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Making a Modern Piece of Music More Memorable

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Making a Modern Piece of Music More Memorable

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On The Wishing Box:

"I have a very, very vague form of synesthesia. So when I hear those colors—rubies and emeralds and purples— they suggested different harmonies for me."

—Cheryl Frances-Hoad



Cheryl Frances-Hoad

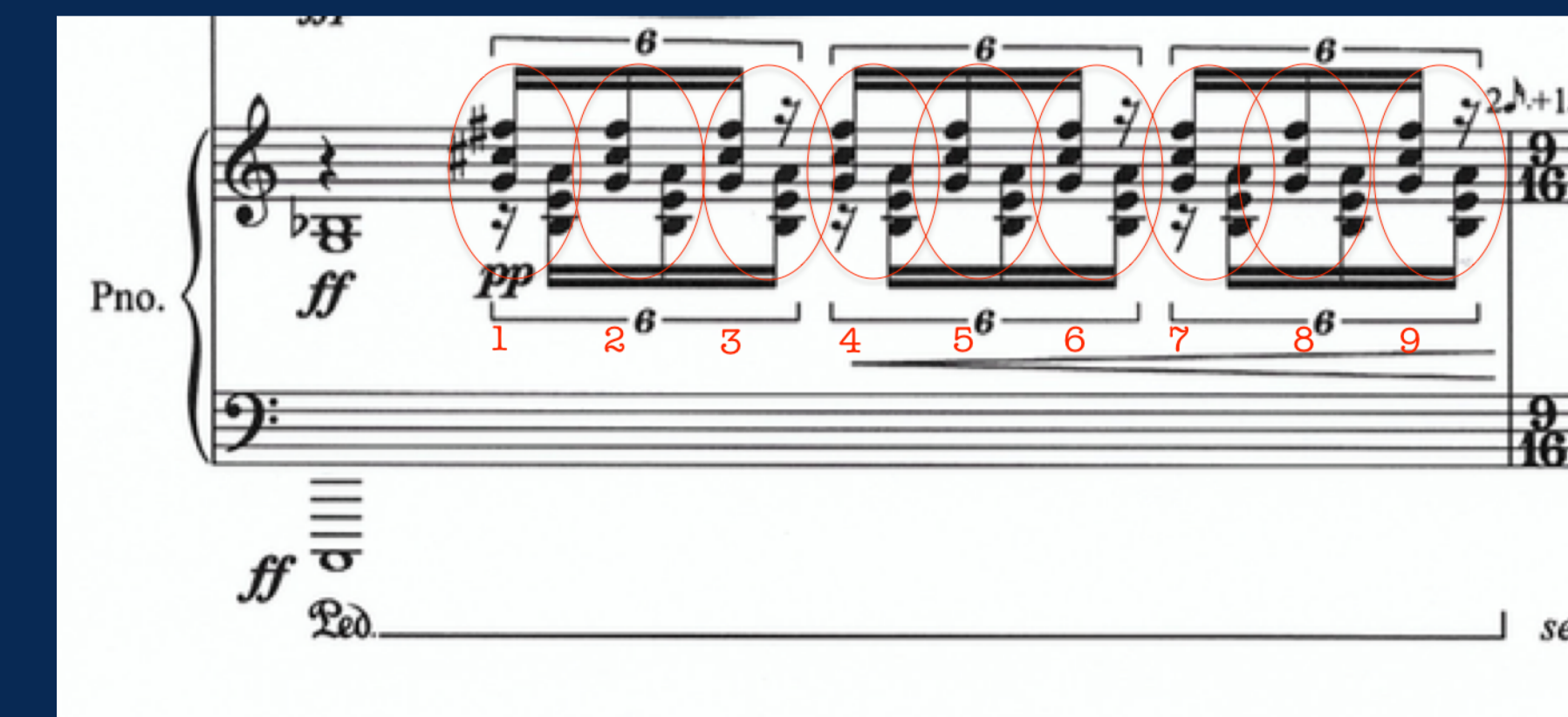


Minerva Piano Trio

Excerpts



*"Her tranquil features were set in a slight, secret smile of triumph, as if, in some far country unattainable to mortal men, she were, at last, **waltzing** with the dark, red-caped prince of her early dreams."*



*"She had... dreamed of a wishing-box land... you picked a box, turned the handle around **nine** times... and the wish came true."*
—The Wishing Box, Sylvia Plath

Introduction

My Fleeting Angel is a piece for a piano trio composed by Cheryl Frances-Hoad. It is inspired by *The Wishing Box*, a short story by Sylvia Plath.

Dr. Frances-Hoad wrote the piece in 2005. It won the Robert Helps Prize, earning her temporary status as composer-in-residence at the University of Southern Florida.

The vivid descriptions in *The Wishing Box* provided musical inspiration for *My Fleeting Angel*. Dr. Frances-Hoad transformed the colorful syntax into harmonies and rhythms throughout the piece.

Research Questions

- Do the many influences in the story resonate with an audience?
- Are the performers of the piece aware of the story behind the music and therefore able to communicate that message in a live performance?

Methods

I discussed *My Fleeting Angel* with Dr. Frances-Hoad and the Minerva Piano Trio just prior to a performance of it on March 9, 2017 in London. I also spoke with several audience members to find what their impressions were afterward.

These responses could then be compared to find the difference between what ideas had been intended to be communicated by the artists and what was actually experienced by the audience.

My Fleeting Angel's Recurring Theme



"I've a fondness for writing tunes that are almost serial and don't use the same notes twice... [The melody] just came from The Wishing Box— the turning, winding nature of it."

— Cheryl Frances-Hoad

Results

Dr. Frances-Hoad eagerly attends rehearsals of her pieces before premieres, sharing ideas for interpretation and performance with the musicians. She also writes program notes that reference *The Wishing Box* for musicians and concert attendees read.

Few audience members were familiar with Plath's story, but a majority associated aspects of the piece with visual elements. **Scan the QR code to listen for yourself.**

Conclusion

The reactions of audience members were surely relative to the other works that were programmed in the concert, which was already highly visual.

According to Dr. Frances-Hoad, knowing *The Wishing Box* was not meant as a prerequisite to hearing the piece. Nevertheless, she and many audience members agree that it adds insight to how the piece was constructed and allows for a more visceral experience.

