

Translating twenty-first-century orchestral scores for the piano: transcription, reduction and performability

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## **Abstract**

This research focusses on the technical and aesthetic issues surrounding the creation of piano reductions of the orchestral scores of two twenty-first-century piano concertos. It sets out a number of principles that might be applied more generally when producing comprehensive and musically convincing piano reductions of a range of contemporary orchestral scores.

Two-piano versions of piano concertos enable performers to learn the content of the work before they have a chance to rehearse it with a full orchestra and thus to gain a better understanding of the solo piano's position within the overall texture. At their best, these arrangements can provide a satisfying alternative to the full orchestral performance. Since the early nineteenth century, piano arrangements of orchestral works have been instrumental in the process of studying and disseminating not only symphonic music, but also other orchestral genres such as operas and concertos. In the first half of the twentieth century composers including Stravinsky, Ravel and Bartók produced their own piano reductions, of their instrumental concertos and symphonic works.

By the late twentieth century, major changes in both musical language and orchestration complicated the straightforward 'reduction' of melodic, harmonic and rhythmic elements for piano. For example, percussion has become a far more prominent element of the musical fabric, and the use of extended techniques on string, woodwind and brass instruments is now practised widely. It is thus becoming increasingly challenging and time-consuming to transcribe orchestral scores of contemporary works for piano in such a way that convincingly captures their essential aural features. Inevitably, fundamental properties of the original, such as timbral and dynamic variety, are easily lost in the process of transcription.

In my research I investigate the possibilities of overcoming the acoustic and technical limitations of the piano as a vehicle for representing the modern orchestra and of creating practicable reductions that are both playable and faithful to the original acoustic impression. General observations and principles are demonstrated through the two case studies: full transcriptions of two stylistically contrasting twenty-first century piano concertos, by Mark-Anthony Turnage and James Dillon.

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