



## Klavier Nonette

An installation by Trimpin of coin-operated, electromagnetically played toy pianos.

Jack Straw New Media Gallery January 16 - April 27, 2003

## Featuring compositions by

|                                    |                  |
|------------------------------------|------------------|
| Bret Battey                        | Allan Loucks     |
| Rick Bidlack                       | Penny Lovestedt  |
| Bill Birney                        | David Mahler     |
| James Bohn                         | Keeril Makan     |
| John Cage                          | Bill Moyer       |
| Quinn Collins                      | Shaun Naidoo     |
| Beth Custer                        | Conlon Nancarrow |
| Amy Denio                          | Jonathan Norton  |
| Christi Denton                     | Doug Palmer      |
| Ellen Fullman                      | Daniel Rothman   |
| Rick Garcia                        | Alan Shockley    |
| Janice Giteck &<br>Marcus Macauley | David Snow       |
| Kevin Goldsmith                    | Ron Sonntag      |
| Jay Hamilton                       | Allen Strange    |
| Chuck Holdeman                     | Tom Swafford     |
| Josh Humphrey                      | Mark D Taylor    |
| Celeste Hutchins                   | Diane Thome      |
| Miriam Kolar                       | Mark Trayle      |
| George Lewis                       | Alba Triana      |
| Liberace                           | Trimpin          |
|                                    | Rickard Zvonar   |

# NORTHWEST LIFE

The Seattle Times



MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2003 | E

## (Toy) piano man

*Seattle artist Trimpin's latest musical creation makes a big sound from a lot of tiny keys*

BY YOUNG CHANG  
*Seattle Times staff reporter*

Trimpin harmonizes with his coffee mill every morning — he hums along with the grating, also screeching of the grinding beans.

He hums a third or a fifth above the whir of his vacuum cleaner, too.

The sound sculptor says this helps dilute the “sound pollution” caused by most household appliances. And finding melodies in the most unmelodic situations is a habit he’s had his entire life.

As a child, Trimpin remembers watching bonfires in Germany every winter but hearing en-

tire symphonies and choruses when he looked into the flames. He would ask his friends if they were hearing the music, too. They would look at him funny and say “no.” Now, the 51-year-old musical inventor knows that his imagination had something to do with the melodious fires. But he’s still convinced the wood wasn’t just crackling. It was wet and it was whistling.

“I was always, even as a kid, trying to visualize sound,” said the Seattle-based Trimpin, who goes by the one name. “Hearing and seeing was always synchronized in some way. But there



GREG GILBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

**Seattle artist Trimpin's latest installation is a room full of nine toy pianos, which play original compositions all at the same time. The exhibit at Jack Straw Productions' New Media Gallery in Seattle runs through April 27.**

wasn't enough to explore, so I had to build an environment.”

His latest environment is an installation of nine toy pianos, each perched on colorful platforms of different heights. They're programmed into a computer to play automatically any one of 41 original compositions at the drop of a quarter in a make-shift jukebox nearby. You turn the dial to the number you want —

PLEASE SEE **Piano** ON E 3

## VISUAL ART

## Happily Disrupted

Trimpin Is Smarter Than You by Emily Hall

LET'S START WITH a rusty generalization: Old systems that have worked more or less well over a long period of time eventually become invisible, though no less functional. For example, you don't think about balancing your checkbook in base-10 mathematics, you just do it. This system's appropriateness goes right down to the biological level—10 fingers, 10 toes—and it rarely occurs to anyone that there are other systems of math out there, let alone one that might be more efficient.

And you know that calling

old systems into question results in all kinds of unbalance—from light seasickness to full-scale agony. If you don't believe me, may I respectfully point you in the direction of the metric system?

I bring this up because I suspect that in Trimpin's work a lot of everyday tools and assumptions are being knocked sideways. I don't have any idea what those things might be, but there's always something that tells me some foundation is being shaken. It registers as a low distant rumbling, an atmospheric buzz, a tingling in the extremities, but it's nothing I can identify, partly because I don't possess the language to do so.

Trimpin's new installation at Jack Straw, *Klavier Nonette*, is sweet, really, but never so sweet as to deceive you into thinking it's

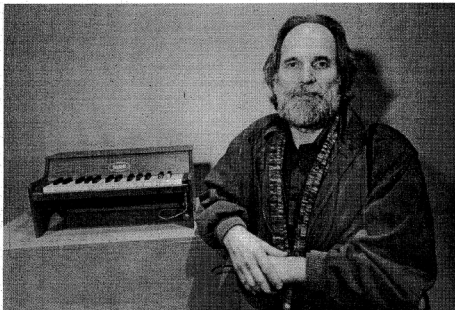
less than it is. It consists of nine toy pianos placed around the room, which are activated when someone puts a quarter into a console and chooses a piece of music. The pianos then play one of about 40 songs, from Libera's "Alley Cat" to John Cage's 1948 "Suite for Toy Piano" to a number of pieces commissioned specially for the project.

**Klavier Nonette**

Jack Straw Productions, 4261  
Roosevelt Way NE, 634-0919.  
Through April 27.

Thanks to electromechanical hookups I can only guess at and musical logic I can't even imagine, the notes are divided among the pianos so that the result is fragmented, jumpy, but the result is undeniably whole. You haven't lived until you've heard the notes of "Alley Cat" jump psychotically from one tiny piano to the next, as if these little instruments were ready to leap off their pedestals and join the conga line.

Like other works by Trimpin, the result is sound that is sculptural, dimensional, enclosing, and unexpected—more accumulative than linear, a far cry from the muzzy mush you often get when people show sound sculpture. It's also faintly creepy, in a lost-in-the-funhouse way. You can stand by a piano for a good 30 seconds in which nothing happens, and then suddenly it's pounding arpeggios, chords, or just a single note. Part of this, of course, is an effect of scale—not musical, but proportional—



ALICE WHITTIER

TRIMPIN IN CONCERT *Sweet, smart, baffling.*

that is, of tiny little children's pianos performing important work, and sometimes with a good deal of violent energy, both amusing and unsettling.

Of course, your experience in the three-dimensional world of sound is only the tip of a great looming intellect. Trimpin's explanation is that "the timbre and sound of toy pianos... resembles somewhat the intonations of non-Western systems and our ears respond to the more natural harmonic spectrum in comparison [with] the precise tuning of our system of music. To achieve certain acoustical layers, it is necessary to use multiple instruments (with the same octave range) strategically placed around the room." What this meant to me was a general upsetting of things that normally go together: Chords are divided between instruments; the distinction between

left-hand and right-hand parts becomes arbitrary, or if not arbitrary, then thoroughly rethought.

And more than that, I can't say. Like Trimpin's other work, this one has an effect on me of exquisite bafflement—that is, I'm baffled and happy about it. The philosophies present in his work (the remoteness of the musician from the instrument, the dedication to acoustic instruments, with the very visible exception of his electric guitar sculpture at EMP) are the artist's variables to play with, and what's left for us is mostly pleasure, with perhaps the residue of shock that the musician can be so present and absent at the same time. This is something we're pretty much used to, since most of our music comes to us in recorded form, but like any good revolutionary system, Trimpin's work throws us back on first things. ■

# TRUMPIN KLAVIER NONETTE

## COMMENTS?

Gretchen ~~Dele~~ Armstrong

wacky - fun!  
30%  
The fullman's piece quite beautiful  
wonder if Trumpin likes the 50¢  
allpage in front of the Oldie Wriosity Shoppe as much as I do

Josua Noble - Magnificently  
wry, joyously off-filter.

"Jaymar" dream world come true! How  
can I try this at home? ~~at~~ Daddy Tree tops

Eerie. -Dawn DeLapp  
Enjoyable.

Lisa Cooperider - Thank you. This is wonderful. Brilliant!  
This is amazing! Bravo!!!

You're the Greatest Guy in the  
World!

... Not enough quarters  
in the world...

Pure joy! Little pianos  
are so hamma!

re: RAMOS sound environment reminds of  
why live music geared to simulate a  
home stereo is inadequate - how - but some  
Monk or some BRAVISE Xylophone music  
for toy piano substitution.

- S Philpin -  
NASAL RETENTIVE CALLIGRAPHIC MUSIC

Beautiful, strange, psychotic, like tumbling down  
a hill made from xylophones, at times in control  
and at others, complete, gorgeous cacophony.  
Armitage Shanks

LIKE JOHN WAYNE GACY'S CLOWN. #  
SOOOCUTE!!!!!! <sup>trickles</sup>

So much in such little space/time.  
Thanks  
NAT

Wild @ Craazzzzeee!

prepared clouds!

Is This <sup>same</sup> then Allan Strange that wrote the  
book on electronic music?




KLAVIER NONETTE ~ COMMENTS

Enchanting? The Age

PAUL W. HENDERSON 3-13-03 VERY SPECIAL!

My two-yr-old loved it, thank you! im elvan alburtz

My smile is still bursting.  
Her 2 yr old loved it, feel  
2 again. ALYSSA BERG   
back again, I'm in love. alyssa

Fabuloso! Thank you!

😊 Becky Bird 3/27/03

△

Vampire movie - dream sequence -  
cirrus music, would be a  
fun place to test a blind  
date - too bad it's (the exhibit's)  
only open during regular  
business hours...

Audibly awesome!  
Cara B. Hochhalter  
Charlottesville, VA


We need these sounds in  
today's world! Thanks! -  
Arl Haas 3/31/03

Jamie's got my ball. have him  
return it, please.

That's cool

Jammin (Creative Performer)  
Art Teacher  
at Brighton Elementary  
come see us 3/4/03

Denise Takahashi & Eric Edgerton  
3 yr old Quintaro  
28 → 40 → 16 → 8 → 26 → 36  
I had to remember to breathe!

af ostra - it's amazing how all the  
mini pianos play at once to  
create harmony and excitement  
all I have to say is WOW!   
111 201 ando

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# TOY PIANO INSTALLATION PREMIERES 24 NEW WORKS

BY AMANDA  
MACBLANE  
ON JANUARY 16,  
2003



Drawing courtesy Jack Straw Productions

Pack a roll of quarters and head to [Seattle's New Media Gallery](#) to experience Seattle-based composer [Trimpin's Klavier Nonette](#), an exhibit that allows viewers to insert a quarter and choose from 41 compositions for 9 toy pianos that are controlled by a jukebox-like console. The exhibit opens with a free public reception from 7:00 – 9:00 PM on Thursday, January 16, 2003 and will feature 24 world premiere pieces by composers ranging in age from 19 to 70.

The installation was originally presented by Trimpin at the [Orange County Museum of Art](#) in 2001 and is comprised of 9 toy pianos made by [Schoenhut](#) and [Jaymar](#) during the 1950s and 1960s, each connected to an electromechanical device that allows them to play automatically like a [player piano](#). Trimpin then runs the pianos through a computer that stores the musical data. After inserting a quarter into the device, audience members will be able to choose from 41 works composed specifically for this configuration. The computer then triggers the pianos to play the selected piece. Each piece lasts about 2 minutes and participating composers will be rewarded from the proceeds according to the frequency that their works are selected.

Trimpin, a sound sculptor, composer, and inventor who is well known for his computerized realizations of [Conlon Nancarrow's piano roll works](#), was inspired by the toy piano's ability to challenge [Western notions of intonation](#). What really informs this particular project, as well as much of his work, is the sonic potential of multiple instruments situated in space. Describing the project he explains, "To achieve certain acoustical layers [with toy pianos], it is necessary to use multiple instruments, (with the same octave range), strategically placed around the room. When the instruments are played simultaneously or sequentially, acoustical patterns, fragments, and other phenomena are perceived depending on where they are standing." Born in Germany, Trimpin is now based in Seattle. The creation of numerous large-scale, computer-driven instruments form the bulk of his recent work.

When Joan Rabinowitz, the executive director of [Jack Straw Productions](#) heard about the installation in California, she became excited about the possibility of re-creating the project in her 400-square foot New Media Gallery. “It really started from me wanting to bring Trimpin in [to the gallery] and then hearing about what he was doing with toy pianos. He does a lot of mechanized things and so much with sound so he is both visual and aural and seemed perfect for our little gallery. And the pianos just seemed like such a natural because it also allowed us to bring the community in by commissioning composers to write short, 2-minute pieces for the pianos.” Jack Straw Productions teamed up with the [Washington Composers Forum](#) to make Rabinowitz’s idea a reality.

The community certainly responded with enthusiasm and shortly after the call for scores was posted in November 2002, they had received dozens of entries. “In a very short time, we got about 45 responses.” Rabinowitz remembers. “Twenty of them were from around [Washington State](#) and another 20 were from around the country and then there were a few from Australia and France and England. We were just thrilled!” A workshop at the gallery with Trimpin and the pianos was held in mid-December to help the composers conceptualize their works and in the end, 24 new works were selected to be a part of the exhibit. Rabinowitz is delighted that the varied participants include everyone from established professional composers to “a grandmother who wanted to write a piece for her granddaughter.” In addition, 16 pieces from the previous incarnation in California (including works by [John Cage](#) and [Liberace](#)) will also be available. A complete list of works is included below.

Jack Straw Productions is a non-profit, multidisciplinary audio arts center based in Seattle that has been providing support and opportunities to area musicians and artists since 1962. Almost all of their programs, which include residencies, education, and radio production, include an outreach element, and both Rabinowitz and Trimpin are excited about the possibility of getting young people involved. She believes that the interactive nature of this exhibit paired with the fun factor of toy pianos is naturally appealing to kids. “What can beat putting the quarter

in and watching the pianos play? It just shows you about orchestration and groupings. Plus they're short!" Eventually they hope to incorporate compositions by children and teenagers as the next step in the project.

"It's just been about figuring out ways to pull people in," Rabinowitz says. "There's got to be a way in for everybody and just paying for a ticket and going to a concert is only going to appeal to the people who already are doing that." But for those who are into concerts, Jack Straw Productions in concordance with the Washington Composers Forum will present a night of Trimpin's work as part of their monthly Composer Spotlight series on February 12, 2003.

The exhibit will run through April 27, 2003 and is free and open to the public (except for the quarters of course.)

### **Complete List of Works for *Klavier Nonette***

1. [Bret Battey](#) – *Quilcene Terpsichore*\*
2. [Rick Bidlack](#) – *Oh No Nonette*\*
3. [Bill Birney](#) – *Americus*\*
4. [James Bohn](#) – *wringer*\*
5. [John Cage](#) – *Suite for Toy Piano (Movements 3 & 4)*
6. [Quinn Collins](#) – *Maul of America*\*
7. [Beth Custer](#) – *TP Nonette #1*
8. [Amy Denio](#) – *La Tessatura delle Nonette*\*
9. [Christi Denton](#) – *Waltz*\*
10. [Ellen Fullman](#) – *Untitled*\*
11. [Rick Garcia](#) – *Piano Spar*
12. [Janice Giteck & Marcus Macauley](#) – *Bachanalìa*
13. [Kevin Goldsmith](#) – *Repitoy*\*
14. [Jay Hamilton](#) – *Mynamar Shave*\*
15. [Chuck Holdeman](#) – *Toy Ploy*
16. [Josh Humphrey](#) – *Omelette*\*
17. [Celeste Hutchins](#) – *No No Nonette*\*
18. [Miriam Kolar](#) – *49*
19. [George Lewis](#) – *Sudden Spaces, Breaking Stride*
20. [Liberace](#) – *Alley Cat*
21. [Allan Loucks](#) – *Fugue in G-Minor*\*
22. [Penny Lovestedt](#) – *Song for Kiera*\*
23. [David Mahler](#) – *For My Daughter, Who Loves to Travel*
24. [Keeril Makan](#) – *Toy Solace*\*
25. [Bill Moyer](#) – *3x4x5x12-9 for Sir Trimpin's Toy Pianos*\*
26. [Shaun Naidoo](#) – *Evil Mbira Music*
27. [Conlon Nancarrow](#) – *Unknown Study*
28. [Jonathan Norton](#) – *Kitty Waltz*\*
29. [Doug Palmer](#) – *Slow Motion, Slow Motion Number Point One*\*

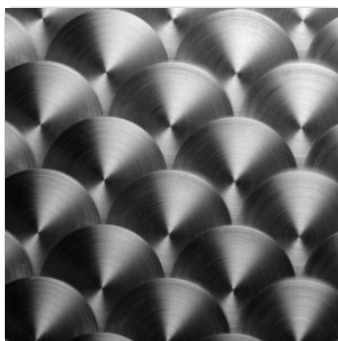
- 30. [Daniel Rothman](#) - *hors de Paris, hors de Paris!*
- 31. [Alan Shockley](#) - *Little White House (Underpass to the Foundation)\**
- 32. [David Snow](#) - *Orbits of the Henon Map\**
- 33. [Ron Sonntag](#) - *Odd Ball\**
- 34. [Allen Strange](#) - *Jackhammer\**
- 35. [Tom Swafford](#) - *DC Agitators\**
- 36. Mark D. Taylor - *Jaymar's Joyride\**
- 37. [Diane Thome](#) - *Fragrance of Orchids*
- 38. [Mark Trayle](#) - *Ramp and Crunch*
- 39. Alba Triana - *Noneto*
- 40. Trimpin - *WORXOK*
- 41. [Richard Zvonar](#) - *K-9 Etude*

\* indicates that the composer was selected through the call-for-scores issued by Trimpin, Jack Straw Productions, and the Washington Composers Forum.

## YOU MIGHT ALSO ENJOY



**THE FORGOTTEN MAN: TEO MACERO AND BITCHES BREW**  
BY GEORGE GRELLA JR



**MANIFESTING COMMUNITY IN EARLY MINIMALISM**  
BY PATRICK NICKLESON



**THE "I" IN DEDICATION**  
BY EMILY GREEN

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## ONE THOUGHT ON “TOY PIANO INSTALLATION PREMIERES 24 NEW WORKS” ▼

Comments are closed.

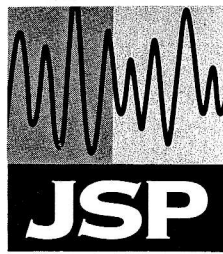
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Jack Straw Productions

Hello Composers!

Enclosed is a CD of *Klavier Nonette*, your check for the amount of quarters spent on your composition, and copies of press related to Jack Straw New Media Gallery's installation of *Klavier Nonette*. I have also enclosed several pages from our guest book so you have a sample of some of the comments we received about the exhibit.

As you may be aware, *Klavier Nonette* was the most highly attended exhibition we have hosted at the Jack Straw New Media Gallery. There was a consistent flow of visitors interested in exploring the space and its sounds throughout the four months it was installed. We had many visitors who came several times – bringing different friends along with them each time.

I can't say that I miss hearing Liberace's *Alley Cat*, but I do miss the energy and enthusiasm our visitors expressed. It is always fulfilling to be associated with such a beloved and critically acclaimed exhibition.

Thank you again for participating in our call for scores and *Klavier Nonette*. We hope you will keep in touch. We wish you the best of luck in all your future artistic endeavors.

Warm regards,

  
Heather Dwyer  
Arts Manager

4261 Roosevelt Way Northeast  
Seattle, Washington 98105-6999  
Phone (206) 634-0919 Fax (206) 634-0925

The non-profit audio production and training center of the Jack Straw Foundation

January 16, 2003 **THE STRANGER** 27**THURS JANUARY 16**

## Klavier Nonette

**(SOUND ART)** My musical education was limited to impromptu mixing on my **Fisher Price record player** and the atonal toy piano in my cousin's basement. Perhaps it's this nostalgia, or maybe it's the hot-knife-through-butter timbre, but I melt at the immaculate tone of those clanky little boxes. Apparently I'm not alone in my affections: **Jack Straw** is presenting *Klavier Nonette*, an installation of nine antique toy pianos souped up with electromechanics and programmed with compositions commissioned specifically for the exhibition. Bring a quarter for their jukebox-coaxed mechanisms, and immerse yourself in clang. (*Jack Straw Productions, 4261 Roosevelt Way NE, 634-0919, 25¢. Opening reception Thurs Jan 16, 7-9 pm. Through Feb 28.*) **ZAC PENNINGTON**

**PICK** **JACK STRAW NEW MEDIA GALLERY** "Klavier Nonette" is a gift to the world if ever there was one. The creation of Seattle-based composer Trimpin, it's an interactive installation of nine vintage toy pianos wired to a computer that, for a quarter, will play music of your choice by John Cage, Liberace, or any of a number of composers who submitted work specifically for the installation. **4261 Roosevelt Way N.E., 206-634-0919. 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Mon.-Fri.**

North Seattle  
**HERALD-OUTLOOK** **7**  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2003

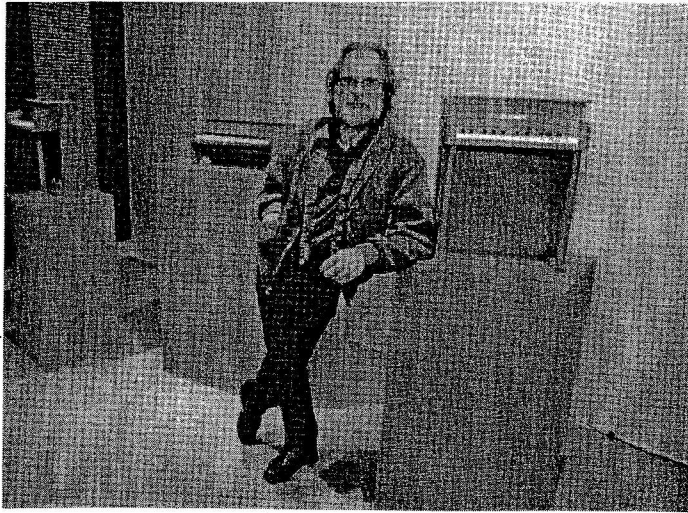
### EXHIBITS

**Monotype paintings** by Tracy Hennessy, through Wednesday, Jan. 15. Wallingford neighborhood office, 2100A N. 45th St. 632-3165.

**Klavier Nonette**, an installation of toy pianos, featuring a Trimpin composition, on Thursday, Jan. 16-Feb. 28. Reception, Thursday, Jan. 16, 7-9 p.m. Jack Straw Productions, 4261 Roosevelt Way N.E. 634-0919.

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER JANUARY 17, 2003 | **PAGE 15**

**JACK STRAW NEW MEDIA GALLERY:** 4261 Roosevelt Way N.E. "New Compositions for Klavier Nonette," an installation of toy pianos by Trimpin with new works by composers. Through Feb. 28. Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. or by appointment. 206-634-0919.



Trimpin stands among the toy pianos in his installation "Klavier Nonette"  
photo by Dean Wong

**Bring Your Quarters!**

Trimpin's "Klavier Nonette" at Jack Straw Productions

As you walk into the Media Gallery at Jack Straw Productions you encounter something out of the ordinary. Before you stands a group of tiny toy pianos scattered throughout the room. Immediately in front of you a music stand with a small electronic console attached to it beckons you to dial

in a musical selection. Drop your quarter and what happens next is pure Trimpin. Little pianos awaken, bristle into action, and begin to plunk out in contrapuntal fashion herky jerky conversations. As the composition you have selected develops you are compelled to move around and try and discern the distinct voice of the piano nearest you. All attempts to follow the piece around the room are foiled as you realize the composition is dropping throughout the room in seeming arbitrary and chaotic ways. As the piece ends and the room falls silent again, the toy pianos return to their faceless sleep and you are left wondering if they had actually been playing.

Welcome to the world of Trimpin. While this installation, "Klavier Nonette," is small in scale compared to the majority of works by Trimpin, it has all the key ingredients which make Trimpin's creations so compelling: animating or activation of objects via a computerized control, the use of sound in unique,

space activating ways, and asking the audience to move among or around a moving sounding installation. Trimpin concocts his aural and sonic brew and after drinking it all in we are transported somewhere else. This is the essential pleasure of experiencing a Trimpin work, this ability of his to guide us into a liminal world between sound and space where for moments normal reality is suspended and we've entered a private and magical place.

Born in Germany, Trimpin is an artist, composer, and inventor who has called Seattle his creative home for over twenty years. His work by his own description is an ongoing investigation of the concepts of vision, sound, and movement. Often combining computer technology, with the animation of acoustic objects or instruments, Trimpin creates sonic and aural experiences which mine territory where the space-time concept can be experienced through a fusion of sonic kinetic awareness.

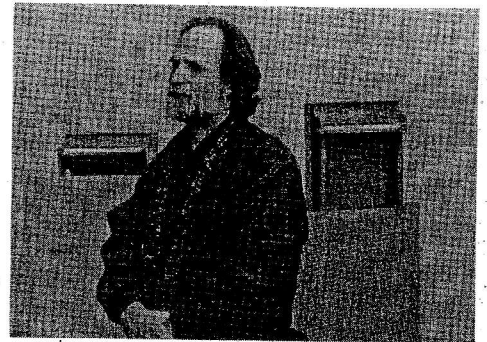
"Klavier Nonette" was originally presented by Trimpin at the Orange County Museum of Art in 2001. Comprised of nine toy pianos made by Schoenhut and Jaymar during the 1950s and 1960s "Klavier Nonette" is comprised of 41 compositions which can be played via a Trimpin computerized console. Selections range from Liberace's "Alley Cat" to an avant garde composition "Unknown Study" by Conlon Nancarrow. Trimpin became interested in the toy piano's ability to challenge our Westernized notions of intonation. Using the particular sonority of the pianos, Trimpin explores our perceptions of sound and space by creating multiple acoustical layers played among the nine pianos. Joan Rabinowitz, the executive director of Jack Straw Productions heard about the installation of Trimpin's in California and invited Trimpin to recreate the work for the Media Gallery. Jack Straw Productions teamed up with the Washington

Composer's Forum to make Trimpin's installation here in Seattle a reality. After the call was posted for new compositions for the pianos twenty responses came from Washington state and another twenty were from around the country with a few from far flung locals such as Australia, France, and England. Rabinowitz was delighted with the results which included everyone from established composers to "a grandmother who wanted to write a piece for her granddaughter."

Pack some quarters and you will be delighted by this unique installation.

**Michelle Burgess**

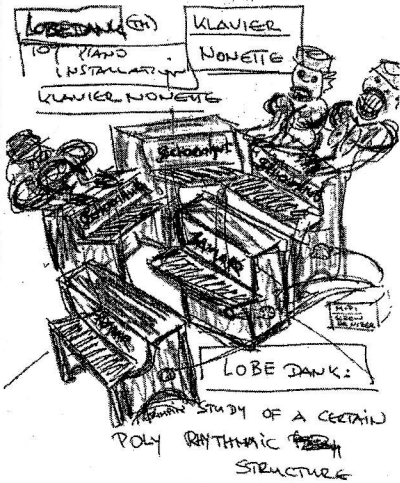
*Michelle Burgess is an artist, musician, and the Director of Winston Wächter Fine Art in Seattle.*



Trimpin—artist, composer, inventor  
photo by Dean Wong

*Jack Straw Productions is a non-profit, multidisciplinary audio arts center based in Seattle. It has been providing support and opportunities to local musicians and artists since 1962. Trimpin's installation is on exhibit through April 27, 2003 and is free and open to the public. For more information on Trimpin, "Klavier Nonette," or Jack Straw Productions go to [www.jackstraw.org](http://www.jackstraw.org).*

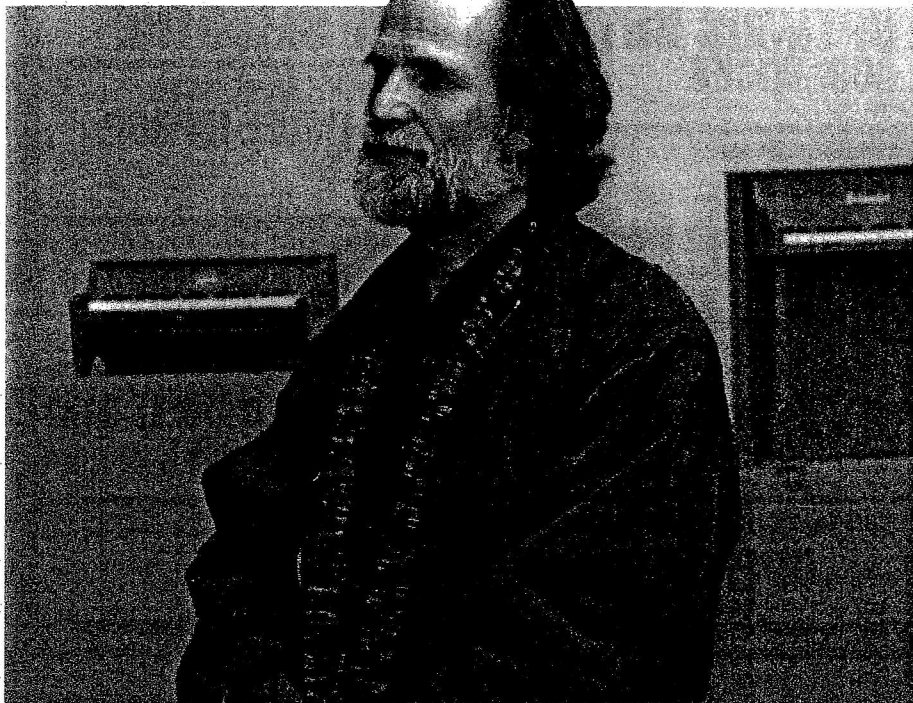
*Jack Straw Productions, located at 4261 Roosevelt Way NE in the University District of Seattle, is open Monday through Friday 9 A.M. - 6 P.M.*



"Klavier Nonette" sketch by Trimpin

## MUSIC

## the score



DEAN WONG

## CLASSICAL, JAZZ, &amp; AVANT KLAVIER NONETTE

Several years ago, if you found your (or your group's) album in the used-CD bin, it was a sign that you were at least somebody. Today, one might argue that getting your CD ripped and uploaded is a similar milestone, except that almost every CD in existence is now floating around somewhere as an MP3.

Decades ago, music writers like Theodor Adorno and Roger Sessions bemoaned the omnipresence of music on LP and radio. They worried that musical performance, formerly an ephemeral act, would become everyday aural wallpaper, a soundtrack to accompany our lives. Given the fact that crap-pop music sells better than everything else, it's not too hard to argue that the ubiquity of recordings makes it more likely that people won't explore the unusual or bother to listen—not just hear, but *listen* with no interruptions or distraction—at all.

Whether or not this is true, Seattle sound artist Trimpin has cleverly beat this game by refusing to record his works and creating difficult-to-

duplicate installations that invite the eye's and ear's attention to the moment. *Klavier Nonette* is a coin-operated vending machine of 41 compositions by 41 composers played by nine mechanically driven toy pianos in the round. Each composer was able to specify when each piano would play, creating a clangorous toy-piano ensemble that often sounds like an Indonesian gamelan miniaturized by a Martian shrinking ray. The composers—including John Cage, Amy Denio, Kevin Goldsmith, George Lewis, Liberace, Conlon Nancarrow, and Trimpin himself—have created pieces that are by turns bluesy, bumptious, solemn, moving, and just plain fun. CHRISTOPHER DeLAURENTI

*Klavier Nonette* exhibits through April 25, Monday-Friday, 9 am to 6 pm (Jack Straw Productions, 4261 Roosevelt Way NE, 634-0919), free (but bring quarters to play the pieces).

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# The pianos aren't all in tune, but it doesn't matter

## PIANO

CONTINUED FROM E 1

No. 40 is Trimpin's composition "WORXOK" — push "start" and watch the pianos play themselves.

The installation, titled "Klavier Nonette," is on exhibit at Jack Straw Productions' New Media Gallery through April 27. When visiting the show, it's best to stand in the middle of the room to hear all nine instruments equally — 216 keys total.

"Constantly the sound moves with the space," Trimpin said. "The whole idea is to add another dimension. This whole project is exploring what you can do with sound and space. Our listening is based on our ears — left and right — but our brains perceive from all directions. Top, bottom, everywhere."

### *Eerily discordant*

The purely acoustic sound is eerily discordant and stark at times. The pianos aren't in tune with each other — and sometimes not in tune at all. But they can't be adjusted and Trimpin isn't concerned with perfect harmonies anyway. He just wants visitors to listen and notice the many directions of sounds.

"When you listen, you come up with your own interpretation of the physics," he said. "It's completely up to the audience to explore in their mind what they perceive."

More than 40 composers sent in original scores to Trimpin during a call-for-composers held for the installation last fall. Christi Denton, a composer from Berkeley, Calif., found it intriguing to play with the idea of music coming from all directions.

"And it's a lot of fun to hear how differently toy pianos are going to sound out of tune," Denton said. "Writing for toy pianos is difficult because it's only two octaves, and also nobody would

## Exhibit preview

"KLAVIER NONETTE," 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, through April 27, Jack Straw Productions, 4261 Roosevelt Way N.E., Seattle, free, 206-634-0919 or [www.jackstraw.org](http://www.jackstraw.org).

consider writing a piece for nine toy pianos."

Trimpin's other works, which dot some of the city's most prominent landmarks, also mix spaces and sounds.

Dip Tip Dip, a 40-foot-high water and wind sculpture at the entrance to the Washington State Convention & Trade Center, plays with the scene and sound of water flowing through kinetic pieces.

Water is also the main element of Trimpin's "Hydraulis" at the entrance to KeyArena. The 60-foot-long piece features a dark-blue background that makes the dripping water look like crystals against light.

### *Visualizing sound*

"In a sports arena, nobody would listen to sound because it's so noisy," said Trimpin. "So I try to visualize the sound of water dripping down to create certain kinds of images."

His guitar installation at Experience Music Project, "If VI was IX," revives more than 700 discarded guitars. About 30 of them play themselves. The repertoire includes everything from Scottish ballads to rock 'n' roll.

Trimpin, who moved to Seattle 23 years ago from Germany, is working on a piece for Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. The installation, heavy on gears and pulleys and small musical contraptions, will glide alongside a people mover (a flat escalator).

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