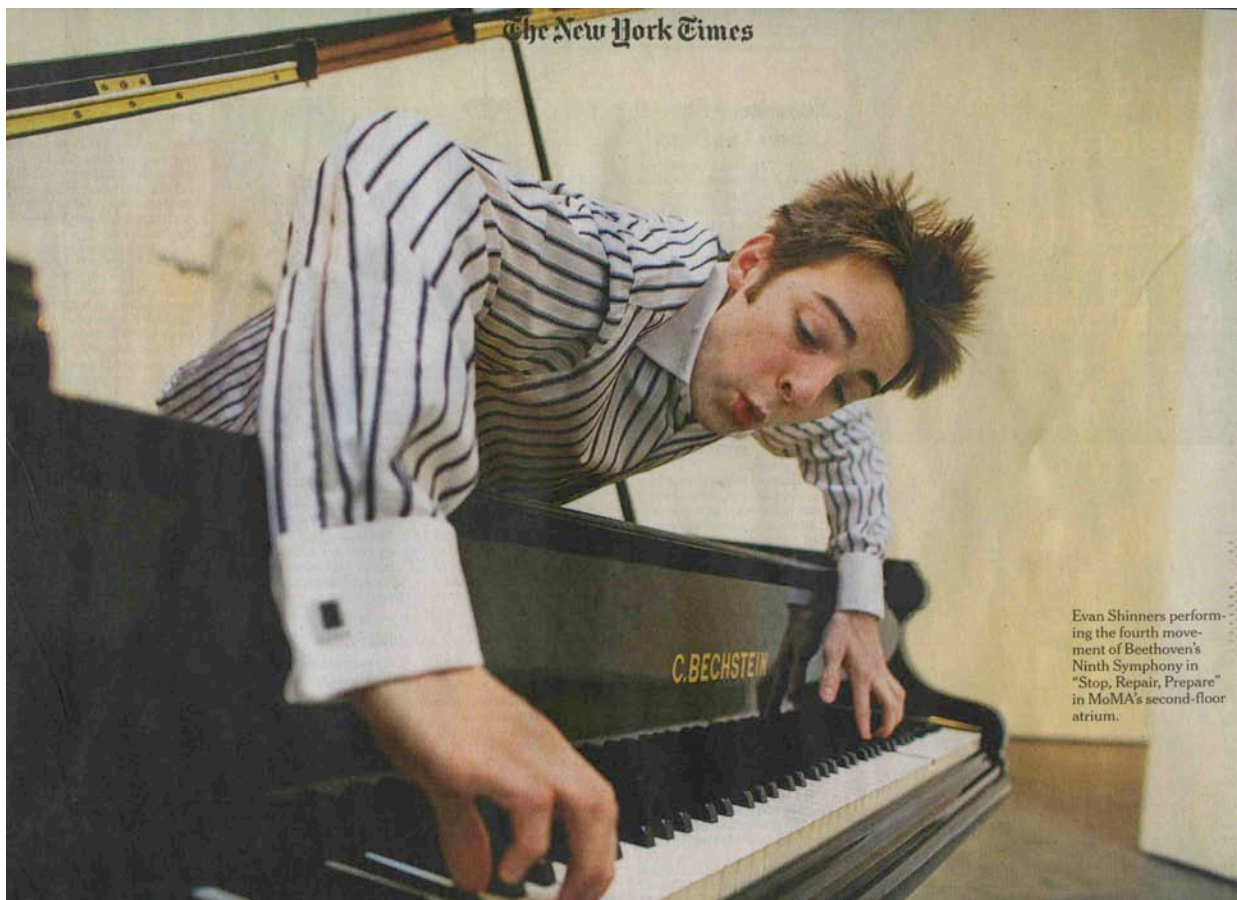


GLADSTONE GALLERY

Smith, Roberta. "I Just Popped Out to Play Beethoven." NY Times. December 10, 2010, p. C27, C33



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I Just Popped Out to Play Beethoven

If you question whether the Museum of Modern Art should be collecting works of performance art, your doubts may be assuaged by the sight and sound of "Stop, Repair, Prepare: Variations on 'Ode to Joy' for a Prepared Piano," a trenchant, newly acquired work by Allora & Calzadilla, the artist team that will represent the United States at the next Venice Biennale. Created in 2008 and first exhibited at the Haus der Kunst in Munich that year, this performance-sculpture-recital-dance piece was an instant hit when it was at the

**ROBERTA
SMITH**

**ART
REVIEW**

Gladstone Gallery in Chelsea in January 2009.

In its Modern debut, "Stop, Repair, Prepare" is more like a classic. It seems completely at home in the spacious second-floor atrium, looking for all the world like a full-fledged, crowd-pleasing museum masterpiece. Discernibly radical yet also resonating with the past, it offers an apotheosis of various forms of interventionist, appropriation and interactive art, which stretch from Fluxus to relational aesthetics, with many stops in between.

And it may be the best work that Jennifer Allora (born in Philadelphia in 1974) and Guiller-

mo Calzadilla (born in Havana in 1971) have produced in their 15-year collaboration. I haven't seen all of their videos and certainly not all of their installation and participatory performance pieces: their only solo in New York before the Gladstone show was at the Americas Society in 2003. The works I have seen have tended to be appealing but underwhelming. As for the others, the lengthy explanations of their intellectual and political motivations and supposed effects suggest a penchant for didacticism. "Stop, Repair, Prepare" appears to be among a handful of their

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Tickling the Ivories Upside Down

WHERE AND WHEN Museum of Modern Art, through Jan. 10, performed hourly starting at 11:30 a.m.

MORE INFO (212) 708-9400, moma.org.

NEARBY "Eat Drink Art Design," Museum of Arts and Design; (212) 299-7777, madmuseum.org. "The Wanderer," Museum of Biblical Art; (212) 408-1500, mobia.org.

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Popping Out To Play Beethoven

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pieces in which the experiential outweighs the carefully plotted subtext, and the tail is not wagging the dog.

Poetic, athletic and more than a little erotic, "Stop, Repair, Prepare" is an unusually intimate collaboration between musician and instrument. The piano, a Bechstein baby grand, has not been gently "prepared" in the manner of the influential composer and erstwhile Fluxist John Cage, who would place bolts or stones under specific strings to alter the sound. And it has also not been axed to smithereens, as was the practice of Raphael Montañez Ortiz, another Fluxus artist (and founder of El Museo del Barrio).

Rather, the Bechstein, which is on wheels, has been succinctly violated: a large hole has been cut through its case. The pianist stands in this hole — wearing or inhabiting the instrument, you could say — playing it from the inside out while propelling it this way and that.

Allora & Calzadilla have cited Gordon Matta-Clark's sliced-open buildings as inspiration. I found myself thinking of machine gun turrets; Velázquez's encumbered *Infantas*; the task-oriented dance of Yvonne Rainer and the Grand Union; and the famous photograph of Robert Rauschenberg performing in his 1963 dance, "Pelican," on roller skates with an open parachute on his back.

Thus embedded, the navigator-

ONLINE: PLAY IT AGAIN

More images of "Stop, Repair, Prepare" at the Museum of Modern Art:

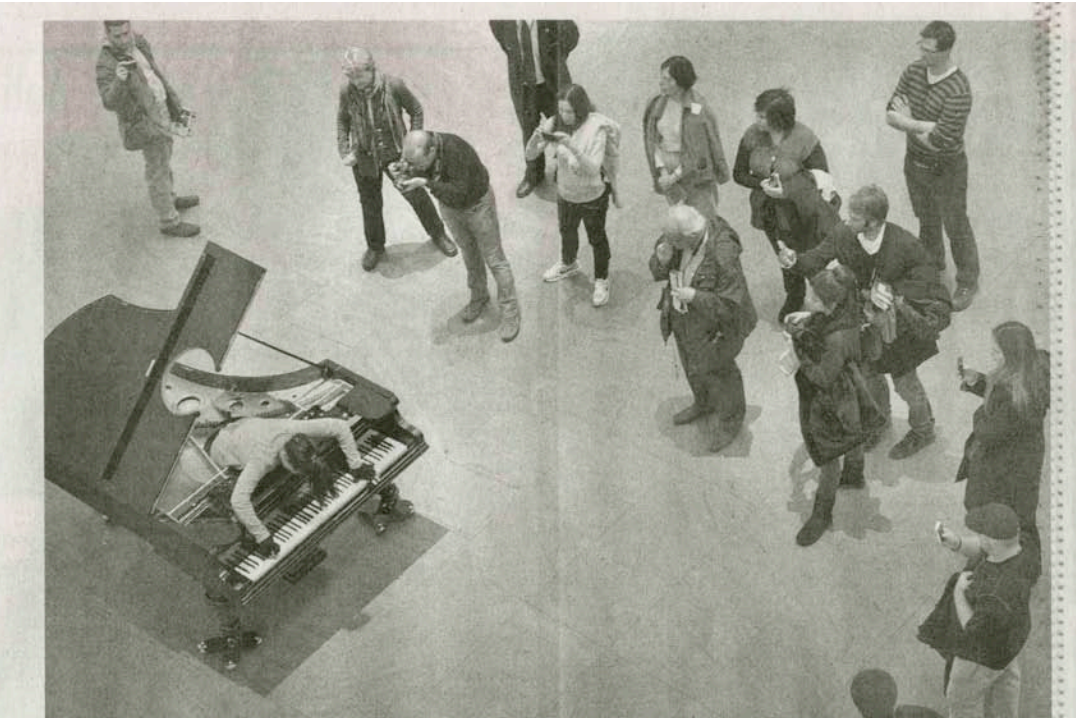
nytimes.com/design

musician plays the fourth and final choral movement of Beethoven's epic Ninth Symphony. It is known for its "Ode to Joy" theme (after the Schiller poem that provides its text), one of Western classical music's most familiar, historically freighted staples.

Playing it under the circumstances devised by Allora & Calzadilla is no mean feat. The hole eliminates two octaves of strings, reducing the center portion of the keyboard to percussive thumps. That is a minor problem, compared with the challenge of reaching across the instrument and playing upside down and backward. The pedals, at least, have helpfully been reversed.

During the next month "Stop, Repair, Prepare" will be performed daily, every hour on the half-hour, by one of five rotating musicians. Each interprets the score differently, inspired partly by the physical limitations — and not only of the instrument (height matters) — and each also motors the piano about according to an individual choreography worked out with Allora & Calzadilla.

At a rehearsal on Monday, Mia Elezovic picked out the melody with subtle precision, occasionally plucking the strings, while making the piano disappear be-



Mia Elezovic performing Beethoven from inside a Bechstein baby grand. The audience follows the piano as it moves.

ANGEL FRANCO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

hind a thick column. Evan Shinnners attacked the score with a bravura that might have pleased Liszt (who originally transcribed it for two pianos, not two-thirds of one), while moving in a crab-walking spiral. On Wednesday, when the piece opened to the public, Terezija Cukrov and Jun Sun performed with impressive aplomb and vigor. At crucial moments Ms. Cukrov pounded the strings, summoning a Beethovenian rumble.

"Stop, Repair, Prepare" destabilizes all kinds of conventions, expectations and relation-

ships. The music is often muffled and fragmented, the players prone to error. Some resort to occasional key changes because of the difficulty of reaching the black keys. Precariousness ensues; things teeter on the brink of disintegration. Chaos, Romanticism's energy source, threatens or titillates.

The concentrated embrace of musician and instrument is more intense and exclusive than in normal performance. This allows the viewer-listener the liberty to examine the performance as the sculpture that it also is, but not

passively. On the move, the piece herds and rearranges its audience as it goes, a spontaneous choreography that is most visible from upper levels. And as the instrument changes position, so does the sound, which is most intense if you follow closely in the piano's wake, as you might overhear. An especially arresting detail: the pianist's hands are completely exposed and available for viewing; they flit about the keyboard like dancers on a stage.

Under these circumstances, the five-legged hybrid of piano and pianist reduces a time-tested

Rhodesia, and was one of the few pieces of Western music condoned by the Chinese during the Cultural Revolution. (It was interpreted as depicting the workers' struggle.) More recently it has become the anthem of the European Union.

Perhaps Allora & Calzadilla want us to stop and consider the history of Beethoven's music as it emanates from their wounded, beast of a piano, activated by its put-upon occupant. The result is a performance in extremis, and possibly a form of reparation for the regimes the music, in its greatness, has served.

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and pianist reduces a time-tested humanist war horse to a shadow of its former self, which was the artists' intention. Allora & Calzadilla chose "Ode to Joy" partly because of the dicey uses the work has been put to, but its back story is interesting only up to a point. That includes being among Hitler's favorite pieces of music. (Wilhelm Furtwängler conducted a performance of it at the Haus der Kunst, where the piano bar featured a Bechstein, in 1942, on Hitler's birthday.) It was adopted by Ian Smith as the national anthem of apartheid-prone

greatness, has served.

But in the end, the greatness of Beethoven's music is a big part of what makes "Stop, Repair, Prepare" compelling. The ode is deservedly and indelibly familiar, which enables us to appreciate the deflating distortions visited upon it in its latest incarnation. In time-honored artistic progression, Ms. Allora and Mr. Calzadilla have made an old masterpiece the basis for a new, youthful one, the first work of their promising maturity. If they are lucky, someone — 10, 20 or 200 years in the future — will return the favor.