

PHYLLIS CHEN, toy piano / piano

New Music / New Places Fellow

The Looking Glass ReWondered

Chess Pieces for piano and toy piano by John Cage (9')

The Memoirist by Phyllis Chen/Rob Dietz (18')

The Tale for toy piano, music box, frying pan

The Memoirist for toy piano, video and sampling keyboard

The Dream for toy piano, bowls and video

Nothing Is Real for piano, teapot and miniature sound system by Alvin Lucier (9')

Down The Rabbit-Hole for toy piano, music box, magnifying glass and gadgets by Phyllis Chen/Rob Dietz (15')

Carousel for toy piano and hand-cranked music box by Phyllis Chen/Rob Dietz (3')

Looking Glass ReWondered is a multimedia program of works for piano, toy pianos, music boxes, electronics, live and edited video, and amplified objects. Inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, this program is not a re-telling of a beloved fairy tale, but a new perspective using objects and themes from the novels. The peculiar objects and sets themselves are so rich in symbolism, that I believe another narrative can be told—even without text—through sound and visuals. *Alice In Wonderland* is well known as a “nonsense” story, filled with logic-bending ideas that turn the book into an unpredictable playground of storytelling. As a toy pianist for over ten years, I have found the world of the toy piano a bit like falling down the rabbit-hole, tumbling into an “unknown” field, that it seems like the perfect point of departure.

This program is born from a love of sound and visual experimentation. Aside from pianos and music boxes, there are many elements taken from the novels that are used sonically and visually such as the ticking of a pocket watch, the cracking of an egg, the shuffling of a deck of cards, or the clattering of a tea set. With the use of mics/amplification and a magnifying glass/live video camera, commonplace objects are brought to life and the audience is invited into this strange world.

For my original works, the visuals and performance sensibility is inspired by my love for Toy Theater. In *The Memoirist*, the miniature set design and puppetry is constructed from cardboard, felt, and found objects. All of the additional sounds in the electronics are made entirely of recorded kitchen utensil sounds such as tea balls, forks and bowls to create a tinkling percussive part that goes along with the toy piano. In *Down The Rabbi-hole*, the toy piano becomes a micro-stage for the miniature prop objects to perform. The toy piano has its own lights and microphones mounted inside the instrument that enhance the feeling of a miniature stage. As the toy pianist, I am the musical performer as well as the puppeteer of these events.

PHYLLIS CHEN: *The Looking Glass ReWondered*

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The concert begins with a recently discovered work by John Cage, *Chess Pieces*. Cage never specified the instrumentation, but most scholars have guessed that it was intended for piano or prepared piano. My interpretation of this work will be an arrangement for piano and toy piano.

In between, I will perform another work for piano by American Alvin Lucier, *Nothing Is Real*. Lucier scores a nostalgic piece that is the simple melody of a Beatles' song, *Strawberry Fields Forever*. The piece demands a miniature sound system that exists inside of a teapot. The melody is first played on the piano and recorded, then played back through the tiny speakers inside the teapot. With careful notation, Lucier directs the performer on the movement of the teapot lid during the playback to create different overtones from the melody. This beautiful piece confirms the unique beauty that comes from small common objects.

This program is multimedia in its integration of a number of different components and musical styles. I believe that the open-minded nature of California's arts and music world would be a great audience for this program. With the idiosyncratic visual and musical language in this program, we hope that *The Looking Glass ReWondered* is a playful multimedia experience that crosses between what we see in real life and our imaginations... just like when we were kids.

Though all of these works are for solo performer, I will be traveling with the video artist, sound designer and my partner, Rob Dietz. As artists, our backgrounds and points of view are vastly different, but we share a curiosity towards new sound and visual experimentation to make live art. Our collaboration is most prominent in the conceptual development stage, where many of our diverse ideas are integrated into a singular voice. Together, we have created, *The Memoirist*, *Down The Rabbit Hole* and *Carousel*.

I will be touring with two of my own toy pianos as well as proper mics for the instruments. These are the requirements we would need from the venue:

- Piano
- PA system
- Video projector with S-video cable input
- Projection screen or white wall