

**"THE LUNATICS ARE  
ON THE LOOSE ..."**

*European Fluxus Festivals  
1962-1977*



**"THE LUNATICS ARE ON THE LOOSE ..."**

**EUROPEAN  
FLUXUS  
FESTIVALS**

*1962-1977*

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## EVENTS Y NEW MUSIC MADRID, 12 NOVEMBER 1966

Henar Rivière Ríos

For the second time in less than six months the Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura ('Superior Technical School of Architecture') of Madrid offered a concert of pieces by Fluxus artists. This time, however, the setting was slightly different since the presentation took place in the auditorium rather than in the foyer. Thus, the approximately 180 spectators could make themselves comfortable in soft seats instead of having to sit in folding chairs. Another, more remarkable difference was that two Fluxus artists, Alison Knowles and Dick Higgins, personally put together the programme and presented it along with the Zaj artists, whereas in the previous concert the Spanish group took care of everything. Higgins had written Juan Hidalgo during the summer asking for his assistance in arranging a concert for him and Knowles in Madrid. At that point, the American and Spanish composers had not yet met personally, but had begun an epistolary contact.<sup>1</sup> Higgins and Knowles on the one side, and Hidalgo and Tomás Marco on the other, finally got to know each other and would perform together in various events arranged in Germany by Wolf Vostell, like the *Fluxus- and Zaj-Concerts* in the Forum-Theater in Berlin that autumn.<sup>2</sup> For the two Americans, the evening in Madrid would represent the final stage of their European tour, while for the Spanish artists it might be seen as the closure of the "second Zaj year".<sup>3</sup>

The programme was divided into two parts: the first part, set up by Higgins, consisted of six pieces to be rendered consecutively; the second part, put together by Knowles, was conceived as *Interruption Music – for J.C. (1966)*, "a sort of musical 'collage' with the simultaneous overlay of diverse easy pieces by different authors".<sup>4</sup>

The concert started with Tomás Marco sitting on a chair in the middle of the stage. Knowles carefully proceeded, with the help of Hidalgo, to entwine Marco with strings, coiling them around his head and shoulders and knotting their ends to different structures on stage,

such as a table and a blackboard in the background. Intrigued, the spectators quietly watched this version of Knowles's *String Piece* (1964), unaware that the original event-score placed them, and not a co-performer, as the subject of these actions.<sup>5</sup>

With the strings still lying about on the stage floor, Knowles, Higgins, Marchetti, Hidalgo and a released Tomás Marco got in line, side by side, giving the viewers their widest grin. Then, in an extremely slow process, their facial expression became more and more relaxed. Each performer interpreted this *DISAPPEARING MUSIC FOR FACE* (1964) by Mieko Shiomi at their own pace, exiting the stage once their grin was gone.<sup>6</sup> When the last performer had left, the following piece, Knowles's *Shoes of Your Choice* (1963), began. The author herself went on stage and displayed several pairs of shoes, including those she was wearing, on a small table. One by one, she took a shoe of each pair and presented it to her audience by means of a physical description and other relevant pieces of information such as its history and how she felt about it (fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> As envisioned in the score, the performance involved the audience's participation – once Knowles had packed her shoes away and receded into the background, a man went on stage and, putting his right foot on the table, he tied his shoe (fig. 2). Another spectator spontaneously sat on the edge of the stage, lit up a cigarette and, after taking several drags, used a shoe as an ashtray (fig. 3). All in all, the performance lasted almost half an hour.<sup>8</sup>

Hidalgo and Knowles then walked separately from one side of the stage to the other facing in opposite directions and passing by each other, at the middle of their paths (fig. 4). This was probably their version of George Brecht's *STRING QUARTET* (1962), whose instruction read, "shaking hands".<sup>9</sup> Unlike in this free interpretation, the following *3 PIANO PIECES* (1962) by the same composer were executed in a literal way: Knowles sat down on a stool and stayed there for a while, facing the audience ("sitting"), then she got up and stood for a little while, again facing the audience ("standing") (fig. 5).<sup>10</sup>

The concreteness of Brecht's event scores was followed by the complex elaboration required of Higgins's *Musical Process No. 2 "Vocal Composition, January 1959: The Sound of the Animal Dying Thirteen to*

*One*" (1959), in which the score(s) have to be composed by the performers themselves. The performers are instructed to select thirteen sounds, to include a "word, syllable, phoneme, morpheme, name of somebody if it is not more than two syllables, or any representation of any vocal sound of any kind", and to set for each sound a pitch pattern by means of a graphic design as well as a number of beats determined by throwing a die. Then, they are to consult each other in order to make sure they are capable of producing "the sounds called for" in the resulting score(s).<sup>11</sup> That Saturday evening of November in Madrid, there were two resulting scores – written on two large panels and placed on stage on two easels, so that they would be visible from a distance. In this manner, Hidalgo, Higgins, Knowles, Marchetti and Marco could move freely around the whole auditorium while reading them, emitting their sounds in a rendition that truly amused them and their audience (fig. 6).

Two other pieces by Higgins, *Celestials – for Bengt af Klintberg* (1962/1963) and *Danger Music Number Three* (1961), would close the first part of the concert. In the first piece, together all five performers acted according to the four different "sets of possibilities and systems" suggested by the verbal instructions of *Celestials*: "In the first variant everybody tries to feel as tall as possible and to stand rooted to the spot where he was when the variant began. [...] In the second variant the aesthetic is the same as in the first, but each performer does simple things. [...] In the third performance a gentle litany is made that praises the general tenor of life without anybody expressing too strongly his own preferences. [...] In the fourth variant very slow gymnastics are the sole means of expression".<sup>12</sup>

To change from one variant to another the performers were to let themselves be guided by "cuing situations", either "observed in the environment" or "arranged [...] to occur".<sup>13</sup> Some of the cues concerned all of the interpreters at once and some cued each of them individually. Thus, while Marchetti and Marco remained for the most part standing, the former sporadically singing next to the blackboard and the latter on the opposite end of the stage, the others moved around. Hidalgo crossed the stage in slow and short steps (fig. 7) and Knowles walked down the aisle between the two sections of seats of

the auditorium, bending down to touch the floor with her hands (fig. 8). For his part, Higgins walked down the aisle as well, then returned to the stage, where he remained “rooted to the spot” balancing his upper body in a circular motion. After such a theatrical rendition – where the visual component was predominant – came the olfactory experience of the *Danger Music Number Three*. As the last performance before the intermission, incense was burned in the darkness.<sup>14</sup>

The *Interruption Music – for J.C.* (1966) was the general structure chosen by Alison Knowles for the second part of the evening. It had been premiered in the *Fluxus-Concert* celebrated the preceding month in the Forum-Theater in Berlin and involved a simultaneous rendition of works by various artists, with two peculiarities: that it was the audience who chose the pieces by picking numbered cards and that no activity was brought to an end but overlapped with another.<sup>15</sup> The artists “brilliantly overcame” the subsequent performing challenges.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the second part began, once the order of the pieces was chosen, with Knowles sitting on a folding chair and manipulating a small mechanism with deep concentration, perhaps performing a version of Joe Jones’s *Steam Engine*.<sup>17</sup> Higgins, standing on her right, faced the audience, while on her left, Hidalgo looked at her and shook his hand in the air. Marco, for his part, arranged a table with all of the materials needed for the next performances (fig. 9).

Shortly after, Knowles and Higgins unrolled small paper scrolls they had presumably taken out of one of her *Bean Rolls* (1963), a collection of canned books where tea cans had been used as containers for printed scrolls. Reading them aloud, the performers provided the listeners – most of whom probably did not understand a word – with all sorts of information on beans (*Simultaneous Bean Reading*, 1964).<sup>18</sup> In the meantime, the three Zaj artists were rolling up their sleeves for Knowles to spread Nivea Cream onto their hands. Then, the four performers rubbed their hands for a while (fig. 10) without amplifying the sound of their action with a microphone, as originally indicated by the American in her *Nivea Cream Piece – for Oscar Williams* (1962).<sup>19</sup> After cleaning off the excess cream from their hands with a cloth, she began directing her *Newspaper Music* (1965) by raising and lowering her arms,

indicating to the interpreters to increase or decrease the intensity with which their respective newspaper readings should be given (fig. 11).

Once again, Knowles moved among the spectators, this time holding a tray, offering grapes and cheese (fig. 12). This gentle gesture, most likely corresponding to the first part of Geoffrey Hendricks's "For A. Knowles – Eat – Gymnastics – Rest" (1966), was interrupted by the three Zaj artists and Higgins unrolling paper rolls over the audience seated in the stalls and box (fig. 13). After this performance of Ben Patterson's *PAPER PIECE* (1960),<sup>20</sup> Knowles took up again her interpretation of Hendricks's work, this time concentrating on its second part: the gymnastics. With her shoulders on the stage floor, her hands holding her waist and her feet stretched upwards, she kicked her legs in the air (fig. 14). According to Tomás Marco, she even shouted while doing so, as though she were having an epileptic seizure.<sup>21</sup> Whether she rested a little afterwards as prescribed by Hendricks we cannot know, since the photographer then focused on Marco and Hidalgo, who were cleaning up the mess created during the concert – more than likely performing a silent version of Arthur Kørpcke's *music while you work* (1962) (fig. 15).<sup>22</sup> In such a tidy way, the evening came to an end.

1

On 10 March 1966 Juan Hidalgo received the shipment of Dick Higgins's *Jefferson's Birthday / Postface* (New York: Something Else Press, 1964). Twenty days later, Hidalgo wrote to Higgins, beginning a correspondence with him that would last for years. On 27 July 1966 Higgins asked Hidalgo about performing opportunities in Madrid. See respectively letter from Juan Hidalgo to Wolf Vostell, 10 March 1966, Archivo Happening Vostell, Museo Vostell Malpartida; letter from Juan Hidalgo to Dick Higgins, 30 March 1966, Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; and letter from Dick Higgins to Juan Hidalgo, 27 July 1966, Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

2

Both concerts included in this catalogue. Other meeting points in Germany were Frankfurt (*Concierto Zaj* in homage to Dick Higgins and Alison Knowles, Atelier Günther Bock, 22 September 1966) and Aachen (*Juxtapositionen 1*, hosted by Galerie Aachen, 25 September 1966).

3

In his chronology of the first Zaj years, Juan Hidalgo regards the *Events y New Music* concert as the beginning of the "third Zaj year". However, in my opinion it is more appropriate to consider it as the conclusion of the "second Zaj year" since, in a certain way, it represented the culmination of the first "international season" of the Spanish group. This opinion is also supported by the fact that, after this evening, a period in the critical reception of Zaj ended. See Juan Hidalgo, 'Zaj', *Revista de Letras*, 1.3 (1969), pp. 424–444 (p. 437). On Zaj criticism see, Henar Rivière Ríos, 'Especulaciones: Zaj y la crítica española', in *Mirando a Clio. El arte español espejo de su historia*

(Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 2012).

4

"Para su parte la Knowles concibió una especie de 'collage' musical, con la superposición simultánea de diversas piezas simples de varios autores", Tomás Marco, 'Teatro musical', in *SP. Revista de información mundial*, 4 December 1966, p. 71. No programme of this concert was ever printed. However, the content of the first and second parts were respectively written with chalk on the blackboard placed on stage. The handwriting of Juan Hidalgo, who listed the composer's names and the pieces' titles of the first part, was clear and easily readable. Unfortunately, the second part was not as legible. The press review that Tomás Marco devoted to this concert and, especially, the rather exhaustive photographic documentation existing thanks to Alberto Schommer are helpful in the reconstruction of the course of the evening.

5

"Using as many balls of string as you have performers, entwine, surround and tie up the audience", Alison Knowles, *String Piece* (1964), from Alison Knowles, '4 Performance Pieces by Alison Knowles', typescript, Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

6

Event-card, Mieko (Chieko) Shiomi, *Events and Games*, Fluxus Edition (1964).

7

See Alison Knowles, *Shoes of Your Choice* (1963) printed in Alison Knowles, *By Alison Knowles* (New York: Something Else Press, 1965), p. 5; and Marco (see note 4), p. 71.

8

Marco (see note 4), p. 71.

9

On the blackboard, as well as in Marco's press review, the piece was presented as "shake", *ibid.*, p. 71.

10

On the blackboard, as well as in Marco's press review, the piece was presented as "Sit, stand, walk"; the original score reads, "standing, sitting, walking", Marco (see note 4), p. 71.

11

See complete score in Dick Higgins, *Selected Early Works, 1955–1964* (Berlin: Edition ARS VIVA! & Berliner Künstlerprogramm des DAAD, 1982), pp. 55–56.

12

Dick Higgins, *Celestials – for Bengt af Klintberg* (1962/1963), in Higgins (see note 11), p. 93

13

*Ibid.*

14

See complete score in Higgins (see note 11), p. 8.

15

See letter from Alison Knowles to Emmett Williams, written in Prague prior to 13 October 1966, manuscript in Jean Brown Papers, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

16

Marco (see note 4), p. 71.

17

Joe Jones's *Steam Engine* seems to be the first piece listed on the blackboard for the second part of the concert. It was also included in the programme of the *Fluxus-Concert* in the Forum-Theater in Berlin 4 October 1966.

18

Score printed in Knowles (see note 7), p. 10.

19

See complete score in Knowles (see note 7), p. 3.

20

For the score see Ben Patterson, *The Black & White File* (Wiesbaden, Erbenheim: Ben Patterson, 1999).

21

Tomás Marco in interview with Henar Rivière Rios, Madrid, 29 December 2011.

22

Køpcke's instructions read: "1 person/a grammophone/a record/ 3 pieces of scotchtape | place the 3 pieces of scotchtape on different spots of the record | expiration: the record/ music starts and the exponent has to work (i. e. clean the stage) | when the grammophone-needle hits the scotchtape, the music | stumbles and the actor has to begin the record again | every time | the piece is over a) when the work is finished | b) if the record ends | \_\_ | several persons/ objects as named above and same preparation | and all exponents have to work, i. e.: a couple is dancing/ | one is making a speech/ one washes his feet/ cleaning the stage | one comes in and goes out again all the time/ strip-tease/&c. | when the music stumbles all actors have to meet at the | grammophone | the piece is over i. e. when the last actor has finished his | work, who is ready before leaves the stage" (sic), Arthur Køpcke's *music while you work* (1962), in *reading/work-pieces manuscript*, Archiv Sohm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.



Fig. 1 Alison Knowles performing her *Shoes of Your Choice*, 12 November 1966

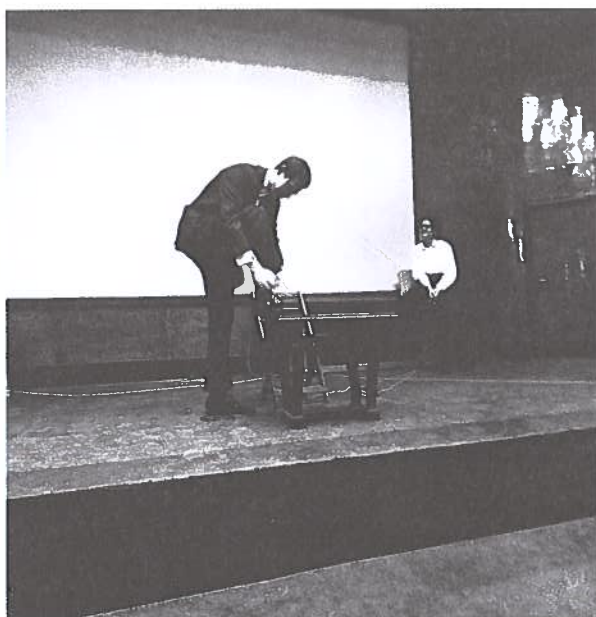


Fig. 2 An audience member performing Alison Knowles's *Shoes of Your Choice*, 12 November 1966

Fig. 3 An audience member performing Alison Knowles's *Shoes of Your Choice*, 12 November 1966

Fig. 4 Juan Hidalgo and Alison Knowles performing George Brecht's *STRING QUARTET*, 12 November 1966



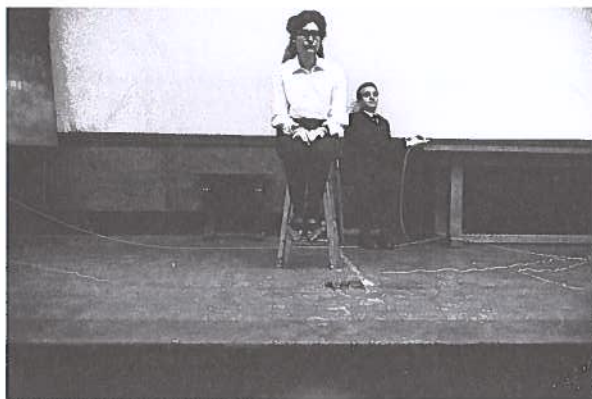


Fig. 5 Alison Knowles performing George Brecht's 3 *PIANO PIECES*, 12 November 1966



Fig. 6 Dick Higgins and Walter Marchetti performing Dick Higgins's *Musical Process No. 2 "Vocal Composition, January 1959: The Sound of the Animal Dying Thirteen to One"*, 12 November 1966



Fig. 7 Walter Marchetti, Dick Higgins and Juan Hidalgo performing Dick Higgins's *Celestials - for Bengt af Klintberg*, 12 November 1966



Fig. 8 Alison Knowles performing Dick Higgins's *Celestials* – for Bengt af Klintberg, 12 November 1966

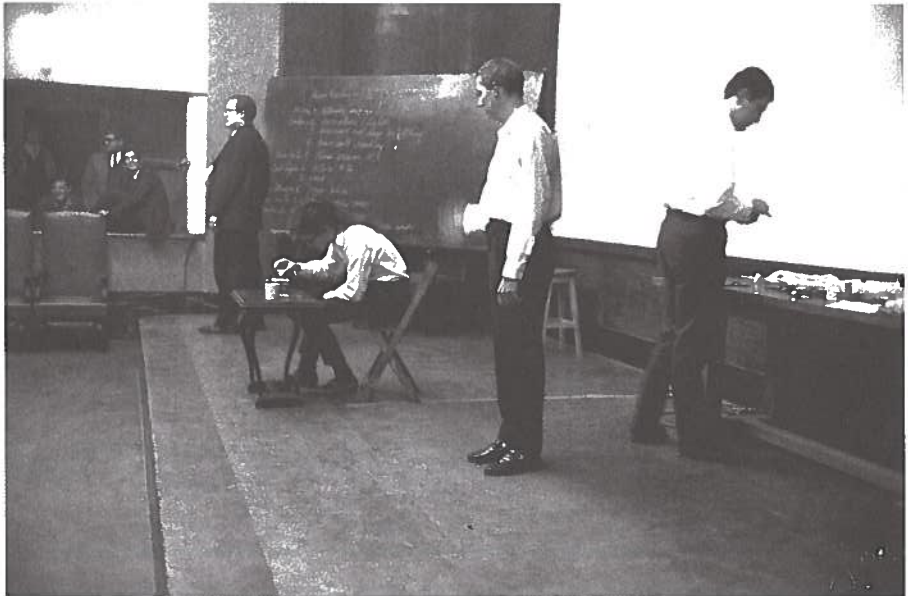


Fig. 9 Dick Higgins, Alison Knowles, Juan Hidalgo and Tomás Marco performing different actions as part of Alison Knowles's *Interruption Music* – for J. C., 12 November 1966



Fig. 10 Alison Knowles, Juan Hidalgo, Walter Marchetti and Tomás Marco performing Alison Knowles's *Nivea Cream Piece* – for Oscar Williams, 12 November 1966

Fig. 11 Tomás Marco, Juan Hidalgo, Dick Higgins, Walter Marchetti and Alison Knowles (back to the camera) performing Alison Knowles's *Newspaper Music*, 12 November 1966



Fig. 12 Alison Knowles performing Geoffrey Hendricks's "For A. Knowles – Eat – Gymnastics – Rest", 12 November 1966



Fig. 13 Audience members after Benjamin Patterson's *PAPER PIECE*, 12 November 1966

Fig. 14 Alison Knowles performing  
Geoffrey Hendricks's "For A.  
Knowles – Eat – Gymnastics –  
Rest"; Tomás Marco performing  
an unidentified piece; in the  
background, Dick Higgins and  
Juan Hidalgo, 12 November 1966

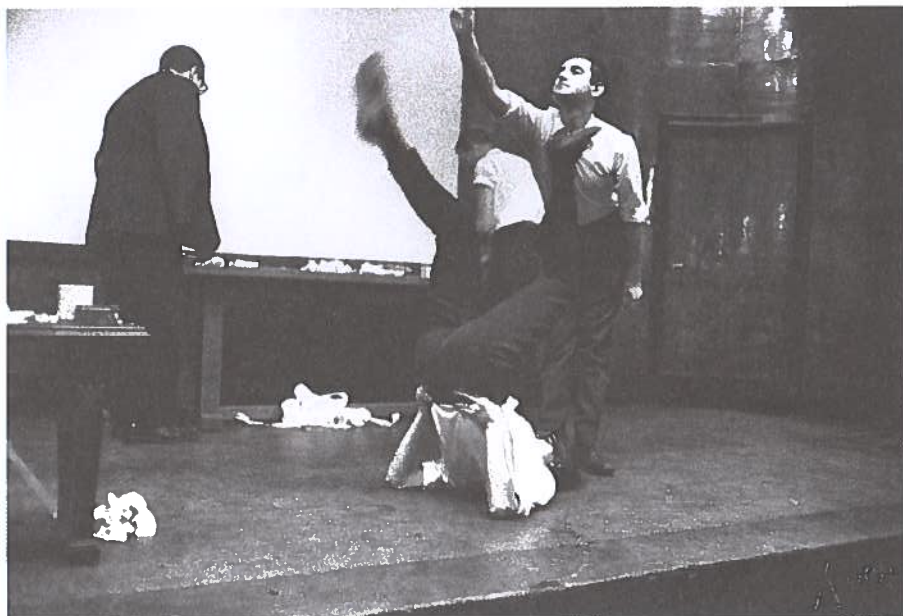
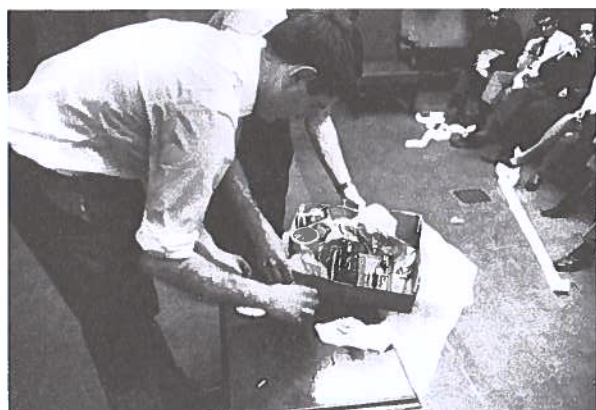


Fig. 15 Tomás Marco and Juan  
Hidalgo performing Arthur  
Køpcke's *music while you work*,  
12 November 1966



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—Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 13 July–12 August 2012  
—University of Arts, Poznań, 1–12 October 2012  
—MOCAK Museum of Contemporary Art, Kraków, 19 October–28 January 2013  
—Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen, 3 November–25 November 2012  
—Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, 1 December–28 April 2013  
—Goethe-Institut, Paris, 5 December 2012–10 January 2013  
—CAC Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius, 14 December 2012–20 January 2013

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