

Withering Sounds//

An Archeology for three Pianos

Ars Acustica Composition by Merzouga

Editor: Soila Valkama. Produced by YLEISRADIO (Finland) 2017.



The piano is an anti-nomadic instrument. It is often sitting in the same room for decades surviving several generations of a family, silently (or not) witnessing their histories. In interaction with the room-climate the piano is slowly changing over the decades. It is a kind of time-travel-instrument shaped by time and space. Sound artists Eva Poepplein and Janko Hanushevsky (aka Merzouga) played and recorded three aged pianos inside their rooms. They are not pianists and used the pianos as sound-generators. In interviews they unearthed as much of the pianos' histories and made field-recordings of the rooms and the immediate space around them (the garden, the street). The stories they collected inspired the composition's three movements, one dedicated to each of the pianos.

1st movement. "Svendborg". A piano from the 1950ies the duo found at Brecht Hus in Denmark, where Bertold Brecht took shelter from the Nazis. A composition that reflects the fragile equilibrium of feeling safe in times of war and imminent danger. Movement and rest, being in a peaceful place but never knowing what tomorrow will bring.

2nd movement. "Holte". A beat-up piano sitting in an old farm house in an impoverished rural area in Germany. Most of the year the house is cold and empty. Life used to be harsh, shaped by the rhythms of nature and by hard work.

3rd movement. "Wien, Düsseldorf". An old "Tafelclavier" that once belonged to the famous Viennese music-critic Eduard Hanslick, a ferocious enemy of Wagner. Family rumors have it that Brahms himself played on it. The piano is sitting in the apartment of Hanslick's grand-grand-nephew in Dusseldorf today, a baroque cellist and experimental musician, and his wife, who is a painter. An urban piano that is constantly surrounded by music.

The 4th movement is a palimpsest-like structure of the sound worlds of all of the three pianos. The end of a sonic journey where time and space blur into one SOUND.

Merzouga would like to thank the owners for letting us play & record their pianos, and for sharing their stories: Kirsten Skou Nicolaisen and Brecht Hus Society Svendborg, Frauke & Rüdiger Hundsdörfer & Family, Leonhard Bartussek & Sabrina Haunsparg.