

MURMURATIONS

MARCIA HADJIMARKOS

PIANO



SATIE • SKEMPTON • PÄRT • MONK • TAILLEFERRE • MOMPOU • CAGE • GLASS

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1. Erik Satie • Pièces froides, Danse de Travers 1, 1897
2. Erik Satie • Pièces froides, Danse de Travers 2, 1897
3. Erik Satie • Pièces froides, Danse de Travers 3, 1897
4. Arvo Pärt • Für Alina, 1976
5. Arvo Pärt • Für Anna Maria, 2006
6. Arvo Pärt • Variations for the Healing of Arinushka, 1977
7. Erik Satie • Gnossienne 1, 1890-92
8. Erik Satie • Gnossienne 2, 1893
9. Erik Satie • Gnossienne 3, 1890
10. Germaine Tailleferre • Pastorale Inca , 1929
11. Erik Satie • Gnossienne 4, 1891
12. Erik Satie • Gnossienne 5, 1893
13. Erik Satie • Gnossienne 6, 1897
14. Erik Satie • Gnossienne 7, 1897
15. Federico Mompou • Música Callada XI, 1962
16. Federico Mompou • Cànts Magics 4, 1920
17. John Cage • In a Landscape, 1948
18. Philip Glass • Metamorphosis 2, 1989
19. Federico Mompou • Música Callada XX, 1965
20. Meredith Monk • Ellis Island, 1981
21. John Cage • Soliloquy, 1945
22. Howard Skempton • Interlude 8, 1989
23. Howard Skempton • Postlude – The Keel Row, 1989
24. Howard Skempton • Prelude 7, 1989
25. Howard Skempton • Prelude 3, 1989
26. Howard Skempton • Prelude 5, 1989

BIOGRAPHY

Marcia Hadjimarkos performs, records, and teaches on a variety of keyboard instruments from the earliest Florentine piano to its modern counterpart, with particular interest in clavichords and historic pianos both grand and square. A native of Oregon, she has lived in Burgundy for many years. She studied fortepiano with Jos Van Immerseel at the Paris Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique after earning degrees in piano performance and French from the University of Iowa.

Recent career highlights include song recitals with Emma Kirkby, Beth Taylor, and Julianne Baird, the commemoration of Hélène de Montgeroult's 250th anniversary at the Paris Conservatoire, a concert series on a facsimile of the Cristofori piano, a clavichord concert at the Institute for Advanced Study, an 8-recital performance of the complete Haydn sonatas on several early keyboards, and the premiere of a clavichord suite written for her by American composer John Harbison.

Marcia also enjoys working with actors and singers to co-create programs that combine words and music, such as 'The Intimate Mozart' (based on the Mozart family letters) and 'Entre Deux Feux' (commemorating popular and art songs of the World War I era). She plays the four-hand piano and two-keyboard repertoires with Brice Pauset, and is a member of L'Académie des Cosmopolites ensemble. She gives frequent master classes on historic pianos and clavichords in conservatories, museums, universities, and festivals.

Her performances are described as "imaginatively realized, full-blooded, and loving", "brilliantly intelligent", and "dynamic, free, and powerfully shaped". She has played at the International Piano Festival in La Roque d'Anthéron, La Folle Journée de Nantes, the Sablé Festival, l'Arsenal de Metz, the National Music Museum, Rencontres Internationales Harmoniques, the Nordic Historical Keyboard Festival, the Cobbe, Finchcocks, Bad Krozingen, Fenton House and Russell Collections, the San Diego Early Music Society, MusicSources...

Her recordings of Mozart Sonatas and Rondos, Haydn Sonatas, Character Pieces by C.P.E. Bach, Haydn songs & cantatas with Emma Kirkby, Viennese music with Hugo Reyne (czakan), and Schubert Dances and Sonata have been enthusiastically received, and have earned various awards including a Diapason d'Or. A recording of solo and chamber works by Hélène de Montgeroult played on an 1817 square piano, with mezzo-soprano Beth Taylor and violinist Nicolas Mazzoleni, will be released in October 2023 on the Seulétoile label. The Murmurations album marks her return to the modern piano and its repertoire after many years of focusing on earlier keyboard instruments.



THE WORKS

What brings these pieces together? They span and slightly overlap the 20th century, with Satie's *Gnossiennes* and *Dances de Travers* dating from the tail end of the 19th century (when the piano used on this recording was built), Pärt's *Für Anna Maria* written in 2006, and the works of Cage, Monk, Tailleferre, Glass, Mompou and Skempton falling in between. Eight composers, all associated with minimalism to a greater or lesser degree, born in the United States, France, England, Spain, and Estonia. Eight approaches to resonance, pattern, repetition, layering, phrasing, form, color, touch, texture, and volume on the piano. The ways their music dovetails remind me of a murmuration, a cloud of iridescent starlings swirling and shape-shifting through the sky at dusk, seemingly at random but in fact governed by each bird's observation of the seven other birds nearest it. So: a small murmuration of seven, plus one extra for luck, inspired by the enthusiasm of friends, students, and other musicians, and by my own reactions to the mesmerizing qualities of this music in all its diversity, and the way it pulls me in time and again. This selection only scratches the surface of the works that fall under the capacious umbrella of minimalism, but it's a start.

Erik Satie's *Gnossiennes*, though written before the turn of the 20th century, bear an unmistakable minimalist stamp in their "repeated, identical melismas over a uniform rhythmic accompaniment, (that) plunge us into a sound world that is timeless and immobile" ¹. The first three *Gnossiennes* have no barlines and are studded with whimsical recommendations for the player such as "*Munissez-vous de clairvoyance*" ("Bring your own clairvoyance"), and "*Très luisant*" ("Very glossy"). The fourth and sixth *Gnossiennes* are in the same vein as the first three, sans the tongue-in-cheek performance suggestions, while the fifth is reminiscent of Satie's years as a piano player in Montmartre cafés, and the seventh is a solo reworking of one of the movements of *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire* for piano four-hands.

Satie's *Dances de Travers*, along with his other repetitive works - of which *Vexations*, to be played 840 times without interruption, is the most notorious - give the impression of having prophesied minimalism more than half a century before its 'official' beginnings in mid 20th-century North America. These "Crosswise Dances" are the second set of three *Pièces Froides* ("Cold Pieces") dating from 1897. They present "three slightly different treatments of one scheme of broken chords in ceaseless modulation. A strong bass line propels each section through to the end without any rests or change in rhythm. The soprano line scarcely forms a melody, but repeats unhurried groups of notes which lead the shifting harmonies (...). (They) use repetition and near repetition to create a feeling not of stillness but of controlled circular movement" ². The *Dances de Travers* also dispense with barlines, and hints for the player such as Blanc ("White"), *Merveilleusement* ("Amazingly"), and *Sans bruit* ("Without noise") are scattered through the score like the white pebbles Hansel and Gretel dropped here and there in the forest.

The Catalan composer Federico Mompou stated that he sought “the greatest expressive force with maximum simplicity and economy of means, as well as a return to primitivism in order to present the musical idea naked and pure.”³ Like Arvo Pärt, Mompou used bell sounds in his compositions, most of which are short improvisatory works for solo piano, some without barlines or key signatures. Mompou’s mother’s family had been bell-makers since the 1400s, and the composer spent time working in their foundry himself. The sound of tolling bells features in many of his pieces, including the intimate miniatures from *Musica Callada* (“Silent Music”) and *Cants Màgics* (“Magic Songs”) heard here.

Germaine Tailleferre impressed Satie in 1917 with her *Jeux de plein air* for two pianos; the older composer declared she was his “sister in music” and invited her to join the Les Nouveaux jeunes, later the Groupe des six, which also included Milhaud, Honegger, Poulenc, Durey, and Auric. Like Skempton’s *Images, Pastorale Inca*, penned in 1929, was written as the soundtrack for a documentary. Although Tailleferre is not commonly associated with minimalism, she made use of some of its most characteristic elements in her imaginary ‘Inca’ music: “minimal material, repetition, and mostly tonal, repeated with discipline, (...) often static, almost always hypnotic”⁴. Rather than ending with a closing gesture the piece cuts off abruptly in mid-trill. Perhaps in imitation of a human sacrifice?

John Cage wrote *Soliloquy* in 1945 to accompany a solo dance choreographed and performed by Merce Cunningham. This “uncanny precursor to Minimalism”⁵, featuring ostinato basses and repeated motifs, is made up of excerpts from the first Act of Cage’s *Four Walls* for solo piano. Do the 7 bars of silence about a third of the way through the piece look forward to Cage’s infamous 4’33”, first performed in 1952? Or should that honor go to *Waiting*, composed the same year for the dancer Louise Lippold, and which includes just 11 bars of music for prepared or unprepared piano, along with 25 bars of silence?

In a Landscape, also written for Louise Lippold, dates from 1948. This ethereal piece was choreographed by Lippold and premiered with Cage at the piano at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Its rigid rhythmic structure of 15 x 15 bars, with each section divided into 5+7+3 bars, is tempered by the instruction to the player to depress both the damper pedal and the una corda pedal throughout, which results in a rippling wash of sound that may reflect the landscape of wooded hillsides and lake that surrounded this now defunct liberal arts institution whose teachers included Cage and Cunningham alongside Gropius, Rauschenberg, Motherwell, Buckminster Fuller, and other high priests of the American avant-garde.

The Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, known today as a spiritual minimalist, “overcame a prolonged creative block (...) thanks in part to his discovery of medieval and Renaissance music. His next step, paradoxically, was one that could have occurred only to a composer brought up with the creative precepts of socialist realism and its principle of ‘obraznost’ or ‘imagery’, which encouraged composers to convey specific ideas in music by imitating and adapting the sounds (including the music) of surrounding reality. Applying this highly materialistic stylistic principle

to the task of conveying impressions of spirituality and sublimity, Pärt fastened on the sound of bells. (...) which became for (him) the sonic equivalent of an icon: a holy image that embodied mystical belief in material form.”⁶ *Für Alina* was the first piece written in Pärt’s new tintinnabular style – from the Latin word meaning “bell” – in 1976. A ringing bell produces overtones, and “to achieve a comparable sonic aura, Pärt accompanied the notes of a diatonic melody with overtones produced by the notes of an arpeggiated tonic triad in some fixed relationship to the melody notes.”⁷ *Für Alina* has no time signature and just two types of notes: whole notes and filled-in noteheads. The damper pedal is held down almost continually. The resulting fifteen-bar piece is built by adding one extra beat to each successive bar, up to eight notes, and then subtracting one beat per bar to the end. Despite this rigid structure, *Für Alina*’s sublime and haunting sonic aura has a strong emotional impact.

Pärt’s *Variationen zur Gesundung von Arinuschka* (“Variations on the Healing of Arinuschka”) was written in 1977 for his daughter, who was recovering from appendicitis. It is based on a simple rising and falling scale, A minor in the first three variations and A major in the final three. As described by the Arvo Pärt Center, “The clear and transparent soundscape of this early *tintinnabuli* composition is created by the resonating overtones and subtle use of the pedal.”⁸ *Für Anna Maria* (2006) was commissioned by a Pärt family friend for her tenth birthday. The performer can choose between two suggestions on how to interpret this short piece, one quick and joyful (reflecting Anna Maria’s character) the other slower and more contemplative.

The composer, singer, choreographer, filmmaker, and performance artist Meredith Monk originally conceived *Ellis Island* for two pianos. Her short film of the same name, also released in 1981, evokes the arrival of America’s immigrants in the now decrepit halls of Ellis Island, but does not include the eponymous piano piece heard in its solo piano version on this album. In the preface to *Piano Album II* Monk writes she “was always drawn to 20th-century music, particularly Mompou, Satie and Bartók.”⁹ She suggests that Ellis Island should sound “like clear water, flowing”¹⁰ and “shimmer”¹¹ as it takes the player and listener on a journey of sparkling repeated motifs in the piano’s upper register that are grounded by pulsating ostinato Ds and As heard singly or together at the beginning of each bar.

Like Tailleferre’s *Pastorale Inca*, Howard Skempton’s *Images* were originally written to accompany filmed images. In 1989 the BBC commissioned him to write piano pieces that resembled Satie’s *Gymnopédies* for a documentary commemorating the invention of photography. The *Interludes* and *Preludes* from the soundtrack were subsequently published in a volume called *Images*, the name it shares with the documentary. Skempton grants that John Cage and LaMonte Young – one of the oft-cited Big Four minimalists (Young, Terry Riley, Philip Glass and Steve Reich) – were “important to him at different stages”¹², but claims to have “remained independent of all mainstream tendencies in new music.”¹³ His compositions are characterized by “radical simplicity and directness (along with) an extreme economy of means (and) a concentration on essentials.”¹⁴ *Postlude – The Keel Row* is based on a traditional

song about keelmen in Newcastle-upon-Tyne; there are both English and Scottish versions dating from the 18th century or before. Keelmen worked on keels - boats that transported coal from the banks of the shallow river to collier ships waiting in deeper water.

Though widely considered to be a card-carrying minimalist, Philip Glass describes himself as a classicist (he studied with Nadia Boulanger) and his compositions as “music with repetitive structures”. That said, he is a major exponent of the minimalist style, and one of the most important composers of the 20th century. His output includes 15 operas, 14 symphonies, myriad chamber compositions, and numerous pieces for solo piano, among many other works. During his time in Paris he encountered the sitar player Ravi Shankar, whose music inspired him to delve into the traditions of India, North Africa, and the Himalayas, which he then incorporated into his own works. The five pieces in the *Metamorphosis* series are based on Kafka’s story *The Metamorphosis*, and were used to express “existential dread” on the soundtrack of the documentary *The Thin Blue Line*. *Metamorphosis Two* features the elements of minimal music described by Michael Nyman in 1972: “(it) not only cuts down the area of sound-activity to an absolute minimum, but submits the scrupulously selective, mainly tonal, material to mostly repetitive, highly disciplined procedures.”¹⁵

Marcia Hadjimarkos, May 2023

¹ Satie, Erik, *Sept Gnossiennes*, Editions Salabert, 2006, introduction by Ornella Volta, p.1.

² Shattuck, Roger, *The Banquet Years*, Vintage Books, New York, 1968, p. 129-30.

³ Mompou, Federico, *Musica Callada*, Editions Salabert, 1993, preface by Narcis Bonet.

⁴ O’Brien, Kerry, and Robin, William, *On Minimalism*, University of California Press, Oakland, 2023, p. 4.

⁵ Cage, John, *Works for Piano Prepared Piano and Toy Piano Volume 4 1933-45*, Edited by Margaret Leng Tang, C.F. Peters, New York. Preface, page iii.

⁶ Taruskin, Richard, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Volume 5, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, p. 401.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁸ <https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/>, retrieved 9 May 2023.

⁹ Monk, Meredith, *Piano Album II*, Boosey and Hawkes, Inc. 2015, Note from the Composer.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Performer’s Notes.

¹² <http://www.musicnow.co.uk/composers/skempton.html#Biographical%20Notes>, retrieved May 8, 2023.

¹³ *Ibid.*

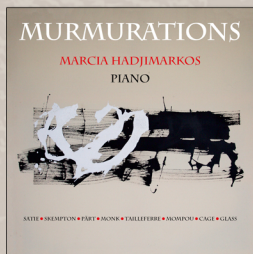
¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ O’Brien, *Op cit.*, Introduction, p. 4.

Thank you to the old and new friends who inspired this album and helped it take shape:

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and Goody Cable, to whom the album is dedicated with love.



Murmurations features Marcia Hadjimarkos performing on an 1887 New York Steinway Model B and was captured by an AEA R88 Stereo Ribbon Microphone through two channels of D.W. Fearn all-tube Preamplication direct to DSD. Additional ambience provided by a Lexicon 224X Digital Reverberator



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