

*Playing with Fire* was recorded in the in the Performance Space, Western Sydney University, Kingswood, 15-16 and 29-30 September, 2014.  
Microphones: DPA 4011, Sennheiser MKH40

Cover image by Diana Blom taken at performances of Annea Lockwood's *Piano Burning* (1968) at WSU in 2004 and 2013. Student collaborators were Henry Saxby (2004), Raymond Strickland (2014).

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# PLAYING WITH FIRE

New Australian music for electroacoustics and acoustic piano  
Tamara Anna Cislowka - piano

## PLAYING WITH FIRE

### New Australian music for electroacoustics and acoustic piano

The project, *Playing with Fire*, began with an interest in electroacoustics, on Ian's part, and in live acoustic piano with CD soundbed, on Diana's. Triggered by Diana's exploration of digitally distorted piano, with Brendan Smyly, the project explores the productive aspects of processes of digital techno aesthetic intermediation in the composition of new musical works for electroacoustics and piano. Composers were asked to compose a new work for electroacoustics and acoustic piano and we asked them to discuss their process with us. And the project would not have been possible without the interest and collaboration of Australian pianist, Tamara Anna Cislowska, an explorer of contemporary Australian piano music.

While this medium has been explored via tape and acoustic piano in the previous century, the 21<sup>st</sup> century offers other possibilities for electroacoustics and acoustic piano which the project aimed to explore.

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**Kim Lajoie, Thomas Reiner, and Tristram Williams - *Forlorn Remix for Piano and Electronics***  
*Forlorn Remix for Piano and Electronics* is a co-authored work by Kim Lajoie, Thomas Reiner, and Tristram Williams. The version on this recording was arranged for piano by Thomas Reiner, providing a notated score with considerable freedom for the pianist to improvise around notated material and to respond to the electronic part. The origin of the work goes back to a solo piece for Flugelhorn with quarter-tone valve, *Forlorn*, written by Thomas Reiner for Tristram Williams. Tristram Williams recorded the solo and Kim Lajoie created an electronic part based on the recording. The notated part for the piano version is based on the original solo for Flugelhorn.

**Kim Lajoie, Thomas Reiner, and Tristram Williams** are three musicians with an interest in contemporary art music. They have previously collaborated in a project called *Flayed Identities* about Indigenous soldiers in Australia's wars.

#### **Daniel Portelli *Mapping Australia***

*Mapping Australia* is an experimental multimedia piece for piano, electronics, video score, live camera, and video. Archival footage of Australia's cartography practices from the 1960s was transformed into a video score for a performer to engage with by tracing its gestures. The footage documents the prospective sale of Australian land to foreign mining interests. Land, and who it belongs to, remains a contentious socio-political issue in Australia today. The interior of a piano was 'mapped' by the performer using a variety of percussion mallets. It explores the piano as geographic territory and criticises the 'terra nullius' idea in Australian history.

**Daniel Portelli** is an art music composer whose influences derive from experimental, classical and electronic practices. He specialises in gesture, staff notation, video scores, and sound/video installations. His music has been performed by Tracensemble, Soundstream Collective, Adelaide Philharmonic Choir, Two New Duo, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Tamara Cislowska, ESMUC Ensemble, Claire Edwardes, Liu Ying, and by a robotic piano named RHEA. Portelli was awarded a PhD in composition at the University of Huddersfield (UK) with principal supervisor Professor Liza Lim and co-supervisor Professor Peter Ablinger. He also completed a MA (Honours) at Western Sydney University with Associate Professor Bruce Crossman.

**Ian Stevenson** is a sound designer and engineer. He is senior lecturer in music and sound design in the School of Communication at the University of Technology Sydney. When not engineering new recordings for piano and electroacoustics, he writes and researches in the area of sound design for media, entertainment and the built environment with a focus on the aestheticization of everyday sounds. He has worked in the theatre in Europe and Australia, in broadcast, post-production, live sound and record production and in high-tech product management.

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### Robert Davidson

Out of silence gradually builds up a contrapuntal web from the simplest beginnings by means of canon, with the live pianist echoed twice by digital delay. The focus is typically on reinforcing the existing texture, building to climactic points, but every now and then there are surprise reinterpretations, giving a new framework of harmony, metre, mode or register. I enjoy the canonic form for its ever-present tension between familiarity and surprise.

### Robert Davidson

Robert Davidson is a prolific composer, bassist, lecturer and founder and artistic director of Topology. Davidson studied composition with Terry Riley in California before completing a composition PhD at the University of Queensland. He previously studied South Indian vocal music in Kerala, India. Davidson's compositions are regularly performed, recorded and broadcast around the world, in venues including New York's Lincoln Center, Sydney's Opera House and London's Barbican. All of Australia's professional orchestras and many leading soloists, ensembles, and other collaborators have commissioned and performed his works. With Topology he has released eleven albums, and has directed numerous artistic collaborations.

### Leah Kardos

"I bought this piano in 1996" is crafted from an improvisation on my original childhood piano in Australia, self accompanied by electronic beats in Ableton Live. The music flows from my personal memories from 1996; being 17, captivated by technology and the mainstream emergence of digital culture, the virtual landscape of the early internet, being an emerging musician interested in both classical piano repertoire, drum n bass and IDM. I remember, with fondness, a time when music was life-giving fun, and not so readily associated with serious, hard work.

Leah Kardos (b. 1979) is a composer/producer making eclectic music that often combines live instrumental performance with technology, location recordings and found sounds. She creates music that explores the communicative powers of timbre and psychoacoustic phenomena, memory and pattern recognition. She has collaborated with performers and ensembles such as Ben Dawson, R. Andrew Lee, Laura Wolk-Lewanowicz, The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, and Australian chamber orchestra Ruthless Jabiru, and the Queensland Symphony Orchestra. She is currently senior lecturer in music at Kingston University, and is a signed artist with London label Bigo & Twigetti.



### Tamara Anna Cislowka (piano)

Tamara-Anna Cislowka is one of Australia's most acclaimed, ARIA award-winning pianists, performing and recording in Australia and internationally to critical and public acclaim. Earning international prizes in London, Italy and Greece such as the Rovere d'Oro, and touring Japan and the USA as cultural ambassador for Australia, Tamara's accolades include ABC Young Performer of the Year, the Freedman Fellowship, an Art Music Award for 'Performance of the Year' (ACT) and the 2015 ARIA award for 'Best Classical Album'.

Frequent guest of orchestras and festivals worldwide, Tamara has performed as soloist with the London Philharmonic, Auckland Philharmonia, and all major Australasian symphony orchestras with conductors such as Matthias Bamert, Edo de Waart, Asher Fisch, Johannes Fritzsich, Karina Kanellakis and Alondra de la Parra. Recent engagements include concerti by Gorecki, Prokofiev and the world premiere of Elena Kats-Chernin's piano concerto, *Lebewohl*, with the

Tasmanian, Canberra and Queensland Symphony Orchestras; CIRCA's *En Masse* for Brisbane Festival and Lincoln Centre's White Light Festival (USA); and Australian Chamber Orchestra's *Mountain* for the Barbican (UK). With five ARIA no.1 albums, most recently 'Into Silence' recorded with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, and 'Unsent Love Letters: meditations on Erik Satie', available on Deutsche Grammophon outside Australia, Tamara also presents for ABC Classic FM and edits for Boosey & Hawkes (Berlin). [www.tamara-annacislowka.com.au](http://www.tamara-annacislowka.com.au)

Photography by StevenGodbee

### **Stephen Adams *Piano in a field of recordings***

I love the diffuse and poly-directional music of sound environments, from urban spaces to bushland and other 'natural' settings. I also love the music of the contemporary classical concert hall. Often recording and playing with the one and writing scores for the other can seem like very disparate and unconnected activities - worlds in competition with each other for the status of a valid and meaningful contemporary sound art. Imagine a pianist playing a grand piano in the middle of a field of tall grasses surrounded by a vast chorus of frogs. Now picture that same pianist and grand piano sounding in a small concert space, with the sounds of the frogs emerging diffusely from a miscellaneous collection of small speakers or radios scattered around, beneath and on top of the piano. This is *Piano in a field of recordings* - a utopian vision of a space where these two disparate sonic and cultural worlds, the icon of the classical concert hall and these hidden choristers of the open air, can sing independently and yet in harmony, as if aware of and at peace with each other's presence. The field is some wet grassland beside Jounama Pond in Talbingo on the western edge of the Snowy Mountains, about six hours drive from Sydney. The pianist I was picturing there was Tamara Anna Cislowska. The field recordings I made in that place have been edited into three one-minute sound-pieces, arranged for this composition into a simple A-B-A-A-C-C structure.

**A** = close-up perspective where you can hear the rhythms of some of the individual frogs and the intense bright, brittle sounds they make.

**B** = a mash-up of three separate recordings – i) the close-up sound of the frogs, ii) a distant 'wide-angle' perspective on the soundscape, and iii) a recording I of the very loud air-conditioning unit in the room where I was staying nearby.

**C** = a carefully selected but otherwise unaltered one-minute slice of the wider soundscape beside Jounama Pond, taking in the frogs, along with other birds including magpies and a soulful, low, two-note honking from some unidentified waterbird, all of this framed by the distant doppler-shift of a passing airplane.

**Stephen Adams** is a composer, musician, and voice and sound artist. His activities include writing concert scores, group and solo improvisation, music theatre, song writing, and studio and field recording-based sound pieces. Stephen is also an ABC radio and media producer-presenter specialising in contemporary classical and experimental music. His choral works *Sydney Dreaming* (1988) for The Contemporary Singers and *memory pieces* (1995) for Sydney Chamber Choir have been widely performed and broadcast in Australia and overseas. *Afterwards* for choir, radios and percussion soloist Claire Edwardes (2014) was a finalist in the 2015 Australian Art Music Awards for Best Vocal Composition. Recent scores focus on relationships between acoustic instruments, field recordings and lo-fi electronics, incorporating elements of improvisation. *Sunset Inside The Listening Room* (2019) for flutes, cello and location field recording was commissioned by Bruce and Jocelyn Wolfe to open the new Limeburners building for Easter at The Piano Mill 2019.

### **Daniel Blinkhorn - *frostbYte - liten snø trinn***

The overall form of the work is that of a suite, with the title reflecting this (in Norwegian). As such, the title is *frostbYte - liten snø trinn* and then each section is named after a work in the tradition of a French Baroque suite. Two of the works (allemande 7 courante) have the same opening passage, becoming noticeably different once moving through the work. All dynamics should be interpreted to suit the pre-recorded parts.

**Daniel Blinkhorn** is an Australian composer, sound and digital media artist currently residing in Sydney. He is currently lecturer in composition, digital music and media at the Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney. Daniel is an ardent field recordist, where he has embarked upon a growing number of recording expeditions throughout Africa, Alaska, Amazon, West Indies and Cuba, Northern Europe, Middle East, Mexico, Madagascar, Australia and the high Arctic/ North Pole region of Svalbard. His creative works have received multiple international and national composition awards. More information about Daniel, as well as samples of his work can be found [www.danielblinkhorn.com](http://www.danielblinkhorn.com)

### **Diana Blom and Brendan Smyly – *Playing with Fire***

*Playing with Fire* – for live acoustic piano and CD soundbed – Diana Blom and Brendan Smyly

A collaboration between Blom and Smyly, *Playing with Fire* explores the sounds of live acoustic piano and distorted piano. The two sound sources borrow and share pitch fields and texture blocks. At times the live piano is foregrounded and at other times the CD soundbed engulfs the piano sound. *Playing with Fire* grew from Smyly's concentrated studio production practice, a process of trial and experimentation both in the recording room and inside the ProTools music production software. The two spent productive hours trying different microphones, signal processing and amplification set-ups to explore distorted piano sounds. Smyly took recordings they made and built the sound-bed for the piece. The result captures the immediacy of the improvised gestures, drawn into a sonic narrative that highlights the piano's ability to adapt to a sound space usually occupied by more contemporary instruments.

**Diana Blom**, composer and keyboard player has written three collaborative works for CD soundbed and live acoustic piano – *Gong Agong* with Emma Stacker (2006), *The Cat's Meow* with Adrian Barr (2010) and *Playing with Fire* with Brendan Smyly (2014). She has co-curated several composition/ performance/ CD projects of new compositions by Australian and overseas composers including *Antarctica – new music for piano and/or toy piano* and *New Music for Multiple Keyboards*. Diana is co-author of *Music Composition Toolbox*, a composition textbook published by Science Press and her music is published (scores and CDs) through Wirripang Pty. Ltd., Orpheus Music and Wai-te-Ata Press. Diana is Associate Professor in Music at Western Sydney University.