three ruined pianos

These three pianos – a Jefferson, a Ronisch, and a piano on which no brand name is visible, but whose serial number is 13113, have been selected from the five in my kitchen. This piece gets the pianos communicating with each other, as they remember their outback homes in ruined pubs, and on verandas.

The only unchanging law is the law of change. Ruins are what remain – still passing away to be sure, but lingering. When they linger as Ruined Pianos, they sing their song of transience – of failure and loss. They sing of all that we loved that will never come again – the loss of home, the fading away of prestige and glory. All that fine nineteenth-century European craftsmanship, all the damp and unrequited loves of Schumann, Brahms and Chopin dry out and degrade to a heap of rotten wood and rusting wire. The piano returns to the earth, where the chirrup of its loose wires blown by the desert easterly is indistinguishable from the cicadas' long electric blurt. And the notes that don't work are at least as interesting as those that do

A note on the Ruined Piano is open at the edges. It readily admits the sounds of the police come to check out the sounds of three ruined pianos played simultaneously in the piano warehouse, with the pedals of the Steinways jammed down with erasers, so that those shining monsters – looking like hearses stalled in the depths of 3am – can mourn along.

Ross Bolleter 2011

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### Anthony Pateras

#### BLEED DON'T BLOCK (2011)

Although I've played piano since I was 5, writing music for the instrument itself has always been the biggest challenge for me. I use it as a compositional tool, a sample source, I prepare it, I improvise in numerous contexts with it, yet sitting down and writing a piece for it, despite numerous requests, leaves me blank.

To circumvent this, I decided this year to develop and solidify my own personal lexicon of techniques into a formalised structure, or at least a set of parameters which were re-performable. This Perth performance is the first culmination of this approach... Throughout its composition I've tried to keep in mind the phrase "BLEED DON'T BLOCK" meaning, I'm trying to get away from my earlier starkly episodic structures, instead formalising something a bit more fluid, a bit more strange.

Like my other extended work for myself, CHASMS (2007) for prepared piano, I guess this can only be performed by me. This is not any kind of statement – quite simply, I think I finally figured out that I can only write piano music for the way I play the piano.

Anthony Pateras 2011



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# Concert Review: Totally Huge New Music Festival

Neville Cohn, The West Australian  
September 19, 2011, 1:40 pm

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## Totally Huge New Music Festival

**Speak Percussion and Piano Tapestry**

**Studio Underground, State Theatre Centre**

What have violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja, flamenco dancer La Chunga and pianist Anthony Pateras in common? Give up? Rather oddly, they all perform without shoes. When Pateras came on stage at Studio Underground on Saturday, he was, in fact, sporting a pair of sandals but within moments they were discarded. From that point, it was bare feet all the way.

In more than 50 years of listening to pianists, I cannot recall encountering one quite like Pateras. He offered a single work lasting for about half an hour. It's his own composition. With astonishingly flexible wrists, fantastically nimble, seemingly tireless, fingers, a powerful left forearm which, periodically and violently, smashed on to the bass keys of the instrument - and immense staying power, Pateras took us on an at-times thrilling journey through his idiosyncratic sound world. His use of note clusters and arabesques repeated with the utmost agility at times called

some of the music of Messiaen to mind. It was a riveting offering.

By a mile, the most satisfying offering by Mark Gasser was his account of Ronald Stevenson's Peter Grimes Fantasy. A superbly crafted homage to Britten's opera, it needs fearless fingers and an iron nerve to negotiate its intricacies successfully. It was a listening experience to cherish – unlike the same composer's effusively titled Motus Perpetuus Temporibus Fatalibus. For all the virtuosity which Gasser brought to bear on it, it came across as an overblown, pompous effusion, a work that talked too much and too loudly but said very little.

There was also a fascinating novelty by Lindsay Vickery – his Reconstruction of a Shifting Path, an exploration of the possibilities of the Yamaha Disklavier, an electronically enhanced version of a traditional piano. In addition to the instrument's normal function, a computer allows for it to be triggered and performed electronically. It's an eerie experience to both see and hear a duet for human

hands and a set of virtuosic phantom fingers courtesy of the computer. As Gasser's hands moved across the keyboard, a myriad other notes rose and fell under the command of the computer.

Ross Bolleter gave us Daughters of Time, a work for three so-called 'ruined pianos'. And ruins they most certainly are, ancient, frontless uprights in the final stages of decrepitude, two of which for many decades survived (barely) the rigours of outback pub environments and another which sat for years in all weathers on the veranda of a house in the middle of nowhere.

Bolleter, garbed completely in black from broad-brimmed hat to shoes, sat on a low cushion in front of the centre instrument, variously plucking, picking and scraping its string innards, now and again playing a few of the keys. At times, it sounded like the scurrying of insects in some dried out road-kill carcase to which were added weird, out-of-tune pings that came across like some extended elegy for dead pianos. Later, seated on a fringed and faded plush stool, he drew eerie timbres from the other two clapped out keyboard wrecks as well.

Speak Percussion, a Melbourne-based ensemble, provided fascinating fare, too. In Gerard Grisey's Le Noir de l'Etoile, six musicians were positioned around the circumference of the space, each surrounded by a large battery of percussion. The audience listened from the centre of the stage, some seated or reclining on cushions, others lying supine. And what a journey it proved to be with aural assaults of such violence that fingers in ears were a necessary precaution.

It's no mean feat to present an hour-long percussive essay with nary a melody – and succeed in riveting the attention from first note to last. And that is what occurred during an often breathtakingly impressive account of a giant-sized work. A host of drums of various shapes and sizes, cymbals, tam-tams, miniature mallets which, when drawn over a drum surface, producing weird simulations of human groans - and gently struck Indonesian gongs producing ethereal wisps of sound – and much activity co-ordinated with a lengthy pre-recorded episode of what sounded like frenetic, hysteria-tinged footwork.

If these opening events are anything to go by, Tura's 10th Totally Huge New Music Festival could well evolve into the best yet.

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## VOX FUTURA

## The Technicolour Piano: a show of dazzling piano riches

by [Ilario Colli](#) on Sep 20 2011 filed under [Classical Music](#) | [Comment Now](#)

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### Ilario Colli

Ilario Colli is a Perth-based composer and music journalist. He is set to graduate this year from The University of Western Australia School of Music, where he majored in composition under Nicholas Bannan, Chris Tonkin and James Ledger. He has composed for the stage, orchestra, choir, various chamber ensembles and piano. As a music journalist, he specialises in twentieth-century music, sound art, performance art and crossover.

**The Second concert of the 2011 TURA Totally Huge New Music Festival was like a mini festival in itself. It was called *Piano Tapestry*, and the title proved apt at conveying the kaleidoscopic range of piano talent on display.**

Exhibiting their unique mastery of the instrument were two of Australia's most charismatic piano wizards – Ross Bolleter and Anthony Pateras – as well as visiting UK virtuoso Mark Gasser. The three together provided the musical fabric with which this tapestry was woven, adorning it with colours that were turn stark and subtle, explosive and delicate.

First to seduce the audience was Bolleter with his wistful and contemplative *Daughters of Time*. Performed on three of the five old, ruined pianos that reside in Bolleter's kitchen, this lengthy work plays like a homage to the passage of time. Seated on the floor with the three pianos towering over him – one in front and the remaining two flanking him on either side – Bolleter works the three instruments like an acoustic mixing desk. He passes from one to the other, at times plucking strings on one piano with the right hand and striking keys on another with the left, then shifting his position to reach the highest notes of one piano with his left hand and the highest notes of the third piano with his right, his arms barely able to stretch the distance.

The pianos are in themselves worthy objects of marvel. They loom on stage, huddled shyly together like a herd of aged pachyderms, transfixing in their weathered majesty. Even before they are played, they seem to utter a mournful song of lost splendour. Each piano has its distinct personality. The Rönisch is sturdy and percussive. The Jefferson, on the other hand, is the most demure of the three sisters. Piano No 3, known only by its serial number 13113, is boisterous and explosive. Each produces a surprising variety of sounds, from metallic clangs to voiceless taps, wiry scratches to wooden plonks, creating textures that are both sweet and abrasive, yet permeated by an overarching sense of bittersweet nostalgia.

Next to take the stage was Mark Gasser, who presented a diverse program of music by his mentor Roland Stevenson, Luigi Nono and local composer Lindsay Vickery. The two Stevenson pieces are vastly different in tone and spirit. The first, *Peter Grimes Fantasy*, a vaguely tonal work based on themes from the Benjamin Britten opera, swings nonchalantly between moments of neo-Baroque clarity and Lisztian virtuosity. The second, *Motus Perpetuus Temporibus Fatalibus* ("Perpetual Motion in Fateful Times") – is a serial piece whose tone rows are derived from cryptograms of various composers' names. It is darkly introspective and fiercely fatalistic, galloping forth with a relentless rhythmic drive, building to an apocalyptic climax and ending abruptly. Gasser really shows his genius here, handling the demonic virtuosity of the piece both with clarity of execution and fidelity to its philosophical scope. Nono's ...*sofferte onde serene...* – ("...serene waves endured...") – was written as a eulogy to

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[REICH: WTC 9/11; Mallet Quartet; Dance Patterns \(Kronos Quartet; So Percussion; Steve Reich\)](#) · 2 days ago

[Chris Beale](#) Very good comment and question by Lisa above - the metaphysical is almost always present - sometimes surreally so - in just about all White's writing. He was fundamentally a very

recently deceased members of the composer's family and that of great Italian pianist Maurizio Pollini, to whom the piece was dedicated. It overlays live piano performance with recorded piano sounds. The intermingling of these two layers creates a ghostly, dreamlike feeling of stasis.

The most interesting piece in Gasser's selection, though, was quite possibly Lindsay Vickery's *Reconstruction of a Shifting Path*. Written for Gasser, the work explores the properties of the Yamaha Disklavier, an enhanced version of the piano that is able to trigger the keys of the instrument electronically. As Gasser plays, the Disklavier works its digital magic, effectively making the piece a duo between man and machine. The result is at times disquieting. Keys sink down unexpectedly as though pressed by invisible, otherworldly fingers; human and electronically triggered sounds blend together so that one is undistinguishable from the other. The inevitable question arises: will all this technological wizardry ultimately lead to the redundancy of the human performer?

No such concerns with Anthony Pateras, the final whizz-bang dazzler of the three piano mavericks. He took stage with his latest piano piece *BLEED DON'T BLOCK*, a half-hour finger-and-elbow-busting tour de force for solo piano. Strongly improvisational in feel, it creeps slowly from one germinal idea to the next, morphing imperceptibly in texture and rhythm in ways reminiscent of minimalism, yet eschewing the same with frequent, abrasive punctuations and vertiginous expressive peaks. His eccentric stage presence, in addition to his musical talent per se, is Pateras's indisputable asset as a performer. Bespectacled and somewhat unkempt in appearance, he cuts the figure of the brilliant and brooding iconoclast. As he plays he moves freely, head swaying and bobbing, feet thumping the floor, body shifting from one end of the piano to the other. At one point, he flung off his sandals and proceeded to play barefoot, as though to liberate himself from an unnecessary shackle. His stage mannerism eschews classical conventions and formalities, putting him alongside cellist Geoff Gartner and violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja as among the most original young musical showmen of his generation. Sure, you could accuse him of self-indulgence, but who could deny that his quirks are engaging and fascinating in a way more tame performances couldn't ever be? With Pateras, the piano is a clean slate, freed of its historical dogmatism, of its status as the one great vehicle of classical expression. It is reinvented, both physically and musically, and vested with renewed expressive vigour.

It is interesting to note connections between the three performers of the *Piano Tapestry* concert. Both Bolleter and Pateras rewrite the piano, using it in innovative and highly original ways, discarding the written score in favour of semi-structured improvisation. Bolleter and Gasser presented programs imbued with a nostalgic feel for times gone by. And Gasser and Pateras gave performances requiring near-impossible displays of virtuosity. If a commonality can be found for all three of them, however, it is their ability to utilise the infinite expressive capabilities of the piano to create a tapestry of staggering variety and beauty.

**The 2011 TURA Totally Huge New Music Festival continues until Sunday, September 25. View event details [here](#).**

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Sept 15-25, 2011

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### playing the ghosts of history

[henry andersen: piano tapestry](#), [ross bolleter](#), [mark gasser](#), [anthony pateras](#), [thnmf](#)

The piano is perhaps the most endearing symbol of the romantic era composers. Images of Liszt swaying back and forth at the keyboard or Beethoven taking the legs off his piano to better hear its vibrations through the floor form a vital part of the symbolism of that musical era. In the 20th and now 21st centuries the piano presents more difficult questions for the composer. Piano Tapestry displays, through startling virtuosity, some ways in which contemporary composers have approached the instrument.

The opening piece of the night, and the one furthest removed from the romantic tradition, was by Ross Bolleter improvising on what he calls "Daughters of Time." These are three pianos taken from various locations in outback Australia where, through years in the harsh climate, they have been weathered to the point of ruin. The instruments are heavy with memory. They have spent lifetimes in outback hotels and on verandas at the mercy of the elements. The symbolism is stark but affecting. It is impossible to distance the sound of these pianos from their connotations. The unevenly resonating strings and muted chimes instantly conjure images of the Australian outback and of an uneasy relationship to European heritage.

The visual element of the performance furthers such associations. Bolleter sits not on a piano stool but on a cushion on the floor, his head down and arms outstretched in order to reach the three pianos surrounding him. It's a far remove from the exaggerated raptures of Liszt or Chopin but Bolleter's performance is nonetheless intense and introspective. Improvised freely, the music exists in two time frames; firstly in the immanent present of the improvisation, and secondly in the imagined memory of these Daughters of Time. As Ross Bolleter writes "Ruins are what remain—still passing away to be sure, but lingering."

The romantic image of the piano is also closely associated with those other romantic inventions, the solo recital and the instrumental virtuoso. This is a world that second performer, Mark Gasser, inhabits. To see a performer so totally in control of their instrument is mesmerising. In Gasser's first two pieces by Ronald Stevenson, there is an incredible athleticism to the performance. The music is loud, complex and unrelentingly fast.

Gasser's third piece, Luigi Nono's "...sofferte onde serene..." ("...serene waves endured...") uses a recorded performance of Nono's friend, the pianist Maurizio Pollini as its seed. This recording, made slightly before Pollini's death, blends with similar material played by Gasser. Nono says that the recorded piano resonates like the bells in the



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lagoon near his house and the serene bells of a funeral. The result is of still, calm beauty in the face of tragedy.

The last piece, by Australian composer Lindsay Vickery, employs the Yamaha Disklavier, which uses data from a laptop to drive small motors attached to the piano's hammers. This automated material blends with passages played by Gasser—a duet for man and machine. Having keys move of their own accord thwarts associations with the piano as an extension of the performer's fingers. Coming straight after Nono's piece, there is a supernatural element to the performance, as if ghosts live in the keyboard.

The final performance of the night was from Anthony Pateras. Classically trained, he spent years experimenting with prepared pianos—using nails, coins and other objects inserted between the strings to expand the timbral and gestural capabilities of the instrument. Tonight's piano is not tampered with but under Pateras' fingers gesture is still the dominant force. The notes are so densely overlaid that any sense of pitch (other than in the most general sense of high or low) is meaningless. The music pivots between swarms of clustered notes and hammering percussive tones.

This performance too was improvised but with a stronger sense of form than Boletter's. Pateras' personality features prominently in his performances and he had clearly made a conscious effort not to engage the audience in any direct manner. He walked onto the stage in sandals (which he removed to play) and sat motionless at the piano for almost a minute before commencing, willing himself into a musical trance. This aesthetic is a big part of the way that Pateras brands himself. It seems to be a reaction against the ego and conservatism of the solo recital and, simultaneously, a bid for the audience's undivided attention. This contradiction only serves to heighten the appeal of his music and of Pateras himself as an indispensable part of it. This is music that only he can play.

The aim of Piano Tapestry was to present three different approaches to the piano. Bolleter's symbolism, Gasser's virtuosity and electronics and Pateras' gestures formed a triptych of contemporary approaches to the instrument—modern tastes, techniques and technologies meeting with the ghosts of the piano's history.

Totally Huge New Music Festival 2011: Piano Tapestry, Mark Gasser, Ross Bolleter, Anthony Pateras, presented by Tura New Music, Perth State Theatre Centre, Studio Underground, Sept 16; <http://www.tura.com.au/totally-huge-music-festival/2011/about>

Henry Andersen, a composer and performer of new music, living in Perth, is currently studying toward a Bachelor of Music Technology and Composition at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts. His interest in music traverses a wide range of styles and he has been involved in music for live performance, sound installation, dance, film and other mixed media.

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**ROSS BOLLETER, MARK GASSER + ANTHONY PATERAS:  
Piano Tapestry**

@ TURA Totally Huge Music Festival 2011

Article by: **Henry Andersen**

The piano is perhaps the most endearing symbol of the romantic era composers. Images of Liszt swaying back and forth at the keyboard or of Beethoven taking the legs off his piano to better hear its vibrations through the floor form a vital part of the symbolism of that musical era. In the twentieth, and now twenty first, centuries the piano presents a more difficult question to the composer. Piano Tapestry displays, in startling virtuosity, some ways in which modern composers have approached the instrument.

The opening piece of the night, and the one furthest removed from the romantic piano tradition, was by Ross Bolleter improvising on what he calls 'Daughters of Time.' These are three pianos taken from various locations in outback Australia where, through years in the Australian climate, they have been weathered to the point of ruin. The instruments are heavy with memory. They have spent lifetimes in outback hotels and on verandas amongst the elements. The symbolism is stark but affecting. It is impossible to distance the sound of these pianos from their connotations. The unevenly resonating strings and muted chimes instantly conjure images of the Australian outback, and of an uneasy relationship to their European heritage.

The visual element of the performance furthers such associations. Bolleter sat, not on a piano stool, but on a cushion on the floor, his head down and arms outstretched to reach the three pianos which surrounded him. It was a far remove from the exaggerated raptures of Liszt or Chopin but Bolleter's performance was still intense and introspective. Improvised freely, the music exists in two time frames; firstly in the immanent present of the improvisation, and secondly in the imagined memory of these Daughters of Time. As Bolleter writes "Ruins are what remain – still passing away to be sure, but lingering."

The romantic image of the piano is also closely associated with those other romantic inventions, the solo recital and the instrumental virtuoso. This is a world that second performer, Mark Gasser, inhabited. To see a performer so totally in control of their instrument is mesmerising. Gasser's first two pieces were by Ronald Stevenson. There is an incredible athleticism to the performance here. The music is loud, complex and unrelentingly fast.

Gasser's third piece, Luigi Nono's "...sofferte onde serene..." ("... serene waves endured...") uses a recorded performance of Nono's friend, the pianist Maurizio Pollini

as its seed. This recording, made slightly before Pollini's death, blended with similar material played by Gasser. Nono says that the recorded piano resonates like the bells in the lagoon near his house and the serene bells of a funeral. The result is of still, calm beauty in the face of tragedy.

Gasser's final piece, by Australian composer Lindsay Vickery, employs the Yamaha Disklavier which uses data from a laptop to drive small motors attached to the piano's hammers. This automated material blended with passages played by Gasser – a duet for man and machine. Associations of the piano as an extension of the performer's fingers are thwarted by having keys move of their own accord. Coming straight after Nono's piece, there was a supernatural element to the performance, as if ghosts lived in the piano's keyboard.

The final performer of the night was Anthony Pateras. Pateras' relationship with the piano is interesting. Classically trained, he spent years experimenting with prepared pianos - using nails, coins and other objects inserted between the strings to expand the timbral and gestural capabilities of the instrument. Tonight's piano was not tampered with but, under Pateras' fingers, gesture was still the dominant force. The notes were

of pitch (other than in the most general sense of high or low) was meaningless. The music pivoted between swarms of clustered notes and hammering percussive tones.

This performance too was improvised but with a stronger sense of form than Bolleter's.

Pateras' character features prominently in his performances and he had clearly made a conscious effort not to engage the audience in any direct manner. He walked barefoot onto the stage and sat motionless at the piano for almost a minute before playing, willing himself into a musical trance. This aesthetic is a big part of the way that Pateras brands himself. It seems to be a reaction against the ego and conservatism of the solo recital and, simultaneously, a bid for the audience's undivided attention. This contradiction only serves to heighten the appeal of his music and of him as an indispensable part of it. This is music that only he can play.

The aim of Piano Tapestry was to present three different approaches to the piano. Bolleter's symbolism, Gasser's virtuosity and electronics and Pateras' gestures formed a triptych of contemporary approaches of the instrument. Modern tastes, techniques and technologies meeting with the ghosts of the piano's history.

