

Brunhild Ferrari / Jim O'Rourke

Le Piano Englouti



Black Truffle

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Brunhild Ferrari, the longtime partner of Luc Ferrari, is a powerful creative force in her own right. Jim O'Rourke assists on two new realizations of her work, interpreting them with rare sensitivity.

A number of thrilling things happen throughout “Tranquilles Impatiences” (or “Quiet Impatiences”), the second piece on *Le Piano Englouti* (*The Sunken Piano*), an album of realizations of work by the composer [Brunhild Ferrari](#). A jittery, nerve-jangling scrum of tones underpins “Tranquilles Impatiences,” a tense chorus of high-pitched sounds that acts as a constant destabilizing force. Their “imperturbable wriggling,” as Ferrari describes it, scratches an arc over more peaceable, low-end drones that fold together like a fabric at the core of the piece. The tension that builds throughout—not so much *between* these two core elements as *because* of their parallel co-existence—makes for something of a white-knuckle ride. Shorter than previous realizations, this version of “Tranquilles Impatiences” has raw impact.

Brunhild Ferrari composed “Tranquilles Impatiences” using material by her husband, the late French-Italian composer [Luc Ferrari](#)—specifically, five of the seven tapes he created for 1977's *Exercices d'improvisation*. In that context, they existed as sequences of electronic music, the grounding force for improvisations by up to eight musicians. They serve a different purpose here, yet there is something in their dynamics, their

strange playfulness, that reflects both Luc Ferrari's humor and thoughtfulness and Brunhild Ferrari's sensitivity and compositional acumen. If the spotlight has, until recently, been trained predominantly on Luc, it's worth noting that the couple collaborated intensively over more than 40 years together, with Brunhild first helping out with paperwork and administration before Luc encouraged her to record and compose.

Between them, Luc and Brunhild Ferrari created a unique musical world, one where sounds were porous and active, and where an interest in the sonic aspects of everyday life met an engagement with the cinematic possibilities of organizing sound. Luc Ferrari's approach to composition was multifaceted—playful and witty, sensuous and seductive, rigorous yet never alienating—and Brunhild increasingly took part as an editor and recordist, a collector of sounds, and a voice on some of Luc's recordings. (A 2013 quadruple-CD set on Shiiin, *Contes Sentimentaux*, featured a series of 11 radio dramas broadcast between 1989 and 1994, consisting of dialogues between Luc and Brunhild about Luc's work, set over corresponding Ferrari compositions.) Over the decades, Brunhild Ferrari would be a significant interlocutor in her partner's work, and a powerful creative force in her own right.

[Jim O'Rourke](#)'s role on *Le Piano Englouti* is as co-interpreter, assisting in performing the pieces on synth, tapes, and electronics at SuperDeluxe in Tokyo in October 2014, and subsequently revising and remixing them in 2019. He's a perfect choice: A serious student of electroacoustic composition, he's long been vocal in his support of the work of Luc Ferrari. Recalling his first meeting with Ferrari in Paris, he told *The Wire*'s Rob Young, "I actually bit right through my lip when he walked past me. I was so fanatically worshipful, I was terrified to meet him." His deep understanding of both electroacoustic composition in general, and the Ferraris' work in particular, is brought to bear on his performances here, interpreting Brunhild's compositions with rare sensitivity. You can hear lingering traces of the experience, perhaps, on his recent four-hour album [To Magnetise Money and Catch a Roving Eye](#), which shares a similar compositional surety.

In the same discussion with Young, O'Rourke made a perceptive observation about what set Luc Ferrari apart from other musique concrète and electroacoustic composers, including those he worked alongside at the pioneering music institute INA-GRM: "[He] was the only one that I felt paid attention to what the sounds were." This is something that Brunhild Ferrari continues to do; you can hear it in "Le Piano Englouti," where she is particularly aware of the interwoven possibilities of the raw material at her disposal. As she writes in her liner notes, the sounds for the piece were recorded "in 1996, at a Greek island almost swallowed by its noisy Aegean Sea, and in 2010, at a very isolated and silent Japanese island." In her narrative of the piece, the noise of the sea and the pachinko parlor "end up swallowing a foolish piano." Though perhaps not as immediately successful as "Tranquilles Impatiences," it is compelling in its own way, weaving recordings of everyday phenomena within washes of electronic disturbance. The piano advances and then recedes, swamped or overturned by other sounds, a slow-building push-me-pull-you between the various elements. Episodic and deliberate, "Le Piano Englouti" is a focused drift of possibility.