

Septapede

The only piece of this album that has not been written for the guitar, *Septapede* was originally a “seven-note piano music”, as its subtitle says. The work was premiered in New York in 1973 by American pianist and composer Frederic Rzewski, a friend of Tom Johnson. Tony Peña had to work a lot to adapt this music, designed for keyboard, to make it sound on his instrument. The difficulty is not so much to play the seven notes in question on the guitar, because the left hand positions for this can be found without too much difficulty, but rather to hear the sometimes very subtle differences between changes. Oftentimes, for example, notes and rhythm remain exactly the same from one variation to another, only the resonances change. He must change fingerings, and have very good control of the resonance of the strings, to highlight the differences. This is much easier on the piano.

Septapede is essentially a case of small differences, of minimal variations. A three-beat initial pattern is repeated, but with constant transformations: a note disappears, it comes back much later, it resonates for a longer or shorter time, it shifts half-beat ahead or behind, etc. This music is both always the same and never quite the same, according to the general principle of repetitive music, very popular in the US in 1973. With *Septapede*, as two years earlier with *An Hour for Piano*, Tom Johnson added his stone to the edifice still brand new of this new musical trend.

We can say then, in his instrumental music in any case, Johnson had not yet fully become himself. *Septapede* does not have the logical character that appears after a few years, and that will be the most singular mark of the author of the *Rational Melodies*. Changes in the pattern follow one another intuitively, unpredictably. However, this funny animal with seven feet is already showing much rigor, developing very gradually with minimal alterations. In the end, the figure does not go back to its initial state, but dissolves in some way into silence, having lost along the way most of the sounds with which it was made.

——Gilbert Delor (August 2016)