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978-1-107-01854-9 - The Spectral Piano: From Liszt, Scriabin, and Debussy to the Digital Age

Marilyn Nonken

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The Spectral Piano

The most influential compositional movement of the past fifty years, spectralism was informed by digital technology but also extended the aesthetics of pianist-composers such as Franz Liszt, Alexander Scriabin, and Claude Debussy. Students of Olivier Messiaen such as Tristan Murail and Gérard Grisey sought to create a cooperative committed to exploring the evolution of timbre in time as a basis for the musical experience. In *The Spectral Piano*, Marilyn Nonken shows how the spectral attitude was influenced by developments in technology but also continued a tradition of performative and compositional virtuosity. Nonken explores shared fascinations with the musical experience, which united spectralists with their Romantic and early modern predecessors. Examining Murail's *Territoires de l'oubli*, Jonathan Harvey's *Tombeau de Messiaen*, Joshua Fineberg's *Veils*, and Edmund Campion's *A Complete Wealth of Time*, she reveals how spectral concerns relate not only to the past but also to contemporary developments in philosophical aesthetics.

MARILYN NONKEN is an international concertizing pianist, Associate Professor of Music and Music Education, and Director of Piano Studies at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development. Her recordings and performances have been internationally reviewed, and her publications include chapters in *Perspectives on the Performance of French Piano Music* and *Messiaen Perspectives*. A highly regarded musician, she has recorded the complete piano music of Tristan Murail – *Complete Piano Music*, and *Voix Voilees: Spectral Piano Music* – and piano music of Olivier Messiaen, Hugues Dufourt, and Joshua Fineberg, and worked closely with Murail, Dufourt, Fineberg, and Harvey.

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*From Liszt, Scriabin, and Debussy to the
Digital Age*

Marilyn Nonken

With a contributory chapter by Hugues Dufourt



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University’s mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107018549

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First published 2014

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd. Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Nonken, Marilyn, author.

The spectral piano : from Liszt, Scriabin, and Debussy to the digital age / Marilyn Nonken; with a contributory chapter by Hugues Dufort.

pages cm. – (Music since 1900)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-01854-9 (hardback)

1. Piano music – 20th century – History and criticism. 2. Spectral music – History and criticism. I. Dufort, Hugues. II. Title.

ML707.N66 2014

786.209’04–dc23

2013039680

ISBN 978-1-107-01854-9 hardback

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Acknowledgments

The Spectral Piano explores an attitude towards the piano that evolved over the course of the twentieth century, has transformed the repertoire, and continues to influence those who engage with it. In writing this book, I have benefited from the insights of performers, composers, theorists, musicologists, sound technicians, and nonmusicians alike, all of whom contributed their time and knowledge with an unusual generosity of spirit. The passion with which they joined me in my work and voiced their concerns both challenged me and encouraged me to take heart. Their shared enthusiasm continually renewed my belief that this topic will continue to captivate musicians well into the twenty-first century.

Above all, I thank Hugues Dufourt, Joshua Fineberg, Tristan Murail, and Edmund Campion, whose music has entranced me. Their works led me to reconsider all I thought I knew about the piano and the musical experience itself, and their comradeship has made my life immeasurably richer. My work with Jonathan Harvey was similarly inspiring; his passing during the final stages of writing this book saddened me, as I became aware how quickly the contemporary becomes historical. Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, Charles Rosen, and David Burge were figures whose work cast a shadow over my own, whose recent deaths brought a new sense of urgency to my project.

From the earliest stages, my efforts were thoughtfully guided by my mentors at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development: Mary Brabeck, Robert Rowe, Lawrence Ferrara, and Ronald Sadoff, for whose encouragement I am grateful. I also benefited from the generous support of The Humanities Initiative at New York University. For their commentary and thoughtful, provocative critique of my material in all the stages of its development, I thank Neely Bruce, Richard Carrick, Joel Chadabe, Roderick Chadwick, Christopher Dingle, Robert Fallon, Graeme Fullerton, Philippe Hurel, Scott McCarrey, and Barry Rigal. Special thanks are due to Joshua Cody, for his elegant translation, and Mikel Kuehn, for sharing his tremendous knowledge of computer and electronic music and penetrating criticisms, always in the most affable manner. At Cambridge University Press, thanks to Arnold Whittall, Vicki Cooper, and Fleur Jones for helping me to realize my vision. I am grateful to Fred Lerdahl, who first

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directed me towards the work of James J. Gibson; his direction convinced me to see my own work, both as a scholar and as a performer, as an ongoing experiment in the ecological perception of music. I would be nowhere without my students, whose valuable role has been that of my sounding board: Jade Conlee, Tina DiMonda, Jeff Lankov, Mario Antonio Marra, Andrew Malilay White, and especially Manuel Laufer. Words are insufficient to express my sincerest thanks to my husband George Hunka, a true writer and artist, and our daughters Goldie Celeste and Billie Swift, from whom I have learned so much in such a short time.

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1826	Liszt, <i>Etude en douze exercices</i> , S.136
1837	Liszt, <i>Douze grandes études</i> , S.137
1841	Liszt, <i>Réminiscences de Don Juan</i> , S.418
1851	Liszt, <i>Douze études d'exécution transcendante</i> , S.139
1855	Liszt, <i>Années de pèlerinage</i> , S.160 ("Première année: Suisse")
1858	Liszt, <i>Années de pèlerinage</i> , S.161 ("Deuxième année: Italie")
1874	Liszt, <i>Die Glocken des Straßburger Münsters</i> , S.6
1881	Liszt, <i>Nuages gris</i> , S.199
1883	Liszt, <i>Années de pèlerinage</i> , S.163 ("Troisième année")
1885	Liszt, <i>Bagatelle sans tonalité</i> , S.216a
1886	Liszt, <i>Unstern!</i> , S.208
1902	Debussy, <i>Pelléas et Mélisande</i>
1903	Debussy, <i>Estampes</i>
1904	Debussy, <i>L'isle joyeuse</i>
	Busoni, Piano Concerto, Op. 39
1905	Debussy, <i>Images I</i>
	Debussy, <i>La mer</i>
1906–1920	Ravel, <i>La valse</i>
1907	Debussy, <i>Images II</i>
1909	Schoenberg, <i>Drei Klavierstücke</i> , Op. 11
1909–1910	Scriabin, <i>Prométhée</i>
1910	Debussy, <i>Préludes I</i>
	Busoni, <i>Fantasia contrappuntistica</i>
1911–1912	Scriabin, <i>Poème-nocturne</i> , Op. 61
	Scriabin, Sonata no. 6, Op. 62
1913	Debussy, <i>Préludes II</i>
	Scriabin, Sonata no. 9, Op. 68
	Scriabin, Sonata no. 10, Op. 70
1914	Scriabin, <i>Vers la flamme</i> , Op. 72
	Scriabin, <i>Etudes</i> , Op. 74
1923	Cowell, <i>Aeolian Harp</i>
1924	Viñes, <i>Menuet spectral (à la mémoire de Maurice Ravel)</i>
	Gershwin, <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i>
1925	Cowell, <i>The Banshee</i>
1928	Ravel, <i>Boléro</i>
1928–1929	Messiaen, <i>Préludes</i>

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1940–1941	Messiaen, <i>Quatuor pour la fin du temps</i>	
1943	Messiaen, <i>Visions de l'amen</i>	
1944	Messiaen, <i>Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus</i>	
1946	Boulez, <i>Première sonate</i>	
1946–1947	Hába, <i>Suite for Quarter-Tone Piano</i> , Op. 62	
1947	Ives, <i>Sonata no. 2, Concord, Mass., 1840–1860</i>	
	Babbitt, <i>Three Compositions for Piano</i>	
1947–1948	Babbitt, <i>Composition for Four Instruments</i>	
1948	Boulez, <i>Deuxième sonate</i>	
	Cage, <i>Sonatas and Interludes</i>	
	Messiaen, <i>Cantélyodjayâ</i>	
1948–1962	Nancarrow, <i>Studies for Player Piano</i> , nos. 1–30	
1949	Messiaen, “Mode de valeurs et d'intensités” (<i>Quatre études de rythme</i>)	
1950–1951	Goeyvaerts, <i>Nummer 1</i> (<i>Sonata for Two Pianos</i>)	
1951	Stockhausen, <i>Kreuzspiel</i>	
1951–1952	Boulez, <i>Structures Ia</i>	
1952	Fano, <i>Sonate pour deux pianos</i>	
1953	Messiaen, <i>Réveil des oiseaux</i>	
	Stockhausen, <i>Klavierstücke I–IV</i>	
1954	Varèse, <i>Déserts</i>	
1955	Boulez, <i>Le marteau sans maître</i>	
1955–1956	Messiaen, <i>Oiseaux exotiques</i>	
1955–1957	Boulez, <i>Troisième sonate</i>	
1956–1958	Messiaen, <i>Catalogue d'oiseaux</i>	
1957–1962	Boulez, <i>Pli selon pli</i>	
1958	Varèse, <i>Poème électronique</i>	
1959	Scelsi, <i>Quattro pezzi per orchestra (su una nota sola)</i>	
1959–1960	Messiaen, <i>Chronochromie</i>	
1961	Xenakis, <i>Herma</i>	
	Ligeti, <i>Atmosphères</i>	
1962	Johnston, <i>Knocking Piece</i>	
	Messiaen, <i>Sept haïkaï</i>	
1963	Messiaen, <i>Couleurs de la cité céleste</i>	
1964	Johnston, <i>Sonata for Microtonal Piano</i>	
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1971	Messiaen, <i>La fauvette des jardins</i>
1972	Crumb, <i>Makrokosmos I</i> Curtis-Smith, <i>Rhapsodies</i>
1973	Crumb, <i>Makrokosmos II</i> Xenakis, <i>Evryali</i>
1974	Babbitt, <i>Reflections</i> Lévinas, <i>Appels</i> Grisey, <i>Périodes (Les espaces acoustiques II)</i>
1975	Rzewski, <i>The People United Will Never Be Defeated!</i> Cage, <i>Etudes Australes</i> Grisey, <i>Partiels (Les espaces acoustiques III)</i>
1976	Grisey, <i>Prologue (Les espaces acoustiques I)</i> Nono, ... <i>sofferte onde serene</i> ... Murail, <i>Mémoire/Erosion</i>
1977	Chowning, <i>Stria</i> Feldman, <i>Piano</i> Finnissy, <i>English Country Tunes</i> Grisey, <i>Modulations (Les espaces acoustiques IV)</i> Lévinas, <i>Voix dans un vaisseau d'airain</i> Murail, <i>Territoires de l'oubli</i> Vivier, <i>Shiraz</i>
1978	Adams, <i>Phrygian Gates</i> Murail, <i>Ethers</i> Grisey, <i>Modulations</i>
1978–1979	Dufourt, <i>Saturne</i> Lévinas, <i>Ouverture pour une fête étrange</i>
1980	Carter, <i>Night Fantasies</i> Harvey, <i>Mortuos plango, vivos voco</i> Murail, <i>Gondwana</i> Grisey, <i>Transitoires (Les espaces acoustiques V)</i>
1981	Ferneyhough, <i>Lemma-Icon-Epigram</i> Feldman, <i>Triadic Memories</i> Xenakis, <i>Mists</i>
1984	Harvey, <i>Bhakti</i>

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1986	Grisey, <i>Talea</i>	
1990	Campion, <i>A Complete Wealth of Time</i>	
1991	Fineberg, <i>Lightning</i>	
1992	Murail, <i>Cloches d'adieu, et un sourire ...</i> Lucier, <i>Music for Piano with Slow Sweep, Pure Wave Oscillators</i> Troncin, <i>Seul</i>	
1993	Murail, <i>La mandragore</i> Troncin, <i>Ciel ouvert</i> Harvey, <i>One Evening</i>	
1994	Harvey, <i>Tombeau de Messiaen</i> Harvey, <i>Advaya</i> Lindberg, <i>Concerto for Piano and Orchestra</i>	
1994–1996	Grisey, <i>Vortex temporum</i>	
1995	Dufourt, <i>An Schwager Kronos</i> Fineberg, <i>Till Human Voices Wake Us</i>	
1996	Campion, <i>Natural Selection</i>	
1997	Dufourt, <i>Meeresstille</i> Harvey, <i>Haiku</i> Leroux, <i>M</i>	
1997–1998	Fineberg, <i>Recueil de pierre et de sable</i> Fineberg, <i>Tremors</i>	
1998	Harvey, <i>Homage to Cage, à Chopin (und Ligeti ist auch dabei)</i>	
2000	Dufourt, <i>Rastlose Liebe</i> Lindberg, <i>Jubilees</i>	
2001	Fineberg, <i>Veils</i>	
2002	Murail, <i>Les travaux et les jours</i>	
2003	Harvey, <i>Bird Concerto with Pianosong</i>	
2004	Dufourt, <i>L'origine du monde</i>	
2005	Campion, <i>Outside Music</i> Dalbavie, <i>Piano Concerto</i> Dufourt, <i>L'Afrique d'après Tiepolo</i> Dufourt, <i>Soleil de proie</i> Saariaho, <i>Ballade</i>	
2006	Dufourt, <i>Erlkönig</i>	
2007	Saariaho, <i>Prelude</i> Hamelin, <i>Etude no. 8, "Erlkönig after Goethe"</i>	
2008	Dufourt, <i>La ligne gravissant la chute (Hommage à Chopin)</i>	
2010	Lévinas, <i>Concerto pour un piano-espace no. 2 (revised)</i> Campion, <i>Flow-Debris-Falls</i>	

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2012	Murail, <i>Le désenchantement du monde</i>
	Fineberg, <i>Grisaille</i>
	Dufourt, <i>On the Wings of the Morning</i>