DEX

Graphical Scores in the Form
of a
Deck of Cards
for
Guided Improvisational Performance
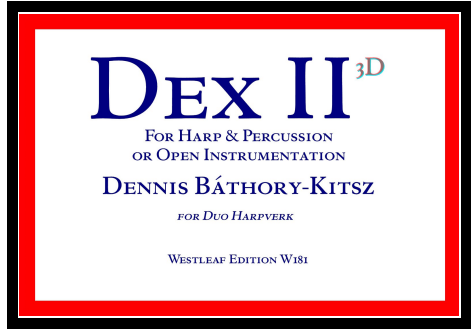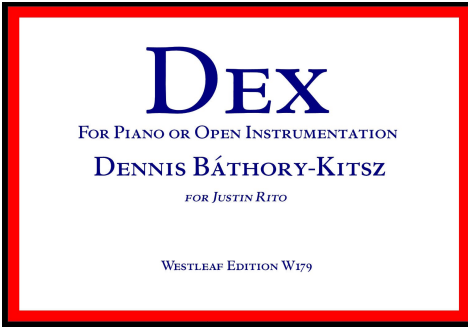
DEX and **DEXII3d** are two closely related graphical scores that are performed as games by one or more musicians. They are games of interpretation and creativity played to produce a series of integrated musical objects and events that are imagined to be heard at a specific, imaginary time in history—past, present, or future.

Otherwise identical in their musical process, some score contents differ; in the second version the performers wear red-blue anaglyph 3D glasses.


Duo Harpverk and Jane Boxall premiere DEXII3d in Reykjavík, Iceland

Materials Provided with DEX

Materials include a deck of 63 durable, tarot-sized
(3½″ × 5″ or 8.5 × 12.5cm) playing cards:

1. The red COVER
   (1 card)

2. The gray INSTRUCTIONS deck
   (9 cards in DEX, 3 cards in DEX II3d)

3. The yellow THEMES content deck
   (21 cards in DEX, 23 cards in DEX II3d)

4. The blue TRANSITIONS content deck
   (18 cards in both DEX and DEX II3d)

5. The green VARIATIONS content deck
   (14 cards in DEX, 18 cards in DEX II3d)
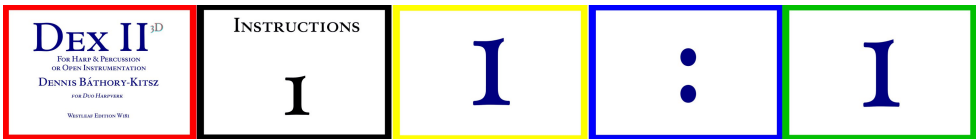
How to Perform DEX: Before Playing

Before performing a full DEX or DEX II3d event, take a few practice runs by learning how to handle and use the cards.

Each card is double-sided. The front of a card has either a number or a colon; the back of a card has the contents. Deal four cards face down: yellow, green, blue, and yellow. You will see a character pattern similar to 4 0 : 7 . Make a mental note of it.
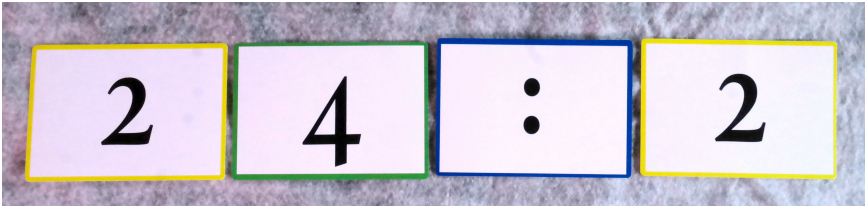

Turn over the first numbered yellow card. It will contain a *theme,* which you can think of as a germ or kernel or motive or thought experiment. Decide how this theme or experiment might be presented. What do the symbols suggest? What is their context within the confines of a single card? Does the card suggest motion in just one direction or more than one? If you are using a DEX II3d card and wearing the 3D glasses, how does the additional dimension you see add to your interpretation? If you are working as an ensemble, how would each player interpret that card? How would the players then integrate their separate interpretations to create a single ensemble presentation of the card's motives?

Set the yellow card face up and **turn over the numbered green card.** It will contain a *variation* on the yellow card's contents, whether in terms of technique or expressivity—or

even ensemble behaviors or suggestions. Explore or discuss how the variation card will affect the theme card you already hold. In other words, return to the yellow card and re-interpret your ideas about it in terms of the green card.

Set the green card face up and **turn over the blue card marked with a colon** (:). It will contain *transition* guidelines that engage with both the theme and its variation, similar to the variation card but more time-directional in nature. (In actual performance, the blue card comes *before* the green card. But since the blue card requires a transition, for this practice run, the blue card comes after the green one.)

Set the blue card face up and **turn over the last yellow theme card** and follow the same interpretive process for the new theme: symbols, context, motion, etc. Consider the card as its own world, but also consider the transition guidelines on the blue and green cards as expanding that world.
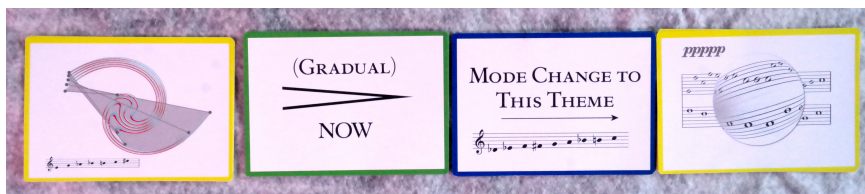

Now the four cards are face up in a row of yellow, green, blue, yellow. With these in front of you, *re-interpret* **all the contents, transitions, and variations** to create a short, coherent musical performance—keeping in mind the character pattern (such as 40:7) you first dealt. The presence of additional cards may change your previous approach to each individual one entirely. Evaluate whether your new interpretation makes sense and what can be done to improve it as a musical event in terms of emotional content, beauty, surprise, color, intensity, and coherency.

You have now completed your first DEX private performance.

How to Perform DEX: First Plays

Each card is double-sided and has either a number or a colon.

1. **Set aside the red cover and gray instructions cards** (instructions on the cards are simplified for reference). They are not needed in actual play.

2. Then **place on a table the stacks of three content decks by color: yellow, blue and green**.
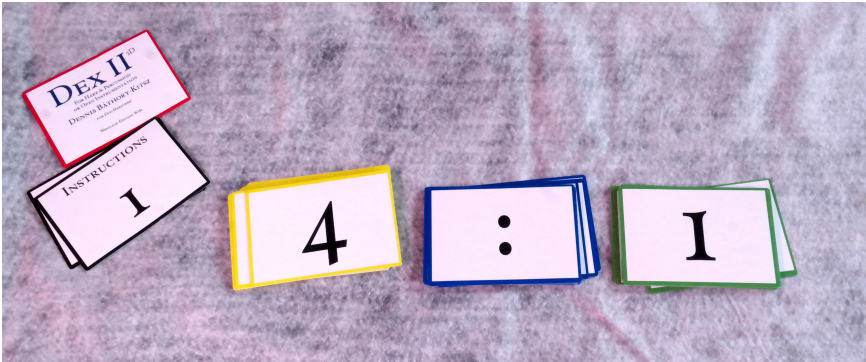
(Note: During a performance, optional large-format sheets or projections may be used if the cards are too small for the performer or ensemble. Large sheets or projections also help the audience enjoy the event.)

How to Perform DEX: The Structures

DEX's architecture is based on imaginary calendar dates. The date format (and the score's architecture) is year, month, day, hour, minute, second:

| Y Y Y Y | : | Mo Mo | : | D D | : | H H | : | Mi Mi | : | S S |

Keep the yellow, blue and green decks separate and face down. <u>Shuffle each deck individually</u> and place the shuffled decks on the table in the order of yellow, blue and green.

<u>Deal the cards.</u> Pull the cards from the top of their respective stacks and place the cards in a left-to-right line with the numbers and colons (backs) showing:

Deal four yellow THEME cards (year, four digits).

Deal one blue TRANSITIONS card.

Deal one green VARIATION card (month high digit).

Deal one yellow THEME card (month low digit).

Deal one blue TRANSITIONS card.

Deal one green VARIATION card (day high digit).

Deal one yellow THEME card (day low digit).

Deal one blue TRANSITIONS card.

Deal one green VARIATION card (24-hr clock high digit).

Deal one yellow THEME card (24-hr clock low digit).

Deal one blue TRANSITIONS card.

Deal one green VARIATION card (minute high digit).

Deal one yellow THEME card (minute low digit).

Deal one blue TRANSITIONS card.

Deal one green VARIATION card (second high digit).

Deal one yellow THEME card (second low digit).

You will now have a complete date displayed. A useful date result might look like this:

1927:12:25:16:11:29

= December 25, 1927 at 4:11pm [16h11], 29 seconds

However, the date you deal might be impossible because some digits may be invalid, like this:

3981:40:33:26:11:22

The year is okay, even if it's in the future. But there's no month 40 or day 33 or hour 26 (see below, though).

To fix the impossible date, underline deal another green VARIATION card or yellow THEME card and place it to the *right* of the invalid card. If the number created by the existing valid card and the new card is still invalid, draw another of the same type. *Keep the invalid card(s) in place*.

3981:41Q:33Q:26I:11:22

= October 30, 3981 at 9:11pm [21h11], 22 seconds

When sufficient cards have been dealt to create a legitimate date (ignoring the invalid cards for now), <u>**announce the date aloud**</u> ("October 30, 3981 at 9:11pm [21h11], 22 seconds"). Now the music is *almost* ready to begin.

(You may wish to think of an impossible date as 'imaginary'—although creating a 'real' date makes the performance length unpredictable and challenging.)

Before you play, *think about the date.* Is it in the past? The future? Distant or near? What time of day? How might the time and date influence how you play and what you play? Also examine the numbers as a stream. What would 39814103302611122 suggest?
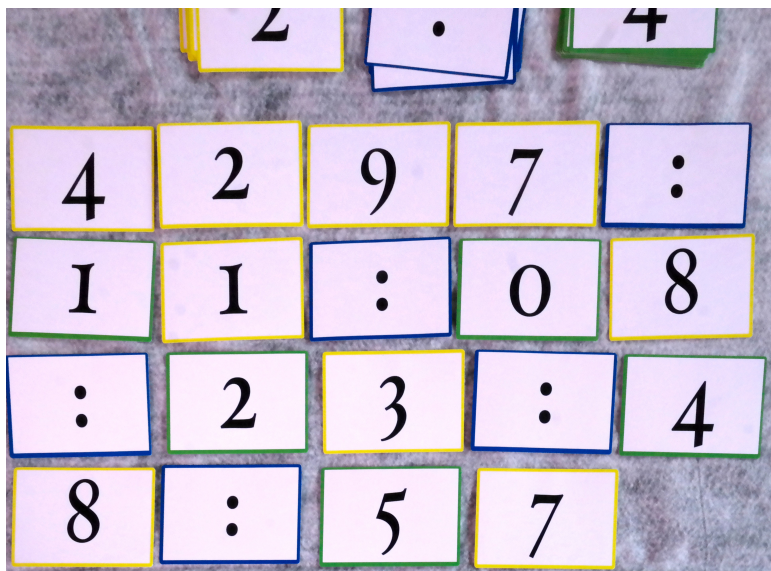

*A legal date has been dealt: November 8, 4297 at 23h48 :57*

How to Perform DEX: The Performance

To begin, <u>turn the cards over</u> lengthwise to reveal the musical instructions, again reading left to right. Once turned over, some cards may be flipped or rotated in various angles, as you like, to increase musical interest.
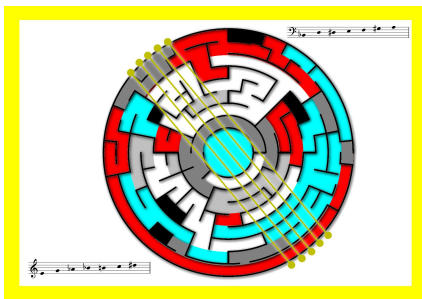
Again, you may use large printed sheets or projections if the cards are difficult to perform from.
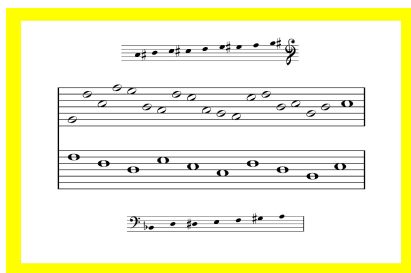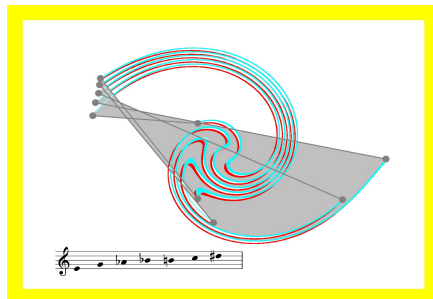

Flippable card (top/bottom)
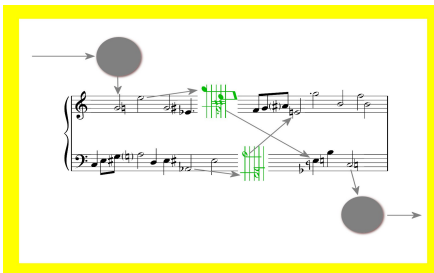
Rotatable card (right angles)
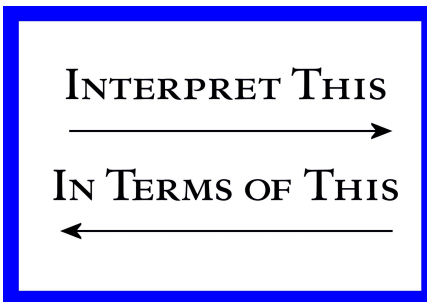

Rotatable card (any axis position)

Rockable card (keeping mode visible)

Keep in mind that when you do this in real time, **it will be hectic and depend on intimate and instantaneous knowledge of the cards**—especially the <mark>yellow THEME cards</mark>—and will depend on the performer's (or ensemble's) experience and *especially* practice time.

Interpret the four <mark>yellow THEME cards</mark>. *It is advisable, especially in group performance, to study and interpret <u>all</u> the cards in advance.* <u>Play each card</u> as long as you choose and, if it's suggested by the cards, repeat the material or make references to previous (or future!) themes as your playing continues—and read ahead to be aware of what is coming with the blue and green cards.

Keep in mind that your performance is for the specific date and time you initially dealt, so interpretive time matters, and using the numerical string of your time display can assist with tempo, emphasis, repetitions, and even performance style or genre. However you choose to interpret a theme card, though, *be sure to respect its contents.*

<u>Play the</u> <mark>blue COLON (TRANSITIONS) card</mark>. A blue cards refers to the interstices between themes, and contains instructions on how to make transitions or what to change in upcoming playing tools or techniques. Arrows, written instructions, "Now," or "During" may be on the card to show when you should make the changes.

<table>
<tr><td>

INTERPRET THIS

———————————➤

IN TERMS OF THIS

◄———————————

</td><td>

MODULATE
+7 AND BACK

NOW

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Upcoming action transition *Current action transition*

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**REPEAT
PREVIOUS CARD
MODULATE +6**
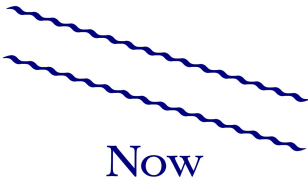
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(BRIEF)

⌣̇

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Retrospective action transition   *Suspended action transition*

Play the <mark>green VARIATION card</mark>, which is similar to the <mark>blue COLON (TRANSITIONS) card</mark>, but with additional and increasingly specific techniques that operate more directly on the themes.
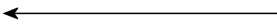
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<tr><td>

〜〜〜〜〜
〜〜〜〜〜

NOW

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**TRANSITION TO
WHISPER
TECHNIQUES**

→

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Immediate variation action   *Directional variation action*

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**RETROGRADE
THIS**

←

BECOME THIS

→

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**RHYTHM
FALLS APART**

→

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</table>

Bidirectional variation action   *Future variation action*

In turn, **play grouped patterns** made up of one each: blue COLON TRANSITION card, green VARIATION card and yellow THEME card.

Continue to play the cards, remembering to create a kind of architectural structure influenced by the date and time you dealt and its relationship to the present.

Note: It is possible to prepare a performance by dealing and rehearsing cards in advance. Where a concert includes other compositions, such preparation may be needed to avoid conflicts—although spontaneity may be tempered and the immediate 'game' nature of DEX lost.

**The performance ends** when you play the last displayed yellow THEME card.
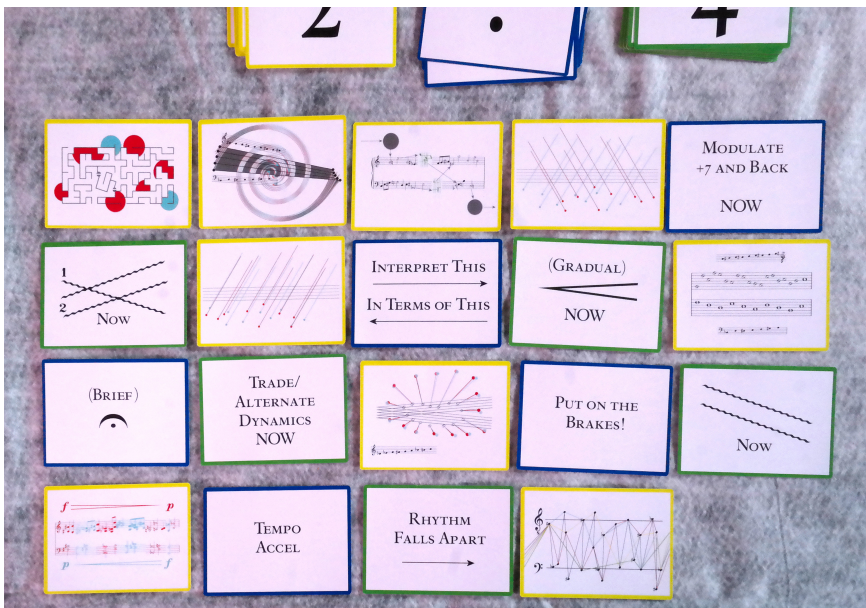
How to Perform DEX: Interpretations

Interpretation is up to you. Certain aspects of the playing —such as where pitches are specified or particular modes are presented—should be limited to that content.

Notes, ideas, and suggestions on interpreting themes:

1. **Growing structures are followed via their paths.** The 'stopping points' may be considered pitches, clusters, lengths of time, etc., as long as they are coherent and related to the image.

2. **Crossed staves share pitches, dynamics and rhythms.** By flipping or rotating the card (which may be done during the performance), a variation transform can be made.

3. **Some reversing lines may be considered canons** in retrograde or inversion.

4. **Changing shapes of staves or notes can be taken as changes** of dynamic, tempo, or density.

5. **Areas with filled spaces between lines may be taken as densities or chords.**

6. In the case of voices or instruments with flexible pitches, their **thematic content may be bent, colored, or distorted.** *Imagination rules!*

7. **Themes with irregular abstractions may also be bent, colored, or distorted.** In the case of either card #6 or card #7 for piano solo (for example), you may play the instrument inside the case or use preparations of your liking.
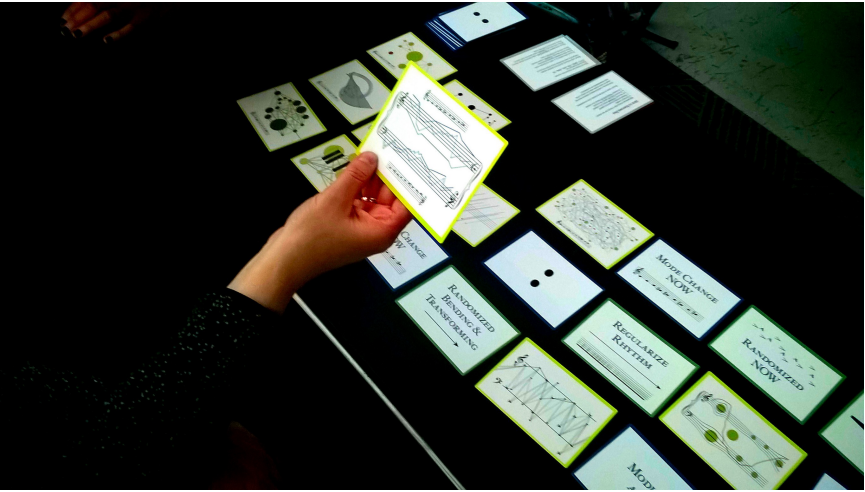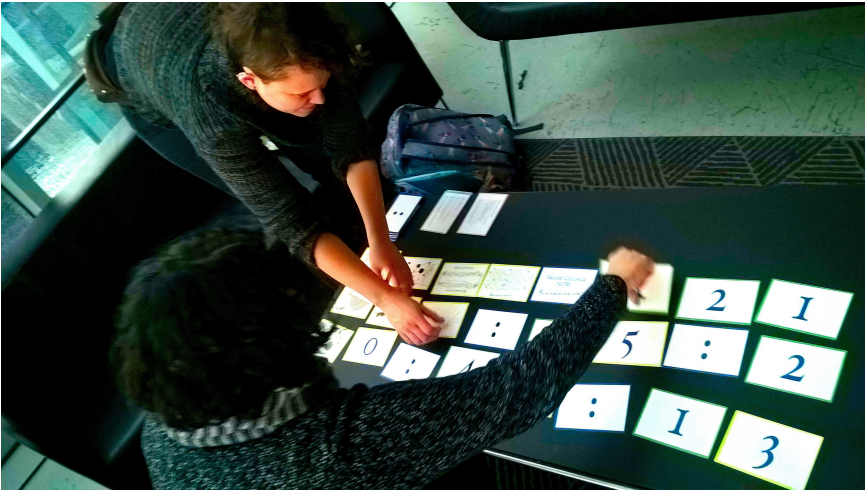
Making decisions before the performance of DEXII3d

Dennis Báthory-Kitsz
Northfield Falls, Vermont
December 11, 2017
April 20, 2022

bathory@maltedmedia.com