Chapter Eight

Case Study Number 2: A Performer’s Guide to Nasiye by Michael Finnissy

8.1 Introduction to Nasiye

Nasiye was written in 1982 for Gerald Garcia who gave the first performance on 22nd October of the same year. It was commissioned by the Unfamiliar Music Series of the Green Room Music Club, Tunbridge Wells (UK) with funding provided by South East Arts. Nasiye was Finnissy’s second solo piece for guitar, the first being Song 17 written in 1976, though he had previously used the guitar in several chamber and larger scale pieces, namely Symphony No. 1 (1962-64), Jeanne d’Arc (1967-71), Babylon (1971) and Lost Lands (1977). Nasiye is the 98th of Finnissy’s works as catalogued by Henrietta Brougham (Brougham, Fox, Pace 1997, 375), where it is described as ‘awaiting revision’. This finally occurred in 2002 when the definitive edition, completely revised, was made for the Australian guitarist, Geoffrey Morris. No performances or recordings of either version are known although Morris has recorded one of Finnissy’s later chamber pieces¹. The 1982 version was obtained from the BMIC (British Music Information Centre) and the manuscript of the 2002 version was obtained from the composer. The BMIC is no longer in existence and for a while, the new version could be obtained from its successor organisation, The British Music Collection, via the Sound and Music website (www.soundandmusic.org). It is now available from Composers Edition, a relatively new publishing venture. The first version is no longer available. In neither score does the composer specify its duration but the Brougham catalogue indicates eight minutes. Brougham states (Brougham, Fox, Pace 1997, 351) that, where there are several versions or revisions, the composer only acknowledges the final version and that ‘works awaiting revision cannot (sic) be performed’
(Brougham, Fox, Pace 1997, 352). However, the original version was available until comparatively recently, possibly withdrawn when Finnissy deposited the new version with the collection.

It is probable that guitarists wishing to perform Nasiye will in future defer to the composer's wishes and play the 2002 version. It is this version that will be considered here though reference to the original version is informative and might be considered as a primary source for interpretive purposes. The 1982 version gives no meaning of the word Nasiye but Brougham adds 'Kurdish) – folk-dance' to her catalogue entry. In the 2002 version Finnissy writes 'The title is that of a Kurdish folk dance'. There is a difference. Finnissy's interest in folk music is well known and many of his works have titles taken from ethnic origins. Nasiye is the second of a series of diverse works with Kurdish titles. The first was Yalli (1981) for solo cello. This was followed by Nasiye, and then Dilok (1982) for oboe and percussion, Cirit (1982) for solo C clarinet, Delal (1984-8) for oboe d'amore and percussion and Kulamen Dilan (1990) for soprano saxophone and percussion. Other ethnic inspired folk music cycles include pieces based on, or inspired by Australian Aboriginal and Colonial, Japanese, Sardinian, Azerbaijani and Hopi Indian folk music. Asked by Pace if he was attempting to say something about the contemporary situation of the Kurdish people, Finnissy replied:

No, that would be patronising. I'm, not sufficiently aware of Kurdish politics to attempt to articulate them in music – though 'oppression' and 'tyranny' are common enough here to register correspondences – the use of any folk material is to redress imbalance and neglect, the idea that folk music is 'trivial' or 'irrelevant'. (Brougham, Fox and Pace 1997, 29)

As mentioned earlier in Part 1 Chapter Two, Finnissy adopts a 'lament' style for some of his compositions and it is clear that Nasiye falls into this category.
8.2 The scores of the 1982 and 2002 versions – the form of the 2002 version

As bar lines are largely absent from both versions there is a difficulty in identifying sections or points of interest for consideration. For present purposes the best that can be done is to specify page and system number (for each page) and then possibly some other distinguishing feature. The 1982 version consists of 7 pages of 9 systems per page. The title, dedication and composer’s name take up the first system of the first page with the music starting on system 2. The piece ends roughly 2/3rds of the way through system 5 of page 7. The 2002 version is 6 pages long. The first page consists of the title, dedication etc. and is unnumbered. The music starts on the next page, which the composer designated page 1. This page has 10 systems, pages 2 and 3 have 12 and page 4 has 10. The piece ends at the end of the 4th system of page 5. Both versions are Finnissy’s manuscripts and in his own hand. It is well known that Finnissy worked at one time as a music copyist and the scores are admirably clear, the only caveat being the occasional difficulty in reading from a photocopy due to the lack of contrast between the blackness of the ink used in the writing and the staves. This would be eliminated in a professional publication².

The 2002 version is subdivided into several sections by double bar lines. I have denoted them as A through H. Whilst section H has also been subdivided (by the composer) with double bar lines there seems to be a continuity of the musical ideas within that section so construing them as one section seems more appropriate. The subdivisions are designated H₁ through H₁₀. The following two tables give a breakdown of the sections and their qualities:
**Table 8.1** Finnissy, *Nasiye* (2002 version) – location of each section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Location (page – system (approximate position))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>p.1 – system 1 to half way through system 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>p.1 – end of section A to half way through system 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>p.1 – end of section B to half way through system 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>p.1 – end of section C to p.2 – shortly after the beginning of system 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>p.2 – end of section D to near the end of system 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>p.2 – end of section E to p.3 – near the end of system 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>p.3 – end of section F to p.4 – end of system 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₁</td>
<td>p.4 – end of section G to half way through system 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₂</td>
<td>p.4 – end of H₁ to about 1/3ₚds of the way through system 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₃</td>
<td>p.4 – end of H₂ to the end of system 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₄</td>
<td>p.4 – end of H₃ to half way through system 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₅</td>
<td>p.4 – end of H₄ to near the end of system 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₆</td>
<td>p.4 – end of H₅ to near the end of p.5 system 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₇</td>
<td>p.5 – end of H₆ to half way through system 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₈</td>
<td>p.5 – end of H₇ to end of system 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₉</td>
<td>p.5 – end of H₈ to 2/3ₚds the way through system 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₁₀</td>
<td>p.5 – end of H₉ to end of piece.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8.2  Finnissey, Nasiye (2002 version) – composer’s descriptions of each section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Composer's descriptive marks</th>
<th>mm</th>
<th>Number of systems (Number of bars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Fast, reckless, impassioned</td>
<td>$\dot{\cdot} = 152-200$</td>
<td>4.5 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Much slower, meditative</td>
<td>$\dot{\cdot} = 96-104$</td>
<td>2 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>$\dot{\cdot} = 152$ ca.</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Much slower, meditative</td>
<td>$\dot{\cdot} = 96$ ca.</td>
<td>4.5 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Fast</td>
<td>$\dot{\cdot} = 152$ ca.</td>
<td>6 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Slower</td>
<td>$\dot{\cdot} = 96$ ca.</td>
<td>8 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Capriccioso:quasi Cadenza(meno mosso)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₁</td>
<td>Andante (10 systems in all)</td>
<td>$1/4 = 66$</td>
<td>1.5 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₂</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₃</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.5 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₄</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.5 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₅</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.5 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₆</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₇</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₈</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.5 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₉</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.7 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₁₀</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1.3 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finnissy’s employment of bar lines is quite idiosyncratic. Where they do appear it is not clear whether or not they provide some rhythmic or other performative information. Of course when a section is denoted as being one bar long, this is tantamount to saying that it is unbarred. In section A the first four and the ninth bar lines coincide with two 8th rests, though there is an indication that the previous notes should ring over them. Even then there is a peculiar circumstance that the
first, second and ninth bar lines are followed by the two rests, but the third and fourth bar lines have one rest either side (Example 8.1).

**Example 8.1** Finnissy, *Nasiye*, 2002, page1, systems 1-3

At the third bar line this coincides with a tempo change (*a tempo – poco meno*) so a distinction might be made, though making a case for a performative difference to the player might be difficult. On the other hand, each bar line in section A is associated with some dramatic change of dynamic, accent or tempo change (although these also occur elsewhere in the section – that is, they are not restricted to bar lines). There is a sense that the bar lines are providing phrasing information.

Section A can therefore be described as fast and turbulent. Extreme dynamic contrasts, sudden accents with wild melodic leaps alternate with occasional, relatively short, moments of stasis and repose. The fast (*velociss.*) descending and ascending scale type figure, which occurs several times during the piece, makes its first appearance. (This figure is first described as *leggiero e velociss.* and subsequently just *velociss.* and then *velocissimo.* It appears in section F without any such appellation and as this section is slower it might be construed that the composer wishes it to be played slower. The three subsequent appearances are all marked *velociss.*)
Section B is the first of the meditative, lyrical sections. This unbarred section is in Finnissy’s lament style with the melody mostly restricted to the notes from G sharp to E flat on the third and second strings (Example 8.2).

**Example 8.2** Finnissy, *Nasiye*, 2002, page1, system 6

8\(^{th}\) = 96 - 104

The melody is inflected with acciaccaturas that again add to the feeling of an East European folk song. The section is uniformly quiet with no unusual rhythmic disturbance to take the attention away from the melody. The occasional two or three part chords add to the textural interest and there are only brief moments of part writing. The section ends with two ¼ note rests to complete the upper part – although in context they seem rather irrelevant (Example 8.3).

**Example 8.3** Finnissy, *Nasiye* 2002, page 1, systems 7-9

Section C is loud, fast and fidgety with numerous acciaccaturas (often over wide intervals), *sforzandi* and some irregular rhythmic figuration. Apart from a short passage near the beginning, this is in one voice again and can be seen as a counterpart to the previous section. The note D on the second string seems to be significant here; the first four being unaccented, the next four *sfz* and the
remainder unaccented (see Example 8.3). The section ends with a *diminuendo over* repeated Ds all at the same pitch. The two bar lines seem to have no performative purpose.

Section D, again unbarred, develops the ideas of section B but at roughly twice the overall duration. The composer has finished the previous section at a *piano* dynamic and gives no indication of the need to change it over the next four systems. Melodic material very similar to that expressed in section B is interspersed with new, more widely ranging melodic movement and a second distinct voice becomes a more substantial presence. The writing is rhythmically more adventurous.

Section E continues the mood of section C over roughly three times the length. Again the bar lines seem to be more for the compositional convenience of the composer rather than indicating any information for the performer. The section starts *f subito* and, while there are several *cresc./dim.* hairpin dynamics, the overall impression is that this is loud until the *pp subito* towards the end. This time the *rallentando* and *diminuendo over* repeated G, repeat the effect at the end of section C. This section continually leaps to the highest fretable notes on the guitar for isolated, accentuated dramatic effect and the melodic contour is richly enhanced with numerous trills (not used since section A) in addition to the now familiar acciaccaturas (Example 8.4).

**Example 8.4** Finnissy, *Nasiye*, 2002, page 2, systems 4-6
The single line predominates but part writing is mostly in 2nd, 3rd and 4th with no 5th, few 6th and only one 7th. This section contains three instances of the descending and ascending velociss. scale pattern.

Section F is again slower and the dynamic remains at piano, apart from the strange pianissimo passages marked Sotto voce, until the forte passage near the end. It starts with a monody (with a little occasional chordal support), liberally ornamented as before with acciaccaturas. A fast ascending and descending passage, similar to the velociss. passages (but not marked as such), leads to the first of the Sotto voce sections which has the appendage ‘mysterious, labyrinthine, fugitive’ (Example 8.5).

**Example 8.5** Finnissy, *Nasiye*, 2002, page 2, systems 10-12

8th = 96ca.

This is a two-part passage and although they begin together, the parts immediately become non-aligned 8th notes. The two voices usually alternate but there are several occasions where there are two or three consecutive notes in one part. With the slower 8th note pulse it is clear that this passage need not be played particularly fast and the notation probably implies an irregularity rather than metronomic exactitude to the progress of the parts. Each part is beamed into groups of various lengths and again it is hard to tell how, or if, this is to be
interpreted by the performer. Two more velociss. passages sandwich another Sotto voce section. After this the forte passage in close two part intervals has a declamatory effect and it must be presumed that the next velociss. passage is also forte (Example 8.6).

Example 8.6 Finnissy, Nasiye, 2002, page 3, systems 4-5

The section finishes with yet another Sotto voce passage but this time it is much shorter. Each time a Sotto voce passage starts it is as if the main piece of music stops for a while so that, as if from a distance, another piece that has been playing all the time, is heard. Pace describes a similar effect in Song 9 for piano which:

includes long periods of silence, at the end of which material is resumed only to find it has sometimes progressed from where it had ended, like a car travelling behind a building, or the sun moving behind a cloud. (Pace 1996, 26)

Section G (Capriccioso: quasi cadenza) is slower still (meno mosso though for once no mm. is given). There are no dynamics at all but the bravura nature of the writing would imply a largely strong and exuberant sound. The opening two part figure has an ascending figure in the bass part consisting of E, G sharp, A, B, C and this is repeated (with some small variations) several times in the section (Example 8.7).
Example 8.7 Finnissy, *Nasiye*, 2002, page 3, systems 5-8

8th = 96 ca.

The sense of a passionate melody remains, again heavily ornamented with acciaccaturas, but this time there are several five and six note chords to enrich the texture.

All but one of these chords is over an E or A bass that suggests progress towards the quasi tonal/drone centre of A in section H. A *Sotto voce* passage occurs about half way through, with the same effect as previously (though no dynamic). The *capriccioso* returns for another three systems before the section ends with another *Sotto voce* passage.

Section H (Andante, ¼ = 66) takes the form of a substantial coda. The composer has subdivided it (by double bar lines) into ten subsections of varying lengths. Where there are bar lines (H₁, H₃ and H₉), these seem to be giving phrasing information. H₁ ends with a *rallentando* and H₂ is marked *meno*. H₂ ends with an *accelerando* and H₃ starts *a tempo*. This pattern continues to the last subsection that ends without any change of tempo. There are no dynamics at all. The section continues the monody in lament style over a drone bass of A, sometimes
supplemented by a D and occasional oscillations with G sharp. H₄ ends with the drone (supplemented with an E making a perfect 5th) establishing a firm rhythmic pulse (Example 8.8).

**Example 8.8** Finnissy, *Nasiye*, 2002, page 4, systems 9-10

\[ \frac{1}{4} = 66 \]

At last something resembling a (Kurdish?) dance emerges. This is short lived and the music continues as previously with a slight return to this dance-like pulse in the last section. The end is rather abrupt, the composer choosing to use a 16th followed by an 8th rest to signify a quick finish to the piece: no long drawn out silence to prolong the atmosphere (Example 8.9).

**Example 8.9** Finnissy, *Nasiye*, 2002, page 5, system 4

\[ \frac{1}{4} = 66 \]

8.3 *Comparison of the two versions – the form of the 1982 version*

At this point it is instructive to compare the 1982 and the 2002 versions. As this is a reworking of the same material it is not surprising that there are many
similarities as well as direct quotations. The first point to note is that the earlier version does not divide into so many subsections. Three longish sections, that we will denote X, Y and Z, can be perceived. The following table identifies these sections.

**Table 8.3** Finnissy, *Nasiye*, 1982 – section identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number of Systems (approx.)</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Opening to just after the start of p.4</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>$8^{th} = 152$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>End of X to end of system 4, page 6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>$8^{th} = 108$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td>End of Y to end of piece.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>$8^{th} = 72$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sections X and Y end with *rallentandos* of about one system duration. The piece ends *a tempo*. The passages marked *velociss.* in the 2002 version appear, sometimes subtly altered, in the 1982 version, where only two are marked *veloce*. It might be inferred that they should all be *veloce* but it need not necessarily be the case. Apart from this there are no other tempo changes at all. Sections X and Z have numerous bar lines of various lengths and again, no obvious performative function. Section Y is unbarred.

Finnissy gives no indications of tonal contrast anywhere in the 2002 version. In the 1982 version they are ubiquitous on the *first* page of X but appear less often after that. They are completely absent in Y and Z.

Similarly, X is full of dynamic contrast, often *pp to ff* but apart from four *p leggiero* passages in Y, Y and Z have no dynamics. Section X has the same fast, reckless, turbulent feel of several subsections of the 2002 version but this time sustained for a much longer duration. In fact the material in the first two systems of page 1 up to the end of the second note group of system 4 of the 1982 version is the same as
that in the first two systems of the 2002 version. The note order is nearly the same but the rhythms/note values are different and there are many octave transpositions and some enharmonic switches. For example, the F sharp/D sharp in the second note group of the second system of the 1982 becomes F sharp E flat in the second note group of the first system in 2002. The D natural in the first note group, third system of 1982 is brought forward (that is, out of order) to the last note group of the first system (p.1) in 2002 (Example 8.10 and Example 8.1).

**Example 8.10** Finnissy, *Nasiye*, 1982, page1, systems 2-3

The material in page 1, system nine of the 1982 version becomes (with similar minor alterations) page 1, system four (from *p leggiero*) of the 2002. Page 2 systems 1-7 of 1982 are almost exactly the same as section E of 2002. Many other correspondences are easily recognised. The five *sotto voce* sections of 2002 were originally two long sections and one shorter one. They do appear in the same order, however, in 1982 where they were notated with more rhythmic precision (Example 8.11).
Example 8.11 Finnissy, *Nasiye*, 1982, page 4, systems 1-4

Finnissy might have decided that his original intentions were unrealistic and that the subsequent, looser rhythmic notation was adequate³.

The lament style is certainly present in the first version where the melody is also heavily ornamented with acciaccaturas and trills (always to the semitone above). Section Z is a quite different ending to the piece. There is no hint of a drone or tonal centre and is a monody apart from three two-note chords (two perfect fifths and one perfect fourth) on the final page. The writing is almost all in the low range on the guitar only rarely going above the open G (3rd) string, and mostly on the fourth and fifth strings (Example 8.12).
The tessitura only occasionally goes below the open fifth string (A) though the piece ends on the low G on the sixth string. This is an example of Finnissy working on self-imposed constraints as described by Pace (Pace 1996, 25).

As the two versions are so different it is of interest to speculate how the title can refer to both versions if there is any other than a non-abstract meaning. Although one would not expect a simplistic transcription of the Kurdish dance form, there seem to be no significant, identifying, rhythmic similarities between the two versions and apart from the ornamented, angular melodic content of both versions, they are essentially two different pieces.

8.4 Aesthetic considerations for the performer

Finnissy's compositional catalogue now contains well over 300 items. The range and diversity of his work is enormous, making a concise summary of the aesthetics of his compositional style next to impossible. His influences range from plainchant,
jazz and popular music, ethnic folk music, as well as more traditional (and somewhat unfashionable from a modernist point of view) classical composers such as Verdi, Grieg, Alkan as well as Ives and Cage. Finnissy's engagement with these styles is always one of his own creative response to the musical material, breaking it up into fundamental elements and reworking, or recomposing it so that the traces of the original are often imperceptible.

In order to prepare Nasiye the guitarist unfamiliar with Finnissy's music might find a survey of his other music and writing useful. They will however, need to be selective as to what strand of Finnissy's oeuvre to use as instructive of any performance practice. Finnissy's own website should be consulted, as there are links there to his own writing and articles by others. Most useful are Pace's papers *The Panorama of Michael Finnissy (i) and (II)* (Pace 1996, 1997). These are a comprehensive introduction to Finnissy's works and aesthetics written around the time of his (Finnissy's) 50th birthday. Pace has continued to write extensively on Finnissy's music, most recently contributing substantial essays on *The History of Photography in Sound*, Finnissy's monumental five-hour set of piano pieces. These essays appear in the booklet accompanying the CD set.

A short précis of Finnissy’s views, as presented by Toop, was also given earlier in Chapter Two. Here, Finnissy explained his ideas of using musical material to represent complex phenomena in the real world and in particular his use of rhythmic notation in an attempt to ‘capture that excitement, that dynamic, kinetic quality’. Pace goes further. For him Finnissy:

> wishes to create a music that in some way mirrors the enormous diversity of activity that one experiences in the 'world outside' and create a dialogue with that world (Pace 1996, 30)

This connects Finnissy’s aesthetic stance to some of the composers discussed in Chapter Three.
Finnissy’s original source for *Nasiye* was a recording on a Unesco LP. He writes ‘the piece is a reflection on this material, not an attempt to reproduce the dance’ (Finnissy 2013). This LP has not been located but a CD ‘Kurdish Folk Songs and Dances’ (Various artists 1995/2007), which contains recordings from the ‘national museum of the United States’, is available and contains numerous pieces in similar style. This provides a starting point for understanding Finnissy’s original material.

Pace describes the first version of *Naisy* as ‘involving fleeting arpeggios from the constrained material, rather like flights of thwarted liberation.’ (Pace 1997, 10) This can also be said of the 2002 version though the rest of the composition feels less constrained.

Another piece from Finnissy’s series of Kurdish influenced pieces. *Cirit* (1982) for clarinet in C has numerous similarities to Nasiye. The following example, Example 8.13, gives an indication of the numerous acciaccaturas that appear throughout the piece.

**Example 8.13** Finnissy, *Cirit*, page 1, systems 1-3
By the second page of the score Finnissy introduces microtonal variation to these ornaments (Example 8.14).

Example 8.14 Finnissy, Cirit, page 2, systems 2-5

On the last page arpeggios similar to those in Nasiye appear (Example 8.15).

Example 8.15 Finnissy, Cirit, page 8, systems 1-3
Finnissy’s first solo piece for the guitar, *Song 17*, has some notational similarities to *Nasiye*. It is one of eighteen ‘Songs’ for various combinations of instruments that Finnissy wrote between 1966 and 1978. The title ‘Song’ comes from the series of short films by the American experimental filmmaker Stan Brakhage. Finnissy has acknowledged film and cinematic techniques as an influence in his composition; in particular the manipulation of time, the ability to speed up and slow down, cut and edit, shooting from odd angles, close ups etc. have their compositional analogies. Finnissy sees this influence in, for example, his *English Country Tunes* for piano (Brougham, Fox, Pace 1997, 6). *Song 17* has not, as yet, received a commercial recording but a recording by me is included. Pace describes *Songs 1-9* as being ‘mostly in explicitly bi-partite forms’ (Pace 1996, 26). Presumably the other eighteen *Songs* in Finnissy’s catalogue are composed with a similar structure. *Song 17* is also of the same bi-partite form being essentially monophonic with interjections of rapid ‘tremolando rapido - quasi mandolino’ phrases. The first of these (Example 8.16) is just on one note but later phrases are of four and six notes.

**Example 8.16** Finnissy, *Song 17*, page 2
The longest of these phrases is of twelve notes which appears towards the end, and the piece finishes with the 'mandolino' gradually fading away (Example 8.17).

**Example 8.17** Finnissy, *Song 17*, page 5, systems 2-3

Finnissy writes ‘suddenly floating’ at the start of one of these passages and all (apart from the singletons) are lentissimo (Example 8.18).

**Example 8.18** Finnissy, *Song 17*, page 3, systems 2-3

The effect of these interjections is similar to that described above in *Nasiye* – the idea of the background mandolin, unheard at first but suddenly exposed and then occluded, continuing behind the guitar. The piece has the dedication ‘For Hans-Werner Henze, the people of Gracciano di Montepulciano, and Roberto Porrioni’ so the Italian references are understandable. Tempo is problematic in this piece as Finnissy has written ‘hurriedly – velocissimo’ at the start and then mixed long
acciaccatura groups of notes with other groups in 16\textsuperscript{th} 32\textsuperscript{nd} and 64\textsuperscript{th} notes (see Example 8.16). Each performer will respond differently to the necessity of making the acciaccaturas distinctive in some way. Dynamics are also problematic as, apart from the diminuendo at the end, they are completely absent (the P in a circle at the very beginning might be a dynamic or an indication to use the thumb). This does leave the way for a flexible approach from the performer.

8.5 Technical difficulties

For the guitarist the technical difficulties are not insurmountable. Bearing in mind Finnissy’s stricture, there is no point in considering the 1982 version so the following will refer to the 2002 version. There are two impossible chords: the first chord of section D (page 1, system 9 – see Example 8.3), where it seems best not to attempt to sustain either the F or G and focus on the melodic line. The six note chord just before the first sotto voce passage of section G needs to be ‘spread’ from the bass, the low F being released to attain the high B flat (Example 8.19).

Example 8.19 Finnissy, Nasiye, 2002, page 3, system 10

\begin{equation}
8\text{th} = 96
\end{equation}

Some part writing is difficult to maintain and each guitarist will come to his or her own conclusion about whether to persevere with a heroically difficult fingering that preserves the integrity of the voicing, or opt for a compromise the infidelity of which will be masked by the overall context. For example, in the sotto voce passage at the end of section F, the high E flat is to be construed as part of the lower line,
though its tessitura would suggest (from a guitaristic point of view) a connection with the preceding D flat (page 3, system 5 – see Example 8.7).

The rhythmic writing is complex at times though for the most part an 8th note count/beat can be maintained. The compressions (6:5, 10:9, 5:3 etc.) merely ‘nudge’ the music slightly faster in the sense Thomas suggests (Thomas 2009, 85). The rallentando just before section D (page 1, system 9 – see Example 8.3) contains two nested rhythmic ‘irrationals’ but any attempt to calculate the exact relationships would miss the point, the presence of the rallentando itself guaranteeing a flexibility of approach. Similarly the 3rd triplet singletons or 2/3rd triplet dyads can be approximated (page 1, system 3 – see Example 8.1). As mentioned earlier the notation of the sotto voce passages in 8th notes implies that they need not be played particularly fast, and certainly slower than in the 1982 version. As with so much new complexity music, the complexity of the notation seems to be an attempt to inspire the player to avoid the obvious and aspire to a more transcendent performance.

8.6 Performance practice

It is pointless to comment on performance practice, as there is none at present. Gerald Garcia has simply commented:

When I first played it, Michael Finnissy presented it to me as a finished piece. We worked on it together and he turned pages for me. The rhythm was a problem, and we decided on an approximate rendition which is probably how the new version came about.
8.7 Performance notes – my own practice

In many ways Nasiye is quite conventional guitar writing. My approach to the rhythmic problems was to employ Thomas’s nudging principle to some of the rhythmic figuration.

The following notes are my practical solutions to technical problems.

The peculiar nature of the score means referring to specifics is problematic. The solution that occurs to me is to indicate the page and system number, together with other identifying features so as to isolate the particular issue. Should there be a subsequent edition of this piece these means of identification will probably not be sufficient.

Page 1
System 9: It is impossible to sustain all the notes of the three-note chord for their notated duration. I do not attempt to sustain the G or the F but focus on the coherence of the middle voice.

Page 2
System 11: This is the first of the sections marked ‘Sotto voce: mysterious, labyrinthine, fugitive’. As the note values are 8ths, my feeling is that these sections should not be played too fast.

Page 3
System 10: The six-note chord is impossible for normal hands. The chord can be arpeggiated with the bass note released at a suitable moment so as to reach the high B flat.
8.8 Conclusion

No performances are known of the 1982 version of Nasiye other than the première. Over a decade has elapsed since the 2002 definitive version of Nasiye with little interest shown by guitarists. This is strange as Finnissy has long been generally considered an ‘eminent’ composer and one might have expected more interest in his works for guitar from the guitarists keen to continue the work, started by Segovia and continued by Bream and others, to establish the guitar at the forefront of new music composition. My recordings of the new version of Nasiye and Song 17 can be found on the supplementary data files.

Notes


2  The Composers Edition version is simply a reproduction of the composer’s manuscript and, whilst perfectly legible, has the same lack of contrast.

3  A similar point is made by Garcia [Garcia 2011]

4  www.michaelfinnissy.info

6 Song 17 is also published by Composers Edition

7 (Garcia 2011).

8 The Composers Edition version retains the same pagination.