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CMP 413
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Conlon Nancarrow (1912-1997)

Biography

Born October 27, 1912 in Texarkana, AR, father was an oil executive

His childhood house had a player piano: Chopin, "light classical fare"

Discovered jazz trumpet at Interlochen: Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Earl Hines

Father disapproved of his musical studies and sent him to Vanderbilt to study engineering briefly

They must have reconciled, as Conlon received his share of his father's trust fund in 1947

Played in jazz groups at CCM

1934-1935: private studies in Boston with Sessions, Piston, Slonimsky

Joined Communist Party, worked for WPA

1937-1939 fought for Abraham Lincoln Brigade, a Soviet-backed militia that fought against Franco's government

This, along with his Communist Party membership, resulted in harassment from the government. Moved to Mexico City in 1940

Read Henry Cowell's *New Musical Resources* in 1939

Returned to New York briefly to buy a player piano in 1947, would not return again until 1981

Became a Mexican Citizen in 1955

Ligeti discovered his music in the late 70s/early 80s, new worldwide influence

1982 MacArthur Fellowship

Passed away August 10, 1997

Some General Issues

Isolation in Mexico City

Physically removed from American establishment, ignored by Mexican establishment

Modified Player Pianos: metal and thumbtacks in the hammers

Pitch: Kyle Gann Interview with Boulez (1987): "For me it was very interesting, because the rhythmical structure is really very well thought out. Unfortunately, the pitch vocabulary does not follow."

Gann: "Whether Nancarrow's pitch thinking has been on the same level as his rhythmic thinking is not a question that can be answered in generalities, because he has made pitch serve so many different purposes. There are studies in which, by Nancarrow's own admission, pitches are little more than an arbitrary string with which to manifest the tempo structure."

Sometimes simple and direct: tonal, clearly intervallic, blues and jazz from his training

"Always intended to render some rhythmic point more easily audible, they lend an unnerving freshness to his music, though an ear trained to subtle Boulezian sonorities might find them simply awkward. However, had Nancarrow tried to construct tempo canons from the pitch systems typical of Boulez' *Le Marteau sans Maître*, he would have defeated his own purposes and become incomprehensible."

Some Methods in the Studies

Early studies (Nos. 1-13): Less Systematic Manipulation of Tempo

Study No. 3a-e "Boogie-Woogie Suite"

Tempo Canons

Study No. 26 (Canon 1/1)

Study No. 36 (Canon 17/18/19/20)

Study No. 37

Acceleration Canons

Study No. 27 (Canon 5%/6%/8%/11%)

Irrational Tempo Relationships

Study No. 41a-c

How do we perceive these relationships?

Music for Live Performers

String Quartet No. 3 (1987), movement 1 – canon 3/4/5/6

Study No. 7 and London Sinfonietta arrangement (Yvar Mikhashoff)

What among Nancarrow's ideas work for live performers?

Carter: "Rhythmic Basis of American Music"

The ideas in Cowell's *New Musical Resources* "have gained little currency because the great difficulties of performance that they involve have proved a real deterrent to a number of composers..."

List of Works

Player Piano

Studies #1-30 (~1948-~1960) (#30 originally for prepared player piano)
Studies #31-37, #40-51 (~1965-early 1990s) (38, 39 renumbered 43, 48)
For Yoko (1990)

Piano

Blues (1935)
Prelude (1935)
Sonatina (1941)
Three Two-part Studies (1940s?)
Tango? (1983)
Two Canons for Ursula (1989)

Chamber

Sarabande and Scherzo for oboe, bassoon and piano (1930)
Toccata for violin and piano (1935)
Septet (1940)
Trio for clarinet, bassoon and piano, #1, (1942)
String Quartet #1 (early 1940s)
String Quartet #2 (late 1940s) incomplete
String Quartet #3 (1987)
Trio for clarinet, bassoon and piano, #2 (1991)
Player Piano Study #34 arranged for string trio

Orchestral

Piece #1 for small orchestra (1943)
Piece #2 for small orchestra (1985)
Studio for Orchestra, canon 4:5:6, (1990-91)

Select Bibliography

Bruce, David. "The Manic Mechanic", *The Musical Times*, Vol. 138, No. 1850 (Apr. 1997), 9-12

Cowell, Henry. *New Musical Resources*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Gann, Kyle. *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Jarvlepp, Jan. "Conlon Nancarrow's Study #27 for Player Piano Viewed Analytically", *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 22, No. 1/2 (Autumn, 1983 - Summer, 1984), pp 218-222

Nancarrow, Conlon. *Selected Studies for Player Piano*, Garland, Peter, ed. Berkeley, CA: SOUNDINGS, 1977.

Thomas, Margaret. "Nancarrow's Canons: Projections of Temporal and Formal Structures", *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Summer, 2000), pp 106-133

Kyle Gann, *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow*. Formal Diagrams:

The music of Conlon Nancarrow

Study No. 37 - Canon 150/152/154/156/158/160/162/164/166/168/170/172/174/176/178/180/182/184/186/188/190/192/194/196/198/200

Canon 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Time 0:00 0:05 0:45 1:07 2:28 3:21 4:15 5:28

Study No. 44 - Aleatory Round

(This canon is playable at any tempo ratio and number of repetitions.)

Study No. 48 - Canon 48A/48B

No. 48B
No. 48A
No. 48C

Study No. 49A No. 49B No. 49C - Canons 49A/49B

36

The music: general considerations

Study No. 50 - Canon 50/51/52/53 (Second movement, Piece for Small Orchestra No. 2)

(Non-canonic - voice)

Two Canons for Ursula
Canon A - 5/7 Canon B - 3/5

String Quartet No. 3 - Canons 5/4/5/6
Movement 1

Movement 2

Movement 3

(The final canon is an acceleration canon. 3/4%4/5%5/6%6/7%)

37

Nancarrow, *Study No. 36 (Canon 17/18/19/20)*

1.

ff sempre

$\text{♩} = 85$

$\text{♩} = 90$

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Nancarrow, *Study No. 36 (Canon 17/18/19/20)*

2.

♩ = 95

(36) 222

Nancarrow, Study No. 36 (Canon 17/18/19/20)

3.

♩ = 100

(36) 223

Nancarrow, *Study No. 36 (Canon 17/18/19/20)*


4.


N.C.' MONODROMA EXTRA MANUS PER.
IN PAUTAS

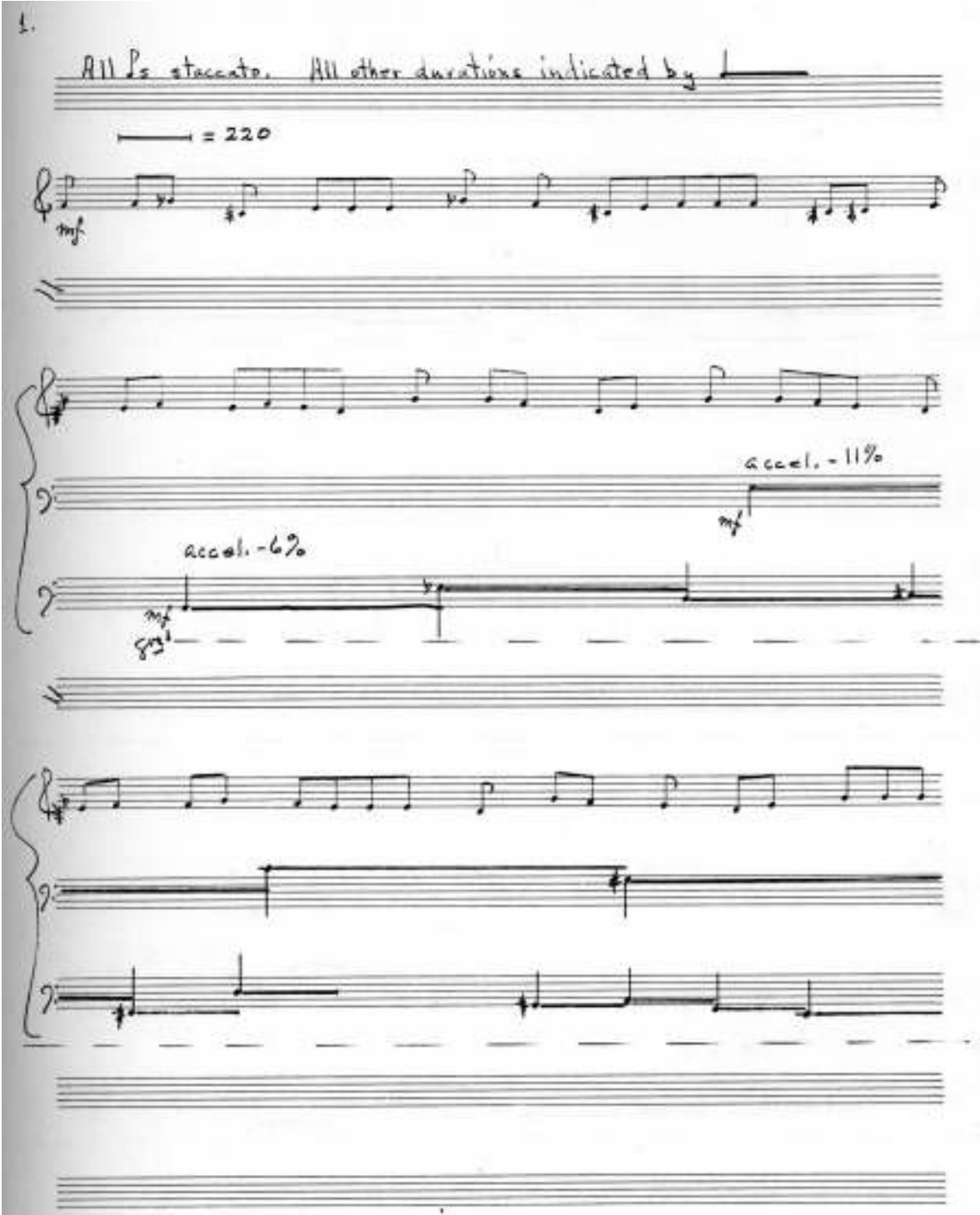
(36) 224

Nancarrow, *Study No. 27 (Canon 5%/6%/8%/11%)*

1.

All Ps staccato. All other durations indicated by 

 = 220



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Nancarrow, *Study No. 27 (Canon 5%/6%/8%/11%)*

2.

rit. - 6%

rit. - 11%

★ No. 2 MONODRAMA EXTRA MASA REG. LI PRUFAR

(27) 128

Nancarrow, Study No. 27 (Canon 5%/6%/8%/11%)

3.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Study No. 27, consisting of three systems of staves. Each system includes a treble clef staff, a bass clef staff, and a piano (p) staff. The notation is in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The first system begins with a treble clef staff containing a melodic line, a bass clef staff with a rhythmic accompaniment, and a piano staff with a bass line. The second and third systems follow a similar structure, with the piano staff in the third system ending with a fermata. The score is numbered '3.' at the top left and '(17) 129' at the bottom center.

(17) 129

Nancarrow, *Study No. 37*

1.

Handwritten musical score for 12 staves. Each staff has a time signature and a tempo marking:

- Staff 1: $\text{♩} = 281\frac{1}{4}$
- Staff 2: $\text{♩} = 262\frac{1}{2}$
- Staff 3: $\text{♩} = 250$
- Staff 4: $\text{♩} = 240$
- Staff 5: $\text{♩} = 225$
- Staff 6: $\text{♩} = 210$
- Staff 7: $\text{♩} = 200$
- Staff 8: $\text{♩} = 187\frac{1}{2}$
- Staff 9: $\text{♩} = 180$
- Staff 10: $\text{♩} = 168\frac{3}{4}$
- Staff 11: $\text{♩} = 160\frac{5}{7}$
- Staff 12: $\text{♩} = 150$

Dynamic markings include ff (fortissimo) and f (forte) on various staves. There are also some handwritten notes and symbols above the staves, such as ff and f with a vertical line through them.

(37)

Nancarrow, *Study No. 37*

Handwritten musical score for Study No. 37 by Conlon Nancarrow, page 17. The score consists of 13 staves of music. The notation is highly rhythmic and complex, featuring many accidentals and dynamic markings. A '2.' marking is present at the top right, and '(37)' is at the bottom center.

Nancarrow, Study No. 37

5.

Handwritten musical score for Study No. 37, measure 5. The score consists of 11 staves. The first two staves are marked with "8th r." and "pp". The rest of the staves are marked with "pp". The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals. The piece ends with a "loco" marking and the number "(37)".

Nancarrow, *Study No. 37*

6.

(37)

Nancarrow, Study No. 41

Study #41 for Player Piano

(Canon $\frac{\frac{1}{3\sqrt{11}} / \sqrt[3]{13/16}}{\frac{1}{\sqrt{11}} / \sqrt{2/3}}$)

41A - as is (Canon $\frac{1}{\sqrt{11}} / \sqrt{2/3}$)

41B - as is (Canon $\frac{1}{2\sqrt{11}} / \sqrt[3]{13/16}$)

(2 pianos) 41C - A and B together in approximately the proportions indicated below.

CONLON NANCARROW
 APARTADO 20-550
 MEXICO 20, D. F.

$w = \frac{1}{3\sqrt{11}}$
 $x = \sqrt[3]{13/16}$
 $y = \frac{1}{\sqrt{11}}$
 $z = \sqrt{2/3}$

Nancarrow, *Study No. 26 (Canon 1/1)*

1.

$\text{♩} = 50$ *f* sempre

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Nancarrow, *Study No. 26 (Canon 1/1)*

Handwritten musical score for *Study No. 26 (Canon 1/1)*, page 22. The score is written on ten staves, organized into five systems of two staves each. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings. A large brace on the left side groups the staves into pairs. A double bar line is present between the first and second systems. The number '22' is written in the top right corner of the page.

Nancarrow, *Study No. 7*

1. $\text{♩} = 140$ $\text{♩} = \text{♩} \text{ sempre}$ (7)

The musical score consists of six systems of grand staves. Each system contains two staves joined by a brace. The notation is handwritten and includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system includes the tempo marking $\text{♩} = 140$ and the dynamic marking $\text{♩} = \text{♩} \text{ sempre}$. The piece concludes with a final cadence on the sixth system.

Nancarrow, *Study No. 7*

(7) 2.

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for Study No. 7 by Conlon Nancarrow. The page is numbered (7) in the top center and 2. in the top right corner. The notation is arranged in five systems, each consisting of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The music is highly complex, featuring many accidentals, slurs, and dynamic markings. The first system starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second system has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The third system has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The fourth system has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The fifth system has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The score is written in a cursive, handwritten style.