



**Flor Hartigan**

Flor Hartigan was trained as a concert pianist at the Royal College of Music in London, and launched her career on the international concert-pianist circuit with prestigious competition wins in Ireland, Europe and Russia. Her career was brutally cut short in 2000, however, when a car accident in Australia broke both her wrists and left her with only two fingers on her left hand. Hartigan has described her feelings during this time: “I was incredibly lost, very much at sea... My entire identity was wrapped up in being a concert pianist. You have to understand that I had trained for this from the age of four. I did my Associated Board Grade 8 exam in piano at age 11. I spent every Christmas holiday memorising the pieces for the following year’s Feis Ceoil competition. I didn’t play games, I didn’t watch TV, all I did was practice the piano and I loved it. I loved my piano. I still do. But it’s different now. Until the accident, the piano was a part of my body, it was an extension of my arms and hands and breath, but when my body changed, when everything changed, that connection changed also. The piano is still a part of me but it’s different now.” After months of recuperation and physical therapy in Australia, Hartigan took what she called “the slow boat” home to Ireland, travelling through Bali, India and Eastern Europe. These travels were to have a profound effect on the next stage of Hartigan’s development. She describes how a chance meeting with a Romanian shaman revolutionised the way she thought about music: “My body had been modified, traumatically changed, and that changed the way I listened, the way I felt, everything I did. I realised I had to change my musical thinking completely. I stopped thinking of myself as a concert pianist, and instead recognised myself as a creator, producer, and organiser of sound.”



Tuition for bang

25-year wait for musicians

**pitches together**

strike hard, explosion



Upon Hartigan's return to Dublin in late 2000 she settled in Rathfarnham, where she taught piano by day and composed her own work at night, experimenting boldly with extended techniques. In 2001 she wrote her first "deconstruction," *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand in C Minor*, which many consider her breakthrough work. The concerto is a piece for prepared piano that is built around a melody written specifically for two-fingered left-handed playing. While the pianist's left hand is engaged in playing a melody, her right hand is used to execute a series of manipulations inside the piano, delicately rolling crystal paperweights along the strings, inserting nuts, bolts, rubber erasers and padding between strings, muting and plucking and setting off dominoes and wind-up plastic animals. The traditional piano soundworld breaks apart and comes back together: through Hartigan's loss she gains an opening into exciting new territories.

After meeting The Dowager Marchylove as a result of her students' involvement in Marchylove's *A Child's Album of Noise*, Hartigan became involved with Grúpat. She credits Marchylove with helping her further explore how the altered body might be recreated through art, noting "The Dowager introduced me to the work of Leigh Bowery and Neil Harbisson, and as a result I began researching body modification. This seemed a natural extension both of my own experience of the body as well as the practice of using prepared instruments." In 2002 Hartigan wrote *My Fair Gob* for Jennifer Walshe, a piece requiring Walshe to sing with her mouth full of marbles, ping-pong balls and other objects, while wearing a corset which permitted her to take only very shallow breaths. The piece is unsettling to witness, as the performer manoeuvres and



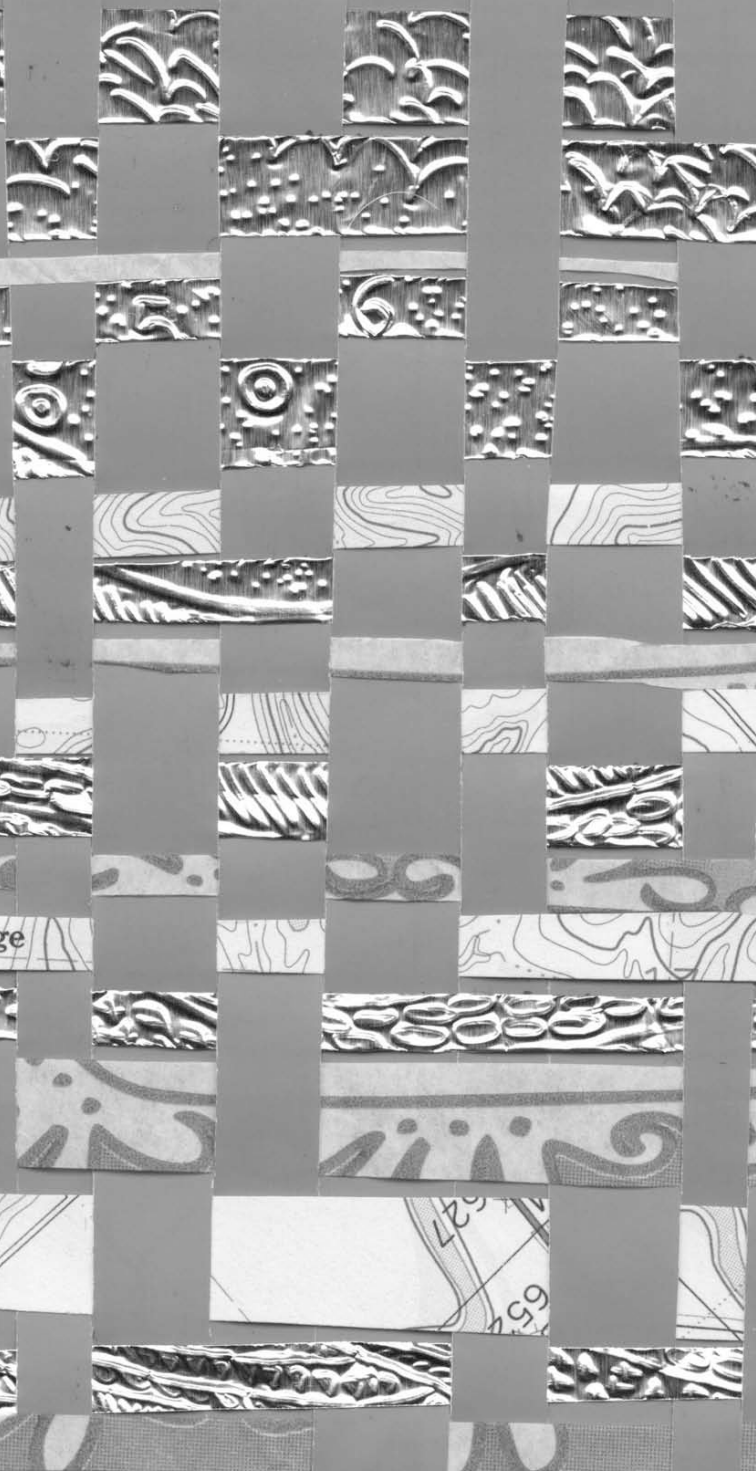
manipulates her physical constraints to produce a range of discomfiting and otherworldly sounds.

Hartigan's interest in non-traditional notation is evident from her earliest works. *My Fair Gob* is notated on a series of delicately woven strips of paper, and other compositions are notated in embossed tin, embroidery, and macramé. Since 2003, Hartigan has applied the concepts of preparation and modification to include not only instruments and the body but also the collective production and performance of scores in the events she calls "decompositions." In works such as her *re(Cycling)* project (2003-present) and *PhrEeeek!* (2004), Hartigan creates staff systems using materials such as barbed wire, lace, and silly string, and invites the audience to make notations on them. The score of *The Many Faces of Hermann Görztz* (2005), another example, was developed from audience members' descriptions of their conceptions of space. Her more recent scores, intricate weavings of delineations, contours and finely-graded marks such as *Conturador* (2007), can seem austere in comparison, focusing as the artist says "merely on the line."



Hartigan's much-lauded work as a conductor is diverse, encompassing sensitive readings of Beethoven quartets, unorthodox reworkings of Medieval chants and precise and intelligent performances of new music works by Murail, Vivier and Sciarrino. This work feeds into her work as a composer through her experiments with various forms of conducted improvisation: she has conducted game scores by John Zorn, performed with Soundpainting inventor Walter Thompson and has developed her own "deconduction" system inspired by the work of Butch Morris.

In every aspect of her musical practice, Flor Hartigan channels a fierce experimental aesthetic through the forceful will and rigorous discipline of a concert pianist to create striking, moving and sometimes shocking new work.



FOR 4 to 17 players