

OXFORD

Michael Finnissy

History of photography in sound

Solo piano



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**THE HISTORY OF
PHOTOGRAPHY IN SOUND
(1995-2001)**

for Piano Solo

Volume 1

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Programme note: *The History of Photography in Sound* (1995-2001)

I am about eight years old, standing in the darkroom at my father's office in County Hall. A countdown is in progress. A piece of paper is floating in the pungent-smelling liquid of the developing-tray. As the seconds tick by, an image begins to form on the paper. If extracted too quickly from the liquid this image will not be fully and clearly visible, if left too long it will be spoiled – obliterated by a relentlessly creeping chemical twilight. These moments have an urgency and mystery that I cannot locate in the too speedy, too limited, and appallingly irrevocable click of the shutter across the lens.

Fifty or so years on, and I am looking at the vacant paper on my desk. The clocks tick, my hand moves, sounds appear. Eye to 'eidōs'.

Photographs have generally been most valued, or perhaps de-valued, as documentation. They are treated as memoranda, relics, anecdotes, supposedly objective evidence, emblematic of singular arrested moments in time. In most photography, unlike painting or drawing, the view is disconcertingly blinkered, directly ahead. Everything is completely still. The camera and its lens (its eye) do not move. This fixed-perspective immobility is haunting and unnatural. In writing music, both my ears, and their accompanying brain and hand, have to remain mobile, alive. Acknowledging the fluidity, movement and characteristics of sound, discovering and exploring, getting the hands dirty and relishing it. Not putting 'already musical' sounds on a pedestal, and admiring them from a safe or discreet distance. Teaching my inner ear to newly recognise and listen.

The ear is not a camera, nor is my music-writing hand neutrally mechanical. My title uses the word 'photography', and its plethora of associations, to convey a certain kind of musical material: documentary – snipped out from different periods in the past, and different locations across the world – a collection of exterior facts. These refugee facts are then situated, more or less provocatively, in the eventual composition. They are exchanged for, disrupted, and transformed by composing (imagining, transcribing, analytically mis-reading) into other facts. The whole piece is outlining a type of musical composition using the analogue of an idealised 'photography' instead of painting, sculpting, writing novels or poems. Although I have lifted phrases from Roland Barthes for the opening two sections of the work, my feeling is that the emphasis he places on implied or covert 'narratives' is excessively literary. Many other writers interpret photographs this way. One can, as in a still rarer than 'normal' cinema, witness a more fluid and active camera and non-figurative photography. In the wildly cavorting camcorder of some of Chris Newman's videos, in the weaving and dripping trails of light across Maarten Vanvolsem's panoramic photographs, in the 'joiners' and collages of David Hockney. Teaching our eyes to look more closely.

'History' in the title conveys 'remembered or invented past and present'; or 'a chronological continuum'; or 'the appearance and stylistic attributes of previous and current eras'.

'Sound' is the raw magma of music, before what Baudrillard calls 'obscene formulae' intrude.

The musical 'documents' (= photographs) or materials used in this piece are:

- (i) A 'motivo fondamentale' – the plainsong *Te Deum laudamus*, or the Lutheran version harmonised by J.S.Bach, *Herr Gott, dich loben wir* (BWV 328). This is, in effect, a pitch reservoir, a 'grundgestalt' (alternate minor thirds and whole tones). It functions as the Aristotelian unifying factor, subsuming the following 'variations'...

- (ii) A reference to Wagner's *Gotterdammerung* 2.i. Hagen's question "Der ewige Macht, wer erbte sie?" - a rhythmic and harmonic leitmotif including rhetorical silence. Offset by...
- (iii) A reference to Berlioz's *Romeo et Juliette* Scene d'amour, a melodic and textural idée fixe. And then, more localised...
- (iv) Short quotations from, or allusions to, canonical musical personalities: most prominently Beethoven and Busoni, also Alkan, Mozart, Paganini, Grieg, and...
- (v) Short quotations from, or allusions to, musical genres: fugal (diatonic/harmonically directional or functional) counterpoint, minuets, 18th and 19th century hymnody, ragtime, 'exotic' or 'primitive' folkmusics (African and Black American, Sicilian, Inuit, Norwegian hardanger-fiddle etc.), popular dance-band music of the 1930s and 1940s.

The piece, lasting around five and a half hours, is divided into eleven sections. The fifth and ninth are quite short in duration (between 10 and 15 minutes), the eighth is long (between 75 and 80 minutes) the others average half an hour. The composition was begun in 1995 and completed in 2001. Ian Pace gave the first complete (recital) performance at the Royal Academy of Music in London, on 28th January 2001. The eleventh section of the cycle (first performed by Nicolas Hodges with slide projections by Ken Scott and Steyning Camera Club) was commissioned by Steyning Music Society. The Academic Board of the Royal Academy of Music generously supported the writing of the later stages of the composition (the *Bachsche Nachdichtungen* suggested by Carlo Grante, sections 9, 2 and finally 1). 'The History...' was designed to be performed, in whole or part, either as a solo piano 'recital' or as an 'installation' with video, slides and film.

1. Le démon de l'analogie (for Carlo Grante)

2. Le réveil de l'intratable réalité (for Marc Couroux)

(1) Analogy – (Copy) – Homology. "No sooner is a form seen than it must resemble something." (2) Reality – (Image) – Illusion. "We translate...as if the universalised image were producing a world that is without difference."

3. North American Spirituals (for Marilyn Nonken)

Billings – Ives – Cowell – Nancarrow. Confronting Afro-American spiritual responses to slavery: *Nobody knows the trouble I see*; *By and by*; *Go down, Moses*; *Steal away*. Appropriated by Michael Tippett in *A Child of our Time* to signify the voices of defiance and hope everywhere and at any period of history.

4. My parents' generation thought War meant something (for my mother April 1922–October 2000)

Six verses, each introduced by increasingly brief fragments of the opening bars of Debussy's *Berceuse Héroïque*, drawing on vernacular sources between Arthur Sullivan (his hymn-tune *Gertrude* (Onward Christian Soldiers), also more pervasively *Whatever you are* from the operetta *Utopia Limited*) and the Soviet song (by Blanter) *Sacred War*.

5. Alkan – Paganini (for, and commissioned by, Nicolas Hodges)

Virtuosic pan-demonium (another set of analogues to No.1). *Jean qui rit* – Alkan re-composes Mozart, Paganini's Capriccio Op.1 No.12, copied by Schumann (Op.10 No.1).

6. Seventeen Immortal Homosexual Poets (for Ian Pace)

The central axis of the cycle and the first section to be completed and performed. The title recalls various albums of Japanese classical writing – *wakashu* – assembled between the tenth and nineteenth centuries. The poets appear in reverse chronological order: Gregory Woods (born in 1953), then Mutsuo Takahashi, Thom Gunn, Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, Harold Norse, Pier Paolo Pasolini, James Kirkup, Jean Genet, Stephen Spender,

Federico Garcia Lorca, Ralph Chubb, Jean Cocteau, Konstantinos Kavafis, Oscar Wilde, Edward Carpenter, and John Addington Symonds (born in 1840).

7. Eadweard Muybridge – Edvard Munch (for James Clapperton)

Balances and contradicts No.5. Abstract structuralism (scientific rationality) – Metaphysical expressionism (emotive irrationality).

8. Kapitalistisch Realisme (met Sizilianische Männerakte en Bachsche Nachdichtungen) (for Colin Symes)

Three Bs. (i) Beethoven (grundgestalt thirds in Op.67, Op.18 No.5, Op.10 No.1). (ii) Bach (*Allein Gott in der Hoh' sei Ehr'* BWV 717, 716, 662, 667). (iii) Busoni (retrograde of the *Pezzo serioso* from Op.39 with an overlay of Sicilian folktunes collected by Meyerbeer). Counterpart to No.4.

9. Wachtend op de volgende uitbarsting van repressie en censuur (for Andrew Infanti)

Opening almost identical to No.1. Thereafter the first half is loosely modelled on the Sarabande from Busoni's *Doktor Faust* (linked to material from No.8). The second half is a disordered atomising (censoring) of the first.

10. Unsere Afrikareise (for Dr. Franz Eckert)

Title from Peter Kubelka's film. Meditating on occidentalised 'African' materials (also finally from No.3). Most obviously Victor Masse's operatic version of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, and Felicien David's *Le Desert*. Sectionalised montage including 'ritornelli' (as No.2 but mostly less hectic).

11. Etched bright with sunlight (for Dr. Mark Signy)

Title from Derek Jarman's unfiled project *Sod 'em*. Reiterations of previous material, bringing chaos into order (Adorno's 'minima moralia'). Opening with Bach (BWV 328), then Wagner, North African folk music (related to No.10) and an excerpt from Kavafis (in No.6), Berlioz,... eventually 'disappearing' in 'mid-sentence'.

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DURATION OF SECTIONS

1.	Le démon de l'analogie (2000)	25'
2.	Le réveil de l'intraitable réalité (1999)	15'
3.	North American Spirituals (1997-8) <i>first performance, Merkin Hall, New York, USA, 15 April 1998, Marilyn Nonken</i>	20'
4.	My parents' generation thought War meant something (1999) <i>first performance, St. Mary de Haura, Shoreham, 2 October 1999, Michael Finnissy</i>	40'
5.	Alkan - Paganini (1997) <i>first performance, Oxford Festival of Contemporary Music, 15 May 1998, Nicolas Hodges</i>	12'
6.	Seventeen Immortal Homosexual Poets (1997) <i>first performance, Conway Hall, London, 21 March 1997, Ian Pace</i>	40'
7.	Eadweard Muybridge - Edvard Munch (1997) <i>first performance, Festival "antasten", Germany, 20 September 1997, James Clapperton</i>	25'
8.	Kapitalistisch Realisme (met Sizilianische Männerakte en Bachsche Nachdichtungen) (1999-2000) <i>first performance of Kapitalistisch Realisme, Grieghallen, Bergen, Norway, 27 May 1999, Michael Finnissy</i> <i>first performance of Bachsche Nachdichtungen, Newport Festival, USA, 20 July 2000, Carlo Grante</i>	75'
9.	Wachtend op de volgende uitbarsting van repressie en censuur (2000)	12'
10.	Unsere Afrikareise (1998) <i>first performance, Cheltenham, 16 November 1998, Ian Pace</i>	30'
11.	Etched bright with sunlight (1999-2000) <i>first performance 6 May 2000, Steyning Music Club, Sussex, Nicolas Hodges</i>	25'

NB – I think the titles without information were first performed at the world première of the whole work.

Le démon de l'analogie

$$[\mathcal{J} = 108 \quad \mathcal{J} = 216]$$

Handwritten musical score for the song "L'Espresso" by Francesco De Gregori. The score is for guitar and voice. The guitar part is in G major, 3/4 time, and consists of a simple melody. The voice part is in G major, 3/4 time, and consists of a simple melody. The lyrics are "L'Espresso" and "L'Espresso". The score is handwritten on a single page.

Handwritten musical score for a piano piece, featuring a treble and bass staff. The score includes various musical notations and performance instructions:

- Tempo/Character:** *con brio* (above the treble staff), *Long* (above the treble staff), *subito* (below the bass staff).
- Tempo Markings:** $[J = 216]$ (above the treble staff), $[J = 66]$ (below the bass staff).
- Performance Instructions:** *pppppp! cresc.* (below the treble staff), *rinforz.* (below the bass staff).
- Other Notations:** *Long* (above the treble staff), *Long* (below the bass staff), *Long* (below the bass staff), *Long* (below the bass staff).

[♩ = 66]

rinforz.

6:5

7:6

6:5

6:5

3

3

3

3

marc.

6:5

6:5

6:5

motivo fondamentale : Herr Gott, dich loben wir BWV 328 : J.S. Bach

Handwritten musical score for "Long" by J. S. Bach, BWV 999. The score is for a single melodic line on a grand staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked "Allegro". The score is divided into two systems. The first system starts with a "Long" marking and a tempo of 66. The second system is marked "pp" (pianissimo). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

A handwritten musical score for the song "The Rose Tree". The score is written on two staves, a treble staff and a bass staff, using a system of musical notation that includes notes, rests, and bar lines. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 6/8. The melody is written in the treble staff, and the accompaniment is in the bass staff. The piece is marked with a tempo of "Allegretto" and a dynamic of "p" (piano). The score includes a repeat sign and a first ending bracket. The handwriting is in ink on aged paper.

Handwritten musical score for piano, featuring complex chromatic passages and specific performance instructions. The score is written on five systems of grand staves (treble and bass clef).

Key performance instructions and markings include:

- accél. molto* (accelerando molto)
- accél. and rall. constantly* (accelerando and rallentando constantly)
- diabolicamente* (diabolically)
- très fort* (very loud)
- (Heilig ist Gott)* (Holy is God)
- (Heilig)* (Holy)

The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings. Specific tempo and performance instructions are written above the staves, and the piece concludes with a *très fort* marking.

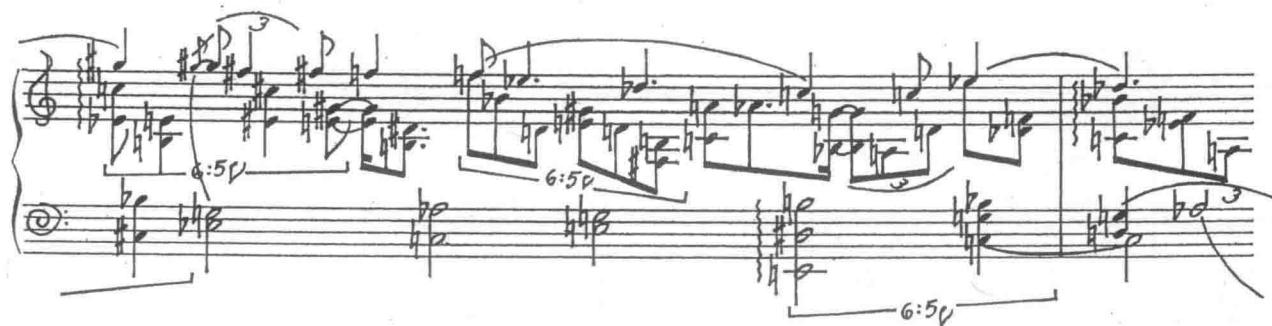
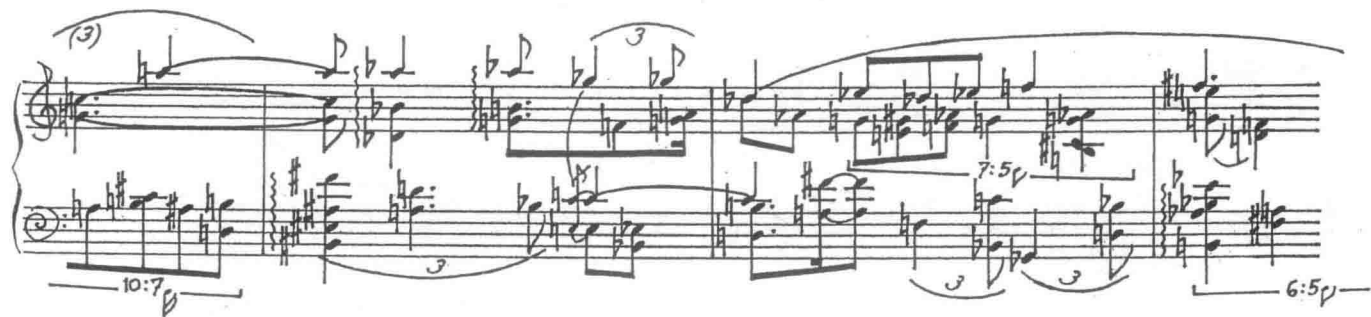
Handwritten musical score for "The Swan" by Camille Saint-Saëns. The score is in G major, 3/4 time, and consists of 11 measures. The piano part is written in treble and bass staves, and the celesta part is written in a single staff. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments. The tempo is marked "rall. moltissimo" and the dynamics are "dimin.".

Handwritten musical score for 'The Rose Tree'. The score is written on two staves, treble and bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked '(rall.)' and the time signature is '[J = 66]'. The music features a melody in the treble staff and a bass line in the bass staff. The melody includes a 7:6 interval and a 6:5 interval. The bass line includes a 7:5 interval. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Handwritten musical score for the piece "Long". The score is written on two staves, Treble and Bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked "Long". The time signature is indicated as $[J = 66]$ and $7:5$. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and a final section marked with a repeat sign and a $7:5$ time signature.

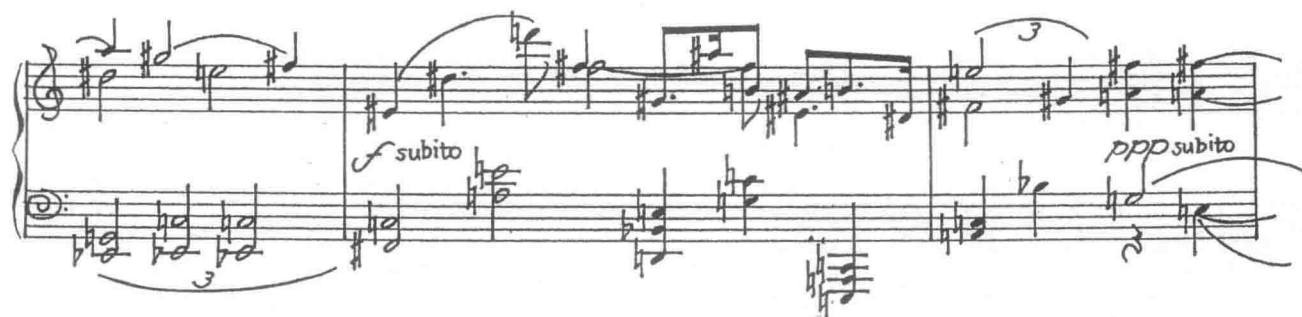
Handwritten musical score for piano, featuring complex chromatic passages and various interval markings. The score is written on five systems of grand staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The notation includes numerous accidentals (sharps, flats, naturals) and interval markings such as 9:7, 7:6, 6:5, 8:5, 5:3, and 7:5. The music is characterized by dense, rapid chromatic movement, often spanning multiple octaves. The final system concludes with a measure marked with a circled '3' and a final cadence.

ben sostenuto






Berceuse Héroïque : Claude Debussy
S. Gertrude (Onward Christian Soldiers) : Arthur Sullivan



First system of musical notation. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by a half note, and then a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. The bass staff contains a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by a half note, and then a triplet of eighth notes in the third measure. Dynamics include *f subito* and *ppp subito*.



Second system of musical notation. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The bass staff contains a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. Dynamics include *f subito* and *ppp subito*.



Third system of musical notation. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The bass staff contains a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. Dynamics include *f subito*.



Fourth system of musical notation. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The bass staff contains a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. Dynamics include *ppp subito* and *f subito*.



Fifth system of musical notation. The treble staff contains a melodic line with a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. The bass staff contains a half note, followed by a half note, and then a half note. Dynamics include *ppp subito* and *p*.

Handwritten musical score for piano, first system. The music is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The right hand features a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a complex, flowing pattern of triplets and sixteenth notes. A tempo marking $[d = 108 \text{ } \text{♩} = 2.16]$ is present below the staff.

Handwritten musical score for piano, second system. The music continues with similar textures. A dynamic marking *pp* is present, along with the instruction *sotto voce senza espressione* (softly, without expression).

Handwritten musical score for piano, third system. The tempo changes to *con brio (rall.)* with a new tempo marking $[d = 66]$. The right hand starts with a *subito* (suddenly) marking. The left hand has a *pp calmo* (very soft, calm) marking.

Handwritten musical score for piano, fourth system. The music features a 6:5 ratio indicated above the staff. The right hand has a *poco sostenuto* (slightly sustained) marking.

Handwritten musical score for piano, fifth system. The music continues with complex textures. A 5:3 ratio is indicated below the staff.

Long

6:5r

ten.

(very slight emphasis)

Sommessamente moderato

motivo fondamentale: Te Deum laudamus

p

3

3

(F)

pppp

mf

leggero

Alkan Paganini

Handwritten musical score for piano, featuring complex chromatic passages and triplets. The score is written on five systems of grand staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 4/4. The notation includes numerous triplets (indicated by a '3' over a bracket) and complex chromatic runs. Some measures are marked with '4:3' and '5:3' ratios, possibly indicating a change in tempo or a specific rhythmic pattern. The final system ends with a 'pppp' (pianissimo) dynamic marking.