

Living Ghosts for music box, fixed media, and chamber ensemble (2025)

Living Ghosts takes its title from *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen, a work concerned with the persistence of past actions, ideas, and structures within the present. These “ghosts” are habits, inheritances, and unresolved traces that continue to shape experience, often without being fully visible. This idea provides a conceptual starting point for the piece.

The work unfolds as a series of connected episodes in which the music box and live performers move through different roles. The box emerges gradually from within the ensemble texture, at first tentative, later more defined. As the piece progresses, its patterns become more prominent, while the instrumental writing increasingly reflects and absorbs its material. The relationship is reciprocal: mechanical and human elements inform one another without fully merging.

Alongside the live performance runs a fixed layer of synchronised sound and image. This layer introduces a further level of mediation, in which material is recalled, reconfigured, and displaced. Repetitions are therefore never exact; events return altered or partial, creating the impression of memory that is active but unreliable.

The visual component, developed with animator Molly Mayhew, avoids linear narrative in favour of suggestion and fragmentation. It is not continuous, but appears at specific moments, often aligned with the emergence of distinctive music box gestures or associated sonic transformations. Images appear, dissolve, and recur with slight variation, while transitions sometimes expose the medium itself through flicker or degradation. This parallel layer does not illustrate the music but operates alongside it, reflecting similar processes of transformation and persistence.

Underlying the work is an interest in systems that are both structured and unstable, in which sounds and gestures are continually reworked. Material persists through change - it is carried forward, reshaped, and partially retained. In this sense, *Living Ghosts* reflects on the ways in which the past remains active within the present, not as something distant, but as something continually re-emerging in altered form.

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