

Jarkko Hartikainen

Sonata for Bicycle

minimum of 3 gears
(Amplified)

2020



Music Finland

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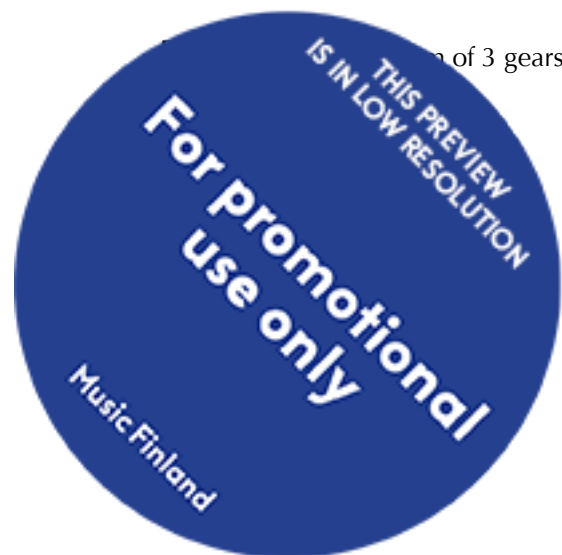
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Jarkko Hartikainen

Sonata for Bicycle (2020)

*commissioned by (and dedicated to) Kalle Hakosalo,
with support from Kone Foundation and Madetoja Foundation*



of 3 gears

(amplified)

Duration 20 minutes

Sonata for Bicycle

In the beginning, the performer is asked to start spinning the crank arm of an upside-down bicycle forward. The aim is to try to find a speed that produces the least sound possible from the vehicle's machinery. Soon, releasing the crank arm releases another, slightly louder sound. Changing gear, yet another. Later, the score also asks the performer to listen to the inevitably slipping out click-sounds of the freehub, and then to imitate these rhythms by flicking the front wheel spokes in canon. Finally, in one of the concluding moments of the piece, the performer is instructed to conduct a 100-second discovery-survey on the various rhythmical loops produced on different nodes of plucked spokes while spinning the wheel in a musically-sensible manner, that is, *come un organetto a manovella* (ie. "like a barrel organist"). The piece also includes quite a bit of *cantabile*... but not for the sake of pitches or tunes, but for the joy of (the bicycle) finding a singing voice and letting it ring.

While adjusting themselves into the concrete materiality of the bicycle at hand, the performer is decisively more of a (co-)listener or an enabler than a master or a creator. The score, a set of tasks in notated rhythm, is based on a transcription of a video documenting the composer's planned improvisation of said tasks – tasks instructing, in various ways, to listening to the bicycle. This 'feedback cycle into itself' is an effort in equalizing the performer and the instrument (even the composer?) to a revised power balance. It is an effort in finding a space where the nonhuman component, the "instrument", is liberated from its traditional of *rôle* of being a mere object, a means to an end – essentially, a tool – and empowered to *initiate* the dialogue in sound. This is to promote the idea of us, humans, actively listening to the

nature around us. Furthermore, this dialogue is suggested to have been naturally initiated by the object's materiality; a bicycle is, in essence, a spinning machine. Bringing this piece about is thus not really only about "making of plinking sounds", but of creating a space for listening to matter's moment of *cantabile*.

In a rendition, the performer brings the particular bicycle into the realm of listening – by using the machine in the most obvious, stable manner requested by concentrated listening – just as much as the title of the piece brings this particular "ride" into the realm of music. Whatever results, in my humble opinion, is a material voice in its ephemeral beauty. And the voice sings (and purrs)... *s(u)onare > sonata*.

The original impetus for my first piece for a non-instrument came already around early 2009, and in the meantime got inspired by the *Gutai Art Manifesto* of Jirō Yoshihara, the *MANI* works of Pierluigi Billone, the constellations of Hanna Hartman... probably also John Cage, the Futurists and everybody composing for objects ever since. But above all, it is inspired by habitual listening to natural materiality (< lat. *mater*, mother) of things concretely offered by nature herself. In 2014, the concept of this project got focused on the bicycle, and finally, in 2019, "a new piece for a non-instrument" was officially commissioned by percussionist-performer Kalle Hakosalo for his *Finnish New Percussion Music* concert, with funding from Kone Foundation and Madetoja Foundation. The resulting *Sonata for Bicycle* (2020) was composed while being supported by Arts Council of Finland (Taike) with my first full-year working grant.

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Sonata for Bicycle

Jarkko HARTIKAINEN
(2020)

A well-maintained bicycle (with min. 3 but pref. 7 gears), laying on a 'repair' position, ie. upside down, on the ground.

Performer sitting behind the bicycle, on the side of the front derailleur, on a small stool etc, facing the audience. Avoid using a music stand if possible (lay score on ground?)

smallest gear

(♩ = 60) start spinning the crank arm (forward)
→ try to find a speed that creates no sound (or, as little sound as possible)

release the crank arm (sound of spinning freehub) **"f"** switch gears (up)* middle gear

calmo, meditativo

pochissimo *subito mf* L.V.

(*exact rhythm depending on model)

middle gear

spin the crank arm (forward)
→ try to find a (this time a little faster) speed that's as quiet as possible

release the crank arm **"f"** switch gears (up)* biggest gear

pochissimo *subito mf*

biggest gear

(let sound of spinning freehub deacc. out naturally)

spin the crank arm (forward)
→ try to find a (yet faster) speed that creates as little freehub noise as possible

accelerate the spinning to as fast as possible

mp (hold the frame with l.h. from tipping over)

spin the crank arm **backward** for raised sound (chain back hits), **forward** for faster downward gliss. (by lessening the resistance)



again, as-silent-as-possible spinning...
(listen closely to the escaping little clicks!) →

imitate as closely as possible the inevitable little clicks
by flicking/striking the front wheel spokes with l.h. fingernails

etc. →

stop spinning
(freehub whirl) →

(keep the imitational relationship going!) →

17

calmo, meditativo
pp

sf *mf*

21 → ← → ← →

so lenne

mf *p* *sf* *sf* *mf* *p* *mf*

accelerate!

29 ← →

cantabile

mf *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

accelerate!

simile

(alternative notation for pitchless forward spinning = as in prev. measure)

34 ← →

continuous gliss. by carefully adjusting (by ear) the speed of backwards spinning

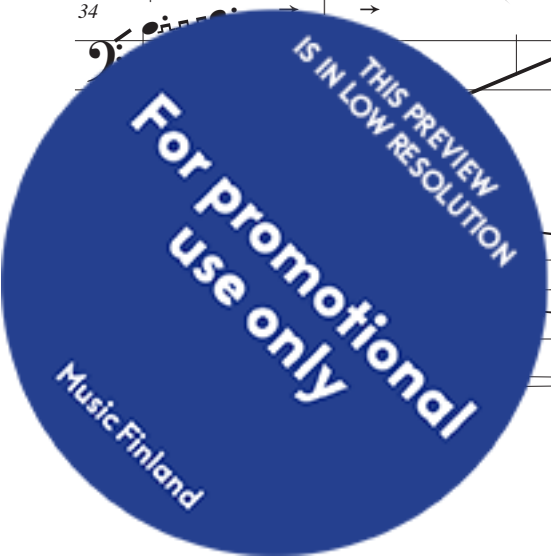
mf *p* *f*

again, listen to the clicks and imitate by flicking/striking the spokes with fingernails

etc. →

23

misterioso
pp



flick/strike different front wheel spokes with l.h. fingernails (producing an aleatoric, bell-like melody)

43

f *mf*

(*pp*)

50

p *mf* accelerate!

58

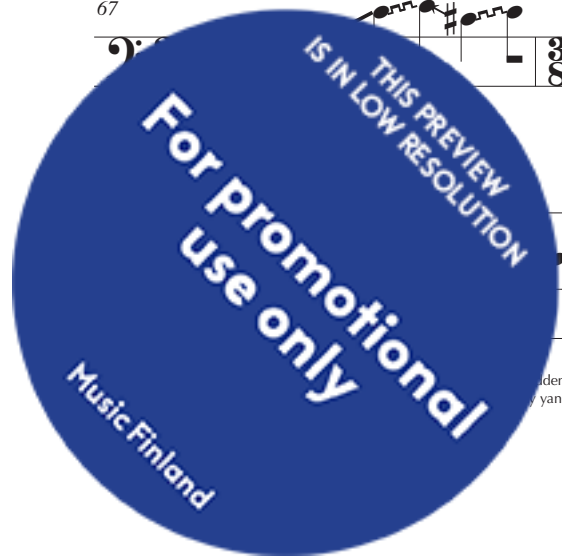
cantabile *mf* simile (a little faster!) fine-tune speed to create fluctuation in the sound

67

accelerate spinning to as fast as possible, so that the crank arm hits are as inevitable as they are steady

quasi fermata

...then, indeterminate grace note 'dips' yanking sharply forward under a gliss.



improvise something similar to m. 74
| → | → ← | etc.

* improvise different kinds of falling melodic contours
(as in previous 26 measures)

80 *quasi cadenza*
f

90

97

103 *accelerate!*

improvise a long falling melodic line
until the whirl slows down from pitch to ticking

take a hard "plectrum"
(pref. a plastic tire lever or
other bicycle-related item)
possible!

press the "plectrum" very gently on the spoke nipples while resting this hand securely against the seat stay
(sound resembling an electric razor or drill)

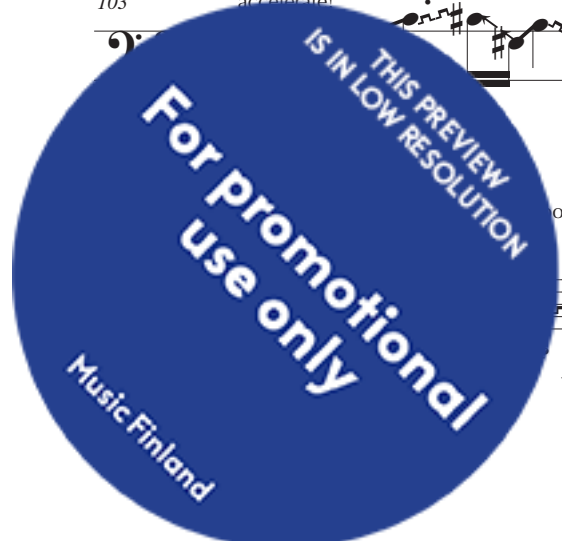
nipples → spokes (pitched!)

use the break to
grind fast to a halt

release the
break audibly
(if possible)

mf *p*

p *mf* *p* *f* *mp* *p*



145
freehub
nipples

(new clef showing 10 poss. positions of "plectrum" on spokes b/w freehub and nipples)

accelerate → pitch ← decelerate
rhythm → ← rhythm

154
freehub
nipples

quasi cantabile

accelerate → pitch ← decelerate

162
freehub
nipples

as little sound from the spinning as possible

biggest gear → smallest gear
exact rhythm depending on model

f | x x x x x x

as little sound from the spinning as possible

holding the plectrum in the same place from previous measure, accelerate and decelerate the rhythmic spoke sound

quasi fermata pp *meccanico mp* *calmo, meditativo p* *come un organetto a manovella p*

166

accel → decelerate accelerate → decelerate

freely conduct an extended (1m40s) survey-discovery on the various "rhythmic loops" provided by the spokes, ie. improvise with different speeds and "plectrum" positions continuing the accel./decelerate scheme ("like a barrel organist") from mm. 165-167

100
4

improvvisando (scoprirando) p-f

freehub
nipples

accelerate → maximum!

18
4

decelerate → a slow ostinato or beat

maintain this steady beat/ostinato on the "plectrum"-on-spokes sound, while keeping the spinning constant and noiseless (as in the beginning)

etc.

(release crank arm and let all sound die out naturally)

53
4

8
4

quasi cadenza *calmo, meditativo pp*

