

Exploring the interpretative platform: composer and pianist thinking on Greenbaum's *First Light*

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Abstract

This study investigates the compositional and contextual thinking of composer, Stuart Greenbaum, and the preparatory thinking, and teaching experience of pianist, Yvonne Lau, in the preparation of the solo piano work, *First Light*. Adopting a practice-informed interview approach with questions drawn from the researcher's own preparation of the work, the study discusses information the composer would like the performer to know and issues the pianist encountered while preparing the work. It also places the findings in relation to seven stages of learning a new piano work identified in the literature (Chaffin & Imreh, 2002; Viney & Blom, 2014). The paper ends with reflections on how both composer and performer intuitively discuss music elements as a whole, emphasizing their connections; how teaching (and being interviewed) offer opportunities for reflection; what can be revealed by different methodologies; the role of score instructions and program notes; and what engaging with new repertoire brings to learning about preparation of a piano work.

Key words: *First Light*, contemporary classical piano solo, preparation, stages of learning a new work

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Beginning preparation of a new piano work involves first 'scouting it out' (Chaffin & Imreh, 2002), that is, playing through to identify structure before sectional work begins, followed by several further stages in the preparation. The preparation of the *Presto* third movement of the *Italian Concerto* by J. S. Bach was the work Chaffin and Imreh observed and documented over thirty-three hours. However, when a piece of music is recently written, not part of the established canon of piano works, plus "stylistically unusual and conceptually challenging" (Viney & Blom 2014, p. 2), an earlier stage is proposed where an interpretative platform be established before or while the technical and structural scouting it out is taking place.

This study draws on the compositional and contextual thinking of the composer, and the preparatory thinking of the pianist who prepared a work, *First Light* by Stuart Greenbaum, for

commercial CD release and teaches the work to her students. Much of this information informs the establishment of an interpretative platform to gain a better understanding of the music while preparing the work for performance but also informs later stages of the preparation process. Asking the two interviewees to draw on their practice-based knowledge of the work, the study responded to the following research questions:

1. Which aspects of the work would the composer like the performer to know about?
2. What were the issues for the pianist in learning *First Light*?
3. How does this knowledge fit into the recognized stages of learning a new work and inform a performer's preparation of the work?

Literature review

First Light was composed in 1997 and is dedicated to the composer's mother, Elizabeth Scarlett. The score note identifies as influences Romanticism, a repertoire played by the composer's mother; rock and other contemporary music styles to which the composer turned while growing up; contemporary voicings of such American pianist/composers as Lyle Mays, Keith Jarrett and Herbie Hancock; and the Romantic harmony of Chopin, Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn and others, part of the composer's musical heritage. The note ends by saying, "the question is not so much one of style as it is of function, and this strikes me as being outside of 'historical time'" (Greenbaum, 1997). *First Light* is neither stylistically unusual nor conceptually challenging but it is a work composed fairly recently and its mixed parentage, reflected in the score's program note, offers several stylistic, interpretative and technical challenges.

Composers communicating about their works to performers

Schoenberg is, famously, purported to have said: "The performer, for all his intolerable arrogance, is totally unnecessary except as his interpretations make the music understandable to an audience unfortunate enough not to be able to read it in print" (Cook, 2001, p. 1). This view is echoed in trombonist Barrie Webb's (2007) comment of observers being forgiven for thinking "that the performer is a kind of second-class musician, simply reproducing the wishes of the composer-creator" (p. 255). Yet the relationship between composer and performer has several levels.

Composers are often happy to talk about their music to increase understanding for performers and listeners; for some the performance note is an opportunity to give the performer more technical information; and for others the score says it all. Yet the score alone can be problematic. For Luciano Berio, adopting a proportional notation in his first version of *Sequenza 1* (1958) for solo flute led performers to "perpetuate adaptations

that were little short of piratical" (Berio cited from 1981 interview in Perlove, 1998, p. 47). His 1992 version, however, rewritten in precise time signature and traditional note values was never adopted as frequently by performers as the first version. Perlove notes that "because of differences and innovations in notation, contemporary music often relies as much on an oral tradition as on a written text" (p. 47) and says flautist, Sophie Cherrier, for example, consults directly with composers, who help her translate their scores. Other musicians, lacking such a luxury, may study recordings (when possible), or discuss the piece with teachers and colleagues who may have had past contact with the composer. "When these options are not possible, performers make their own interpretive decisions" (p. 48). Through a performance note in the score, composers can offer information which is structural in nature, information which composers often do not feel is suitable for the listener's program note (Blom, Bennett, & Stevenson, 2016, p. 8). And while many composers have written about their compositional process and thinking in a work, fewer have written with information specifically for the performer. Pianist Diana Blom (2006) interviewed composer Ross Edwards when preparing his solo piano work, *Kumari*, for performance and recording, having struggled with her conceptual planning of the work. Composer Steve Reich's (1992) writings on performance emerge, in large part, from his own performing of his works in an ensemble, and discuss a range of issues including an understanding of the background of his fellow performers and what each contributes to the music, the influence of non-Western musics on his own composing (structure rather than particular sounds), and the seating of ensembles and orchestras when playing his music. Talking of performers who have difficulty performing works which have freedom in them, and who say "I don't want to be free. I want to be told what to do", John Cage wrote a piece especially for them, and hopes, in the future, to have all kinds of performers – those who like musical freedom, those who hate it (Cage & Kostelanetz, 1988, p. 27).

For oboist Christopher Redgate, composer Roger Redgate's highly complex solo oboe work, *Ausgangspunkte* (1988), technical demands of quarter tones and extreme high notes involved him in learning "to 'think outside of the box'... realizing that I can break some of the rules", (p. 143). In an analysis of Bryn Harrison's 2002 work for solo piano, *entre-temps*, undertaken by pianist, Philip Thomas and two analysts, Eric Clarke and Nicholas Cook (Clarke, Cook, Harrison & Thomas, 2005), the pitch structure is considered by Harrison and Cook, "in a sense, too easy to analyze to need analyzing" (p. 43). However, pianist and composer discuss the accuracy of complex rhythmic notation. In response to a question from the pianist about the accuracy of his rhythmic playing, the composer said, "As far as I can tell, I'm struggling to tell" (p. 45). Instead the piece is not concerned with "matters of larger scale structure and design...but...focus[es] instead on detailed aspects of touch and articulation in relation to the material and the rhythm properties, and rhythmic treatment, of the material" (pp. 60-61). For the composer, "the notation is something to explore, within which as yet unknown discoveries can be made – but that those discoveries depend on engaging with the notation in detailed and serious terms" (p. 63). Here is music with complex notation which requires accuracy but not exactitude over articulation and touch and at the heart is music as human action (p. 64).

Stages of learning a new piano work

Within the learning of a piano work new to the pianist, Chaffin and Imreh (2002) recognize six stages. The work, the *Presto* third movement of the *Italian Concerto* by J. S. Bach, played by pianist/researcher, Gabriela Imreh, was observed over thirty-three hours. The first stage involved running through the piece to identify structure so that sectional work could begin – literally 'Scouting it out'. Learning the movement, "Section by section", helped establish motor memory with "familiar patterns of notes [merging] to form new, larger patterns" (p. 240); decisions were made

on fingering and technical challenges which in turn informed phrasing and interpretative goals. "The gray stage", a transitional phrase in which the decisions of the previous stage become automatic, saw the linking of short segments into longer segments, the beginning of memorization plus "a new focus on interpretation" (p. 242) with consideration of dynamics, phrasing and pedaling. In "Putting it together", memorization is strengthened. Slow practice, playing to practice audiences, putting "final touches" (p. 245) to interpretation and increasing the tempo were all features of this stage and of the fifth stage, "Polishing". And the final stage, "Maintenance" required regular, but not too frequent, runs through the piece. Also of interest is Chaffin and Imreh's choice of the Bach movement for their study over Debussy's *Clair de Lune*. Because Imreh took only four hours to learn the Debussy, it was considered "so much easier [as to be] relatively uninformative" (p. 94) due to the observation methodology adopted.

Learning *Kumari* for solo piano, by Australian composer Ross Edwards, pianists Liam Viney and Diana Blom (2014) adopted a practice-led data-gathering approach via a guiding questionnaire to research their process. *Kumari* has two movements and could be considered moderately difficult, technically. However, both pianists encountered problems when starting their learning, finding the work "stylistically unusual and conceptually challenging" (p. 2) despite both being very familiar with Edwards's compositions. They offer five "elements as a framework for developing an interpretive platform in unfamiliar or contemporary classical repertoire" (p. 5) – "Element 1: Getting to know the composer; Element 2: Reading the score; Element 3: Engaging with the musical parameters; Element 4: Anchoring; and Element 5: Discussing the issues" (pp. 5-6). For *Kumari*, these elements involved discussion of dynamics, physical movement because of the extreme registers in the piece, rhythmic considerations, the title and program notes, and use of metaphor. Viney and Blom found

that contemporary classical repertoire which presents challenges may require a stage where an interpretation platform is established, and suggest that this stage may occur before Chaffin and Imreh's (2002) "Scouting if out".

In summary, the literature offers seven stages in the learning of new piano work:

1. Interpretation platform (Viney & Blom, 2014)
2. Scouting it Out;
3. Section by Section
4. The Gray Stage
5. Putting it Together
6. Polishing
7. Maintenance (Chaffin & Imreh, 2002, pp. 240-246).

Methodology

Australian composer, Stuart Greenbaum, and Australian pianist, Yvonne Lau, who prepared the work for commercial CD release¹ and taught it to students, were interviewed face-to-face by the researcher. The interview questions, for both participants, (see Appendices A and B) adopted practice-informed questioning whereby the questions arose from the researcher's own experience preparing *First Light* for performance in a concert with an intercultural focus, and for commercial recording in 2006.² Ross Edwards's *Kumari* was also played at the same concert, and many of these questions arose while preparing that piece (Blom, 2006). Areas of enquiry, therefore, focused on: whether the work is intercultural or is cross-cultural, if at all; relationships to other works; what a performer brings to the piece from other musics played and heard; the program note/performance note content; sections and structure, in particular the first section; use of imagery and metaphor to

understand and shape the work in performance; dynamics, especially the extreme dynamic shifts; the sense of pulse throughout the work; use of sustain and soft pedal; and performer body movement (Appendices A and B).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and analysed, firstly in relation to the topic raised in the questions, then, in relation to other emerging themes. The voices of both composer and pianist are heard in the findings section.

Findings

Inter-cultural

Greenbaum considers the work cross-cultural because of identifiable jazz, minimalist and romantic influences although he finds "cross-pollenisation" is also useful "to describe when you have something that is the result of a collision or other type of interaction of two things that are otherwise normally thought of as separate". The composer feels that American composer-pianists who use contemporary voicings, Lyall Mayes, Keith Jarrett and Herbie Hancock, "would all have played Chopin, Beethoven and Schubert, so we're not actually talking about two completely independent streams. We're talking about a jazz stream that has some knowledge of romantic music anyway". For Greenbaum, the interest is to what extent these "boundary crossings" happen in a superficial level or at a deeper level. The jazz influence is heard in his use of off-beat quavers, syncopated rhythms, and chords often "constructed around stacked 3rds and chromatic alterations". But there's also the influence of bi-tonality, a harmonic device he also used in *The Founding* for choir and instruments, composed around the same time. Greenbaum notes while there might be some "shared technical possibilities" between works written around the same time, they often inhabit "quite different worlds...and...felt like totally different pieces", largely because of structural differences.

First Light, for example, was written "from the inside-out" and Greenbaum started by writing the first three bars after sitting down at the piano – "I

1. 1998 *First light*, CD of Australian piano music. Yvonne Lau, piano. Published by Fellowship of Australian Composers.

2. 2006 *First Light* by Stuart Greenbaum; *Kumari* by Ross Edwards – Diana Blom piano. *Jo Wha* CD WIRR 004 (Wirripang). The work has also been recorded by Amir Farid on the CD *Satellite Mapping*, released in 2016 by Move Records, MD 3402.

liked the chords followed by the melodic run and then the arrival at a point of bi-tonality after a... very clear harmonic centre with jazz-added notes" moving from white note C major, effectively, to the "unexpected dissonance" of E flat against the G major chord. Whether the first composing for a piece is really the beginning of the work is something he often discusses with his student composers. He finds the piece is more concerned with "phrases that flow into each other by not being resolved and sometimes that non-resolution is achieved harmonically and sometimes... rhythmically and sometimes... a combination", than harmonic analysis.

For Greenbaum the title of a work is very important. Sometimes it is there from the beginning, sometimes, like *First Light*, it isn't. Composers "have a responsibility... to give a title... [which is] a successful way into the piece for the audience! The title, *First Light*, has two ideas. Firstly, the first two bars have "a sunny, welcome the new day aspect" to them; and secondly, metaphorically, "the dawn of new things". And dedicating the piece to his mother drew in influences from the repertoire she plays which are part of Greenbaum's own musical heritage, and therefore paying homage to her and being able "to have a piano and a xylophone and drums and recorders... strewn around the lounge room floor" at home.

As the pianist had not had access to a program or performance note, the title of the work introduced the ideas of "light and colours and brightness" which she tried to draw into her interpretation. She talked of colour and key in two ways: harmonic keys and key speed and touch. Higher registers in the piece allowed a different opportunity to play with colour and to approach the harmonic keys differently. So "rather than going straight into the key with the big romantic sound, trying to vary the key speed so that it becomes more distant or perhaps using the soft pedal ... to change the colour completely". She said that when you think colour, it doesn't have to be "pretty colour... [but] has everything to do with the touch and key speed, how quickly the key's depressed".

The program/performance note

The text in the front of the score is a program note and Greenbaum says he sometimes mixes up information for a program note and performance directions. However, on rereading the text for *First Light* he notes there are some aspects which could be "instructional for the performer to the extent of understanding that there are two different, overt traditions that this music draws from... and they have different performance practice associated with them". This leads to the issue of "how much instruction do you put in a score in performance notes to tell people what to do". Greenbaum feels that these days he gives more direction. He notes that with a composer such as Ross Edwards, when performers know a number of his pieces, "that tells them something before they played the next piece [of Edwards] regardless of the performance notes or not".

Greenbaum is happy for performers to use imagery and/or metaphor to understand and shape a work of his through performance as long as this is not in a program note for the audience. He uses metaphors when working with performers to help them grasp the feel of a work of his.

In relation to style, despite not being given any program notes, Lau recognized the romanticism in the work. Reading later that there were influences from nineteenth century classical composers of piano music, plus American pianist/composers, this confirmed her initial thinking but she got "the general idea just from the music itself".

Shaping and structure

The overall structure of the piece consists of very long phrases, building to mini-climaxes then moving on. Lau, the pianist, drew on, what Rink calls, her "informed intuition" (2002, p. 36), that is, recognition of "the importance of intuition in the interpretative process but also that considerable knowledge and experience generally lie behind it – in other words, that intuition need not come out of the blue, and need not be merely

capricious" (p. 36). She phrased the work "in a typically classical romantic way in that the middle of the phrase is the loudest point and then you taper off on either side... This doesn't happen every time... but as a general rule I played it like that unless it was marked differently". For her, this is "a performance tradition... something that's just known". When teaching *First Light*, she found it difficult to guide students "to have direction in their playing because it could... ramble on a bit if they don't really direct it and know where it's going... the build-up is very long so they need to be able to pace it out". She gave several examples where repetition plus dynamic changes require a build-up which isn't too sudden and tells students "to hold it back and to think *pp* for the whole bar rather than doing a crescendo". She found that the composer "writes in his phrasing because of those long notes that are tied over, the [n] taper off the ends of phrases" (ms. 31-34). While the piece is textually largely chordal with melody, the pianist spoke of "bring[ing] out the inner voice" (in ms. 38-41 – see Figure 1), with ms. 110-111 really being "the bass voice going up... and then it becomes a soprano" (see Figure 2).

Dynamics for Lau are about structure and colour in *First Light*. Talking of the last final crescendo (mms. 126-139) which builds through *pp*, *p*, *mp*,

mf, *f*, *ff*, to *fff* via repeated phrases plus a cadenza, she thought of this as "a structural and a colouristic thing". And in "the last two systems [mms. 140-147] where it fades away you can do lots of colour changes there because there's lots of repetition (see Figure 3). Pretty much every time he has "repeat this system three or four times" I could bring that idea into it... [making] it as colourful and perhaps star-like as possible and then [where it] says "fading away"... to make the sound quite distant". She finds students "build up too quickly and it's very hard for them to play a system of three bars, three times without ... going from *pp* to *f* straight away". In relation to teaching the structure of *First Light* to students, it takes some of them "quite a long time to get but it's okay, they do eventually get it and then it's very good".

The composer describes how *First Light* explores strong dynamic shifts, for example "in ms. 3 from *forte* to *ppp* and back to *forte* in the blink of an eye", for him, is an issue of touch which draws on jazz idioms. Hairpin crescendos are part of classical music, "shaping the ebb and flow of the music", and there are some dramatic gestures (e.g., ms 98 and ms. 133) which are also "arrival points", structural. Greenbaum points out "the idea of repeat chorus in pop music... [which] whirls and builds up and builds up" from *pp* through

Figure 1 shows measures 38-41 of the piano score for *First Light*. The right hand has a melodic line with a crescendo leading to a repeat sign. The left hand has a bass line with a crescendo leading to a repeat sign. Dynamics are marked *mp* and *p*.

Figure 1: mms. 38-41 *First Light* (1997) by Stuart Greenbaum. Reproduced with permission from Promethean Editions.

Figure 2 shows measures 110-113 of the piano score for *First Light*. The right hand has a melodic line with a crescendo leading to a repeat sign. The left hand has a bass line with a crescendo leading to a repeat sign. Dynamics are marked *p* and *mp*.

Figure 2: mms. 110-113 *First Light* (1997) by Stuart Greenbaum. Reproduced with permission from Promethean Editions.

each level to *fff* to arrive at ms. 134. Here “the logic of the music” is moved forward through the dynamics, interrupted soon after by an “almost off-stage effect” at ms. 140 through a drop to *ppp*, giving “the illusion of a spatial effect...as much as it is a dynamic effect”.

Pulse and rhythm

In *First Light*, there are many things that are assumed “beyond the written instructions”. Feld’s (1994) notion of interpretative moves, that is, the fact that we rarely confront sounds that are totally new, unusual and without experiential anchors, is often more difficult for pianists playing Greenbaum’s music as he finds they are less likely to have played in ensembles of any kind and therefore not followed a conductor or a click track or a beat. Therefore the composer speculates “it’s no wonder that there’s more rubato in solo piano music than in any other form”. In relation to the feel of *First Light*, Greenbaum notes that while he hasn’t written “play this piece with no *rubato*” in the score, that’s not necessarily how jazz is played. There are places “where *rubato* is less advisable than other parts” and because of performer background in relation to the influences, he doesn’t really want “to exactly delineate where...*rubato* could be taken and [where] not”. In some pieces he does mark in *rubato* where “people are likely to misinterpret a rhythmic [device]” but generally is “not sure that fully prescribing the extent of slow down” is useful. Greenbaum finds that “saxophone players generally interpret my music well...[and some] string players who can play my music really well”, but it depends on their backgrounds and “there are a lot of pianists whose frame of reference does not necessarily include pop or jazz or blues”. He finds commonalities of groove in jazz and in Beethoven’s scherzos and symphonies – “it’s dance music and there really isn’t much *rubato* at all. It rocks, it grooves”. Music at a slower tempo, however, opens up for both classical-influence and jazz-influenced players issues of rubato and how to approach it, which is not necessarily

the same. Having discussed the principle of rubato, Greenbaum finds there are some places where “it’s actually better to be straight ahead in tempo” – for example, from mm. 99 on a more “pop-influenced feel” takes over, “motoric in its rhythmic construction, as opposed to being linear and lyrical... [and] it certainly has to groove”; and there are some places where “more *rubato* might be possible” – ms. 62-70, for example, where a ‘Chopin-esque’ technique of modulating up a 4th by flattening the 7th degree” (Greenbaum, 2006, p. 2) is where “*rubato* can work through that section”. Greenbaum suggests playing the piece with a metronome in the initial stages then “enhance something from a standpoint of knowing the exact subdivision of the score”.

The pianist found the piece easy to sight-read. Each time she played it through she “tried to add more of what was in the score...”. From this she identified timing and rhythmic issues – ties, dotted rhythms – which took up much of her thinking in the early preparation. The rhythms in the work often adopt a syncopated feel. Lau had not really played real improvised jazz, but had played some “written out ‘jazz’ music”, and had an aural knowledge of jazz. Despite this understanding, despite having probably taught the piece “with swung quavers and without depending on how good the student was at the style...”, and “despite the contemporary style [she]...still worked hard in trying to get the rhythm very accurate”. She said she doesn’t think this style is “an excuse for it being sloppy with the rhythm”. The pianist’s interest in rhythmic accuracy was inherited from her teacher at the Eastman School of Music who taught her to play Debussy with “pretty strict” rhythm, rather than with some freedom, as she’d previously played. Through studying with this teacher, Lau came to understand “that Debussy was very specific in how he notated his rhythm”. She found that adopting this strict rhythmic approach then allowed some play with colours and dynamics and “the way that you approach the keys...”. Greenbaum “was specific in his notation of rhythm [she says]...in that he wanted a note or a chord a specific length of time...”. The piece has

long-held tied notes and chords and the pianist recognized the specificity of these and they were another reason why she didn't want to be too free with the rhythm.

Pedal

In relation to pedal directions, Greenbaum finds there is no right or wrong answer to it, although in his music, for example where two different or conflicting harmonic centres are combined, "somebody who didn't know my style would think – ooh a new chord therefore I must let the pedal up and go – but where I might want to hear the...chords...at the same time". He therefore uses pedal markings "to inform the pianist what sonorities or harmonies overlap and which don't".

In relation to sustain pedal markings, Greenbaum is very specific in the score and the pianist tries to do as the composer asks. Having said that, she adopted "half-pedal [at times to] try and help the piano sound decay with the pedal" plus flutter pedaling where the pedal is raised halfway, "just helping the sound die but keep[ing] your fingers still depressed", for example where one *fff* chord is held for one bar, the pedaling helping it decay. In a section of *First Light* where the pedal stays down for eighteen bars, the pianist drew on her previous playing of another Greenbaum piano work, *The Moon*, in which the composer has marked "clocklike" in a similar section of that score. This notion of the steady, even beat of a clock (ms. 70-88) encouraged her "to make it as accurate as possible" while flutter-pedaling the semiquaver phrases "because it would have been very muddy even though it's *pp*". For the pianist, this "was an interpretive thing". Despite not knowing if the composer "wanted it muddy at those places" she adopted flutter-pedaling "just to make the finger work clearer because it moves quite fast and it's a scale". She gives ms. 77 (clock-like section) as an example saying "it could get pretty congested". Soft pedal was used "for colour rather than soft playing" although in the coda it was used to help the sound fade away.

Body movement

For the composer, physical gestures which "arise as a result of interaction with the music" are good, but not those which arise "as a result of using the music to glorify any misguided maestro associations".

Body movement for the pianist is closely related to the piece's range and not to be "especially showy". For large chords "I would try and fall into the keys so as not to create a really harsh *ff* but a more rounded tone...[but] that's just part of how I approach the keyboard and the way I play so I didn't do that consciously". At the end of the piece, Lau teaches her students to "hold their hands suspended above the keys or on the keys but just to hold their position for the four beats and one quaver and the pause, rather than ...sitting back and letting the pedal do it". She feels this is important as "what people see reflects what they perceive as hearing". Generally, "movements are related to sound production" not for show "unless it was the very last note of the piece". Playing Ravel's *Alborado del gracioso* a while ago had made her think about body movement because "it's such a physically demanding piece". The Ravel required consideration of body movement, finger movement, energy conservation and stamina, the first two useful for playing *First Light* – "Not only getting from one spot to the other but conserving your energy and having stamina to get through to the end, trying not to have too big a movements in the repeated notes section so that you can get through it and then in the big sections to...have the sound big enough and projected enough which means you have to come onto the keys from a greater height so that sort of thing. I think that's also part of the way you play and perform". Movement for her is all directly related to sound production. While other pianists make eye, face, body movements for show, she doesn't think these necessarily help a performance.

As a teaching piece

For the pianist, teaching students to play *First Light* offers “rhythmic accuracy, control of dynamics, being able to structure a piece so that you build to a small climax and then to a very big climax and to be able to have the control to make it work. Being able to play melody and harmony, ...bring other harmonic notes as well... and then being able to go from playing chords for pretty much all of the piece to the semiquaver scale like passages”. The latter is something she finds students have to actually practice. The piece is also good for focusing on “colour and the use of the soft pedal for colour, teaching them how to vary the sound in terms of...a very harsh percussive *fortissimo* versus a rounded full projected *fortissimo*”.

Conclusions

Aspects of the work the composer would like a performer to know about include the role of the title (important communication with the audience), movement (only when moved by the music itself), insights into the compositional process and to some extent pedaling (needed for overlapping deliberately conflicting harmonies). However, he focused largely on two issues, cross-cultural stylistic influences and the role of *rubato*. Greenbaum used several synonyms in relation to cross-cultural influences – cross-pollination, collision, interaction, boundary crossing – and discussed at length, the shared knowledge between contemporary jazz American pianist-composers and the classical piano canon, and his own knowledge, as a classical composer, of both idioms. This interaction can draw rhythmic, groove, harmonic and dynamic gestures from popular music idioms in with Chopin-influenced modulation, bi-tonality and prescribed pedaling, resonating with Reich’s (1992) drawing on some, but not all, aspects of non-Western music in his compositions. Discussing *rubato*, Greenbaum had found lack of ensemble playing with a conductor

or click track keeping everyone to an even pulse, left solo piano music open to much *rubato*. He made useful parallels between Beethoven fast movements – groove, no *rubato* – and slower movements where *rubato* helps shaping. In *First Light*, there were sections where the music was motoric, pop-influenced, and sections where some *rubato* would be evocative. And *rubato*/groove were closely related to dynamic markings, which together structured the work and shaped performance.

The key issues for the pianist in learning *First Light* were concerned, firstly, with rhythmic accuracy. Aspects of style drew on her previous knowledge from playing repertoire of the Romantic and Impressionist composers, and a broad understanding of some jazz influences, engaging with Rink’s (2002) notion of “informed intuition”, despite not being given a program note. The pianist’s previous knowledge informed the way she approached playing large chords, rhythm and pulse, worked with key areas and caused consideration of touch and movement. However, adopting a jazz rhythmic swing was tempered and informed by the music of Debussy as taught by a previous piano teacher with whom she had studied. The title had no background meaning because of no access to a program note but instead activated imagery which informed consideration of colour, register, harmonic key, key speed and pedaling. This reflected flautist Cherrier’s (in Perlove, 1998) comment that performers make their own decisions if contact with the composer or such connections are not possible. Previous playing of another work by Greenbaum offered a way of handling long held chord sections. Dynamics and structural shaping of the work went hand in hand. Despite following the composer’s score instructions carefully, she introduced several pedaling variants to heighten shaping and colour and achieve the sound outcomes she felt were important to the piece. Here was Redgate’s (2007) thinking outside of the box in action. Body movement and finger

movement was not “showy”, but an integral part of playing the piece and choosing timbral colour. However, a carefully considered, but not showy, holding of body and hand position at the end linked the fading sound and vision together for a live audience, and this was taught to her students. Working with students on the piece had helped the performer develop a way of teaching the gradual build-up of dynamic and tension over a long period of time.

Composer and performer shared several ideas. Both were very interested in touch and shaping in the work through dynamics and tempo, a similar focus to composer Brynn Harrison (Clarke, Cook, Harrison & Thomas, 2005). Both made strong connections between the work and other works which influenced their composing and performing of *First Light*, a strategy employed by Viney and Blom (2014) when learning *Kumari*. They wove several musical elements of the work together, in discussion, to talk of shape and direction and both referred to the students who they teach but who, in doing so, make them rethink what they were doing. Neither liked showy body movement at the piano but valued movement which worked with sound production and communication of the piece.

This knowledge fits into the seven stages of learning a new work recognized in the literature, in particular the first four, due to the circumstances of the learning outcome (CD recording) and the questions asked in interview. An interpretation platform was built from recognizable stylistic aspects of *First Light*, and these relationships then informed how parts of the piece are played. All of the five elements suggested for building an interpretation platform were engaged with – knowing/playing other works of the composer (Element 1); sight-reading through the score (Element 2 and “Scouting it out”); engaging with the musical parameters (Element 3); and anchoring through association, and playing experience, with other music of Greenbaum, the music of Ravel, the Romantic composers, plus stylistic performance

practice approaches from teachers informing decisions (Element 4). No formal discussion was made with others during the learning, however in the recording session, the producer preferred the first take, despite others being made, and this touches on Element 5. Interviewing the composer (also Element 1) gave insights into compositional stylistic influences and tempo – rubato and groove/drive, issues which offer a pianist preparing *First Light*, interpretation possibilities for consideration and a deeper understanding of the work. The stages identified by Chaffin and Imreh (2002) were present. The piece was “scouted out” both before and/or while the interpretation platform was being formed. This was, in part, because the work, like Debussy's *Clair de Lune*, was not technically difficult to play, but also because the aural influences are easily recognized. “Section by section” was focused on the large structural shaping of the work, handling climaxes and mini-climaxes which ultimately come to a dynamic climax, followed by a coda which fades to nothing. This large structure mirrors the shape of many of the phrases which rise in dynamic intensity then fade at the end. The “gray stage” saw colour, register, dynamics, harmonic key, touch, body movement and pedaling options being suggested and considered as the interpretation was developed – a stage which isn't gray, in reality, but is about layering sound timbral colours. In “Putting it together”, decisions were finalized and consolidated. “Polishing” took place for the CD recording, an outcome which doesn't require the final stage, “Maintenance”. Both composer and performer talked of the piece in relation to their students which, in principal, adds a further possible stage to the preparation of a work from the feedback encountered through the teaching and discussion process.

The study findings inform a performer's preparation of the work through several further issues that emerged. Firstly, the responses of both pianist and composer moved seamlessly between the musical parameters, despite the

specificity of the questions, underlining the deep connections between all and suggesting an order of thinking in the learning process which isn't always linear but often circular. Rhythmic interpretation was informed by feel, rhythmic accuracy and tempo. The work's title, without the grounding of a program note, helped pianist thinking about colour, key speed, harmonic key, dynamics, phrasing and structure, all informing body movement. Secondly, teaching a work you have written or played (and being interviewed) encourages reflection on how you composed or learnt a piece, but also reflexivity as others (students) suggest different ways of thinking about the work. Thirdly, different methodologies reveal different types and levels of thinking in the learning of new works, whether easy or taking longer to learn. In *First Light*, interview and reflection, informed by practice-led questioning as opposed to observation, still reflected outcomes which can be understood within the seven stages of learning a new work recognized in the literature but also raised further outcomes of body movement and student interaction. Fourthly, the study highlighted the issue of score instructions, including notation itself, performance notes and the role of the program note, offering the performer the right amount of information (pedaling marks important for blending harmonies) but leaving room for personal interpretation (no performer metaphors/imagery in the program note). Here are reflected comments of composers in Blom, Bennett and Stevenson's (2016) program note study. Finally, whether new repertoire is from a familiar canon of works, is contemporary and unfamiliar, or contemporary but familiar, complex or less so, may alter the order and depth of the stages of learning, perhaps blur boundaries, and emphasise different musical parameters.

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Appendix A

Questions for the performer

1. *First Light* was performed in April this year in a concert described as intercultural, as part of a conference described as 'cross-cultural'. For you, what is the difference between cross-cultural and intercultural?
 2. And the use of these terms in relation to music?
 3. What do you feel is intercultural/cross-cultural about *First Light*?
 4. What do you know of the relationship between *First Light* to other works of Greenbaum written around the same time? Did this impact on your thinking?
 5. What do you feel is the relationship between the title, 'first light' and the piece?
 6. What impact, if any, did Greenbaum's dedication of the work to his mother have on your thinking about *First Light*?
 7. Tell me how you went about learning this piece?
 8. Steve Feld says of his notion, 'interpretative moves' – "we rarely confront sounds that are totally new, unusual, and without experiential anchors. Hence, each experience in listening necessarily connotes prior, contemporary, and future listenings". What musical connotation/'baggage' were you aware of deliberately bringing to the piece (at least at first) from other musics played and heard and using this to shape (at least initially) *First Light*?
 9. There is quite a fulsome and informative section at the front of the score on the composer, his composing and about *First Light*. What role do you feel this information played in your thinking as you prepared the work?
 10. What are your ideas for the shaping/structuring of the work? Mark the score if this will help your response.
 11. At the front of the score, Greenbaum has written: "recently I have been thinking more deeply about Chopin, Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn and others...the piece also contains other more contemporary voicings, influenced by composers such as the American pianists Lyle Mays, Keith Jarrett and Herbie Hancock". What are your ideas for the shaping/structuring, and other musical issues of the work, in performance, in relation to the music of these composers and composer/performers?
 12. Did you use imagery and/or metaphor to understand and shape aspects of the work through performance? If so, how did you use them?
 13. The piece explores fairly extreme dynamic shifts. Tell me about your ideas behind these changes.
 14. What are your views on the sense of pulse and the rhythmic figures throughout the work?
 15. Greenbaum is very specific in relation to the use, or no use, of sustain pedal in the work. As a performer, did you adhere to these directions precisely or is there some room for performer choice?
 16. What do you think of the use of soft pedal in the piece, as against soft playing?
 17. What were your thoughts about your body movement during the playing? – this can be in relation to dynamics or any other musical aspect.
 18. Please talk about any other aspect of your preparation of this piece for performance.
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Appendix B

Questions for the composer

1. The concert *First Light* was performed at in April this year was described as intercultural and the conference in which this paper will be presented uses the word 'cross-cultural'. For you, what is the difference between cross-cultural and intercultural?
2. And the use of these terms in relation to music?
3. What is intercultural/cross-cultural about *First Light*?
4. What is the relationship of *First Light* to works of yours written around the same time?
5. Talk a little about the choice of 'first light' as a title
6. What is the link between 'first light' and your mother to whom the piece is dedicated?
7. There is quite a fulsome and informative section at the front of the score on you, your composing and about *First Light*. What role do you think, and would you like, this information to play in the thinking of a performer preparing the work?
8. Steve Feld says of his notion, 'interpretative moves' – "we rarely confront sounds that are totally new, unusual, and without experiential anchors. Hence, each experience in listening necessarily connotes prior, contemporary, and future listenings". What do you think about a performer deliberately bringing to the piece (at least at first) 'baggage' from other musics played and heard and using this to shape (at least initially) *First Light*?
9. At the front of the score, you have written: "recently I have been thinking more deeply about Chopin, Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn and others...the piece also contains other more contemporary voicings, influenced by composers such as the American pianists Lyle Mays, Keith Jarrett and Herbie Hancock". What are your ideas for the shaping/structuring of the work, in performance, in relation to the music of these composers and composer/performers?
10. How do you feel about a performer using imagery and/or metaphor to understand and shape the work through performance?
11. Do you have any suggestions regarding such imagery/metaphor?
12. The piece explores fairly extreme dynamic shifts. Discuss your ideas behind these changes.
13. What are your views on the sense of pulse throughout the work?
14. You have been very specific in relation to the use, or no use, of sustain pedal in the work. Must the performer adhere to these directions precisely or is there some room for performer choice?
15. What do you think of the use of soft pedal in the piece, as against soft playing?
16. Do you have any thoughts about the performer's body movement during the playing – this can be in relation to dynamics or any other musical aspect?

Diana Blom, a composer and pianist, has published on higher education music performance, the artist as academic, student popular songwriters and preparing new music for performance. She has co-curated several composition/performance/CD projects including: *Shadows and Silhouettes – new music for solo piano with a Western-Chinese confluence*; *Antarctica – new music for piano and/or toy piano*; and *Multiple Keyboards – new music for pianos, toy pianos*. Scores and CDs are published by Wirripang Pty. Ltd., Orpheus Music and Wai-te-Ata Press. Music Composition Toolbox (Science Press), a co-authored composition textbook, is published by Science Press. Diana is Associate Professor of Music at Western Sydney University.