

## ***Still Lives* (1993)**

**For hacked CD player, vocalist and solo instrument**

**Notes for software version 2020**

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In ***Still Lives*** a modified CD player slowly scratches through ten measures of recorded music by Giuseppe Guami (1540-1611). As the CD steps from one skipping loop to the next the continuous counterpoint of the canzona is suspended in wobbly harmonic blocks, over which a player improvises. The text, from Vladimir Nabokov's memoirs, addresses memory and mortality. The work now employs a software emulation of my beloved Sony DT66 Discman, which expired and has proven difficult to replace.

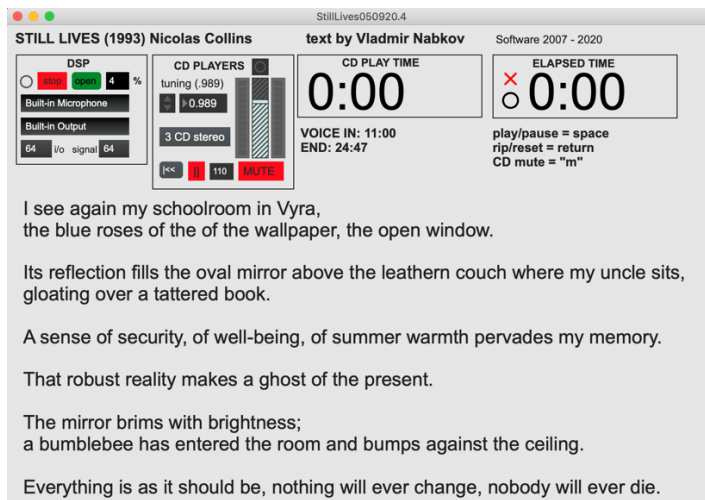
Performance typically requires two people: one manipulates the emulated CD player and speaks a text; the second plays an acoustic pitched instrument. The choice of instrument is open, but it should blend into the texture of the early music ensemble on the source audio file -- these have included trumpet/cornetto, trombone, violin/viola/cello/bass, flute.

## **Software**

The **StillLives** folder contains:

- "StillLives.app" Max app.
- "Guami.pdf" score of source recording heard in the skipping loops.
- "Still Lives Instructions.pdf" (this text).
- "StillLives.mp3" audio recording of representative performance.

Double click on "StillLives.app" icon. You should see this window:



In the top left "DSP" panel select "local" or "all" with the pull-down menu that defaults to "stop" in red: "local" enables audio for the *Still Lives* patch only; "all" enables audio for all Max/MSP patches open on the desktop. Clicking the circle to the left of this menu toggles between "local" (on) and "stop" (all audio off). The black menus across the middle of this window select the audio interface; the software defaults to built-in audio output, and no audio input is used in this program. "I/o" and "signal" menus select respective buffer sizes. The green "open" button toggles the Max/MSP audio panel open and shut. "%" indicates percentage of DSP assigned to this patch. These parameters are typically irrelevant, but can be tweaked by Max cognoscenti.

The **CD Players** panel immediately to the right of the **DSP** emulates hacked CD players. “Tuning” matches the pitch of the playback file to the tuning of the live instrument; the program defaults to a value of 0.989, but can be adjusted by direct entry in the number box, or by clicking the triangles to the left to increment or decrement the value. The black pull-down menu selects between a single CD player, three players mapped to stereo outputs (default) or three players mapped to four-channel output – select as appropriate to your interface and sound system. The slider adjusts audio output level, with the value indicated in the number box below to the left; meters display the actual signal level. “Mute/play” indicates the state of the playback. The “| |” button toggles the virtual CDs between “play” and “pause”; “play” advances the audio, “pause” suspends a skipping loop. “| |” is mapped to the **space bar** for performance. “|<” resets the audio track to the beginning of the file, with an audible ripping/scratching sound, and is mapped to the **return** key for performance. The button above the fader blinks at the tempo of the skip.

The **CD Play Time** panel indicates the current playback position in the audio file.

**Elapsed Time** displays the elapsed time of the performance. This stopwatch starts automatically with the first “play” command, and stops at the “|<” that ends the performance. It can also be toggled on/off with the “x” button and reset by clicking the circle.

The text to be spoken appears at the bottom of the screen.

### Rehearsal

Connect the computer’s built-in outputs (stereo) or the outputs from an external interface (stereo or four-channels) to a suitable sound system. When first launched the computer may ask if you want to allow access to the Macintosh microphone (irrelevant, dismiss) and open an unneeded **Max Console** window (close by clicking the red dot in the left corner). Vocalist and instrument should each have a microphone, which should be balanced against the audio output from the computer.

### Performance

- CD player/vocalist: play the CDs by toggling the **space bar** very briefly to advance the track 0.05 – 1.00 seconds at a time. Do so every 10-20 seconds. Use the recorded performance (“StillLive.mp3”) as a reference, but toggle the CD less frequently to extend the duration. Begin speaking the text when the **CD Play Time** indicates 11:00. Speak slowly. Advance the CD at the end of every sentence. When the **CD Play Time** = 24:47 cue the instrumentalist to stop playing; when she has finished press **return** to end the performance with a skittering rip. Always end even an aborted performance with a **return** to reset program parameters. Performance duration should be c. 10 minutes.
- Instrumentalist: play pitches that are audible in the loop, transpose by octaves as needed (you can reference the Guami score). Emulate the rhythm of the skipping, and mimic the timbre and articulation of the instruments on the recording. Occasionally anticipate upcoming pitches before the CD advances, or suspend old pitches into a new loop before resolving. When eighth-note figures are audible (measure 4) play the patterns at their tempo. Gradually increase the level of activity until the vocal enters; then decrease volume and play sustained pitches under the text. Build the activity back up when the text ends. Watch for the cue to stop playing before the CD rips to silence.