
PREFACE
HIDDEN HEARTACHE—100 MINUTES
OF PIANO MUSIC FROM THE LAST 100 YEARS
IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL
INEQUALITY AND UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONS
Simone Keller

1 Peggy Seeger in an interview with Michael Burland in *The American*, 6/2018, Salisbury 2018, 48.
2 J. Michele Edwards, cited as in Samuel A. Floyd Jr. (ed.), *International Dictionary of Black Composers*, Chicago 1999, 917.

In an interview about her mother, the composer Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901–1953), Peggy Seeger said in 2018: “She died before she—or anybody—realised how good she was.”¹ One could say the same about Julia Amanda Perry (1924–1979) or Irene Higginbotham (1918–1988), two outstanding women composers whose immense talent hasn’t prevented them from remaining almost unnoticed today. As a Black woman with a physical impairment after suffering several strokes, Julia Amanda Perry found herself in a “triple marginalised position.”² Irene Higginbotham ought to be an icon solely on the strength of having written the evergreen song *Good Morning Heartache* for Billie Holiday in 1946, but she has regrettably remained so little known that she is regularly confused with Irene Kitchings, who also wrote for Holiday.

There are many other musicians of international stature—both women and men—who have unjustly failed to receive widespread recognition. The composer, singer and pianist Julius Eastman (1940–1990), for example, studied at the renowned Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. He briefly found acceptance for his work in established circles but died far too soon, leaving behind a powerful oeuvre that denounces structural racism and homophobia, and has lost none of its topicality.

The poet and composer Olga Diener (1890–1963) is another worthy of discovery. She was born in St.Gallen and studied the violin and composition there and in London, Basel, and Paris, and lived in Altnau in Canton Thurgau from 1933 to 1943. Hermann Hesse read her texts and judged them to have “far too much dreaming” in them. But perhaps he had actually put his finger on what constituted Diener’s uniqueness and independence as an artist. It is only in the last 20 years that her work has gradually been rediscovered.

When the Cultural Foundation of Canton Thurgau gave me a free hand to organize a publication in the series *Facetten*, I decided that

I wanted to use this opportunity to bring structurally disadvantaged composers out of oblivion, and let us hear them again.

In recent years, I have consistently resisted sitting down in a recording studio and producing music under such “artificial” conditions, with microphones in front of me instead of an audience, because I have always defined myself as a live musician who makes music in the moment, in real time, and who would like to be able to touch the people who are in the same room. But it also became clear to me just how important it is to my cause to take time and care to capture the music of these composers and to immortalize it. Thus it happened that the present edition in the *Facetten* series comprises not just a book, but sound recordings too: 100 minutes of piano music from the last 100 years.

For many years now, I have been playing regularly—both as a freelancer and as a soloist—with the Orchestra of the Musikkollegium Winterthur. It was founded in 1629 and is the oldest ensemble of its kind still in existence in Switzerland. The Musikkollegium rehearses and holds its concerts in the venerable City Hall of Winterthur, the “Stadthaus”, which was built by Gottfried Semper in 1865–1869. It was a special pleasure for me to record the piano music for this publication in this historically significant building, in collaboration with my sound engineer Michaela Wiesbeck.

The Great Hall of the Stadthaus became a center of European musical life in the early 20th century, thanks to the conductor Hermann Scherchen and the local patron Werner Reinhart. But it was not a venue to which a composer like Olga Diener was given admittance, despite her being well known to Reinhart. Her male peers Igor Stravinsky, Richard Strauss and Anton Webern were all welcome guests. But we also look in vain for the names of Julia Amanda Perry or Ruth Crawford Seeger on programs of their time, nor does today’s public encounter them in the concert halls of classical music.

If we ponder what piano music of the past 100 years deserves greater attention, it soon becomes obvious that there are thousands of hours of unheard, unplayed works by underrepresented composers. The selection I ultimately made is very personal, and closely connected to my own pianistic activities, both in Switzerland and in the USA, where I have often had the privilege of working in recent years.

The compositions of Julia Amanda Perry, Ruth Crawford Seeger and Julius Eastman have been with me for a long time, and I am constantly endeavouring to garner more attention for these bold avantgardists of the last century. But it was also very important to me that *Hidden Heartache* should not merely gather together historical figures, but also present compositions of today that reveal varied perspectives on societal and power inequalities while at the same time paying homage to the music of Julius Eastman and Julia Amanda Perry. These new works by the Swiss composers Jessie Cox and Cristina Janett, and the Americans Julie Herndon and Jessie Marino, were created in direct collaboration with me.

Cristina Janett grew up in a musical family in Canton Thurgau where she was early on exposed to a wide range of cultural influences. I spent my own childhood on a farm in the neighbouring village. No one played music in my home—it was only much later that I discovered folk music with its multifarious influences. And it was only when I began working with Cristina Janett that I realised just how much it is part of my identity.

I got to know the Swiss composer Jessie Cox in New York through the offices of the musician George Lewis. I was working with him on works by Julius Eastman, which at the time were also being recorded by Michaela Wiesbeck. Jessie Cox and I decided back then that we wanted to realise a joint project: the present publication is the concrete manifestation of that wish.

I also got to know Julie Herndon and Jessie Marino in the USA when they were still students and I was on a residency at the invitation of Stanford University. We have since embarked on an intensive collaboration that has resulted in two major music-theatre productions in Switzerland. Their two piano pieces are small excerpts from those works—reflections and memories of them. In *Mirrors* by Julie Herndon, the Steinway D grand piano of the Winterthur City Hall can be heard along with three of the four old, hammered-out pianos on which I incessantly used to play the monumental compositions of Julius Eastman together with the Kukuruz Quartet. *Slender Threads* by Jessie Marino is a contemplative reminiscence of Julia Amanda Perry. This piece was played live in near-total darkness in order to focus fully on the memory of that great composer. At a pizzicato shortly before the end of the piece, I simultaneously pull on a hidden fishing line to which a torch is attached. It is pointed at several mirror fragments lying on the floor, which suddenly causes dots of light to dance all over the room in a kind of languid disco-ball effect—it's a gentle act of rebellion against forgetting.

In my many years spent working with different communities—in asylum centers, prisons and schools—I have been confronted time and again with very different music: with all manner of styles, genres and sounds from other cultures. So it was important to me that the selection of works recorded here should not be too one-dimensional just because my own roots are in the Western classical tradition. This is also why I asked the oud player and composer Abathar Kmath, with whom I have often collaborated in recent years, to record two “interventions.” He decided to play his piece *Basalt* بازلت from 2010, which won second place in a composition competition in Syria in 2014. And he also decided to compose a new piece: *Blue* أزرق.

Abathar Kmash's partner May Alrefai provided us with inspiration while we were working on his pieces. As we made music and cooked together, listening and sharing ideas, poetry emerged that we wanted to reproduce in this book. The poem *Blue* أزرق by May Alrefai, based on the eponymous composition by Abathar Kmash, describes music as the root of life. She gave me the poem with the desire that it be "a simple guest" in this book.

There are other musical guests who have similarly accompanied me. Besides the abovementioned Arabic interventions, I have also recorded four compositions by Lil Hardin Armstrong (1898–1971) together with Valeria Curti, the solo bassoonist in the Musikkollegium Winterthur. This was done in the full knowledge that our homage to this great jazz composer, who even today remains in the shadow of her world-famous husband, neither corresponds to any kind of historical performance practice nor does justice to any contemporary understanding of jazz interpretation. But it was important to me to bridge this gap between classical music and jazz, while nevertheless leaving the main role in *Good Morning Heartache* by Irene Higginbotham (whom I already mentioned above) entirely to the jazz trombonist Michael Flury. This piece can be found in several different interpretations as hidden tracks at the end of the CDs. They represent the abundance of unheard music of the last 100 years that could feature as a kind of endless loop.

The works by Hardin and Higginbotham have been arranged by Philip Bartels, who sought to find a unifying musical language that is situated between different times and different styles. The basic features of *Good Morning Heartache* remain recognizable, but a romantic gondola song by Fanny Mendelssohn is heard as if through a thin wall of glass, and in *Struttin' with some Barbecue* by Lil Hardin Armstrong, we are suddenly joined by an out-of-tune, vintage toy piano that John Cage elevated from a children's plaything

to a concert instrument in 1948, and which brings to this standard a kind of a fragile playfulness.

This immense spectrum of different music with the most diverse of references cannot possibly be properly appreciated by means of a CD booklet, which is why we here present a *book* instead.

During one of my concert tours in the USA, I took part in a roundtable discussion about Julius Eastman with the musicologist Ellie M. Hisama. Apart from her interest in Eastman, she has also engaged intensively with Julia Amanda Perry and Ruth Crawford Seeger, and kindly agreed when I urged her to contribute an essay to this publication.

Musicologists have never before investigated the work of Olga Diener, but Michelle Ziegler immediately became enthusiastic about it. After conducting an enormous amount of research, she wrote the text on this forgotten composer that is now featured here.

The composer Jessie Cox has also contributed an extensive essay. It comprises not just an analysis of his composition *Black/blackness*, but also engages with fundamental issues regarding expanded listening experiences.

In addition to musicological texts, this book also gathers together voices that address today's debates on inequality and discrimination from different perspectives. For example, the historian Ruramisai Charumbira poses critical questions about the Swiss understanding of the concept of "tolerance," while the social anthropologist Alain Leite Stampfli examines structural and institutional participation to explore what efforts might be needed to achieve a pluralistic society.

Mardoché Kabengele's activities include an active involvement in the "Berner Rassismusstammtisch," a transdisciplinary, antiracist collective. He is committed on many different levels to bringing together people with

different realities in life, and to initiating a levelheaded discourse on (post-) migration. He has written an extremely personal text for *Hidden Heartache* that deals with his family history and consists of a fictional dialogue between himself and his parents.

The sociologist Anja Nunyola Glover has often inspired me to address systems of oppression and to promote new narratives that might alter our collective consciousness. Her text here describes our society as one that values productivity over reflexivity, and she explains why a commitment to justice is bitterly needed.

I first came into contact with Sandra Hetzl through the poem by May Alrefai mentioned earlier, for she translated it from Arabic into German for this book. A dialogue developed between us about her work and her background. She kindly agreed to my request to commit to paper her personal reflections on “us” and “you” for this book.

The researchers Oxana Ivanova-Chessex and Antoine Chessex share a common view on postcolonialism and societal inequalities, seen from the differing perspectives of their respective disciplines of pedagogy and music. Their text in this book is the first time that they have ever written a text together.

The other writers featured here are “soloists,” just as my recordings are mostly of solo works, even though these were made in close collaboration with the composers and our sound engineer.

For me personally, playing solo has always been a secondary consideration in recent years, since I have always felt much more alive through the process of exchange and the inspiration that comes from making music with others. It was only the isolation caused by the Covid pandemic that sent me back to myself, leading me to an awareness that it is important how I position myself as a soloist. Strengthening this side of me can in turn enable

me to achieve a new, more differentiated role alongside others in duos or larger ensembles. To me, being a soloist does not just mean putting myself in the spotlight and getting all the attention on my own, but above all it is about taking a stance on things, assuming contentious positions in full view of the public, and displaying courage and attitude.

All of us who have been involved in making this book and these recordings want more justice and a greater awareness of inequality. This is what we are fighting for, and this is to what we are committed. All our contributors should be heard and seen in their diversity. The compositions and the texts featured here are highly heterogeneous in form and content, and their multifacetedness has been left intentionally as it is.

Hidden Heartache is thus like a collection of different X-ray images that try to probe hidden pain—taking a closer look inside, adding different contrasting agents in order to acquire a clearer image. When Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen discovered X-rays at the close of the 19th century, he was afraid that people might think him insane. Today, it is impossible to imagine diagnostics without them. It is our hope, too, that calling attention to discrimination and combatting it will everywhere become the norm in our society.