

## Degu Sounds: A Note

So much program music relies on ineffective ideas. The silliest are perhaps cinematic clichés: the piano's low register for evil characters, a slow ascent from said register for anything majestic and grand, sweet harmonies for characters in love. Much better, but still ineffective are attempts at rendering extra-musical sounds in music, such as imitations of rain, thunder, or bird song transcriptions – even when used creatively, as in many Messiaen pieces. When executed, such ideas may be interesting to listen to and convey something of the sounds they represent. They surely expand the otherwise limited palette available to the composer. But because they are based on such a straightforward, simplistic idea – a copy of the surface layer of a natural phenomenon – they can't possibly achieve any considerable depth.

This newest work is my idea of what program music could be if more complex principles were applied. Our family keeps several degus – Chilean rodents known, among other things, for their extensive vocabulary of vocalizations. These piano pieces are based on degu vocalizations, but they never render any of those in a straightforward way. Actual sounds are isolated and magnified, or radically slowed down and transposed, or used as blueprints for ideas more complex than the sounds themselves. An extraneous musical vocabulary is used when necessary – limited transpositions to convey the idea of an individual degu, a certain type of large chords to convey the idea of sleep, and so on. A single "frrr" from a degu may be interpreted as a minute of all kinds of sounds. The same minute may then be interpreted as an encounter between several degus because of the nature of sound.

The result is simultaneously based heavily on degu sounds and mostly unrecognizable as such even by those who are intimately familiar with those. Most importantly, I wanted the work to have the same quality the original sounds have: while a certain group of sounds may be identified as conveying e.g. fear or a desire for grooming, the details may forever stay beyond our reach. How much information does a degu get from its conspecific's soft "warbling" sound? We don't know. How much does an isolated piano trill convey? In some pieces, we may know, but in these we hopefully don't and never will.

# Degu Sounds – No. 10

Warning of Immediate Agonistic Action Intended to Repel Conspecific

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2015

Musical score for "Piano" by Frédéric Chopin, measures 1-19. The score is in 3/4 time, marked "♩=120". It features a right-hand melody with trills, triplets, and glissandos, and a left-hand accompaniment with trills, triplets, and glissandos. The piece is in D major and ends with a repeat sign.

25

gliss. #

3

tr

Ped.

30

tr

3

gliss

Ped.

Ped.

35

tr

3

gliss.

gliss.

gliss.

[illegible]