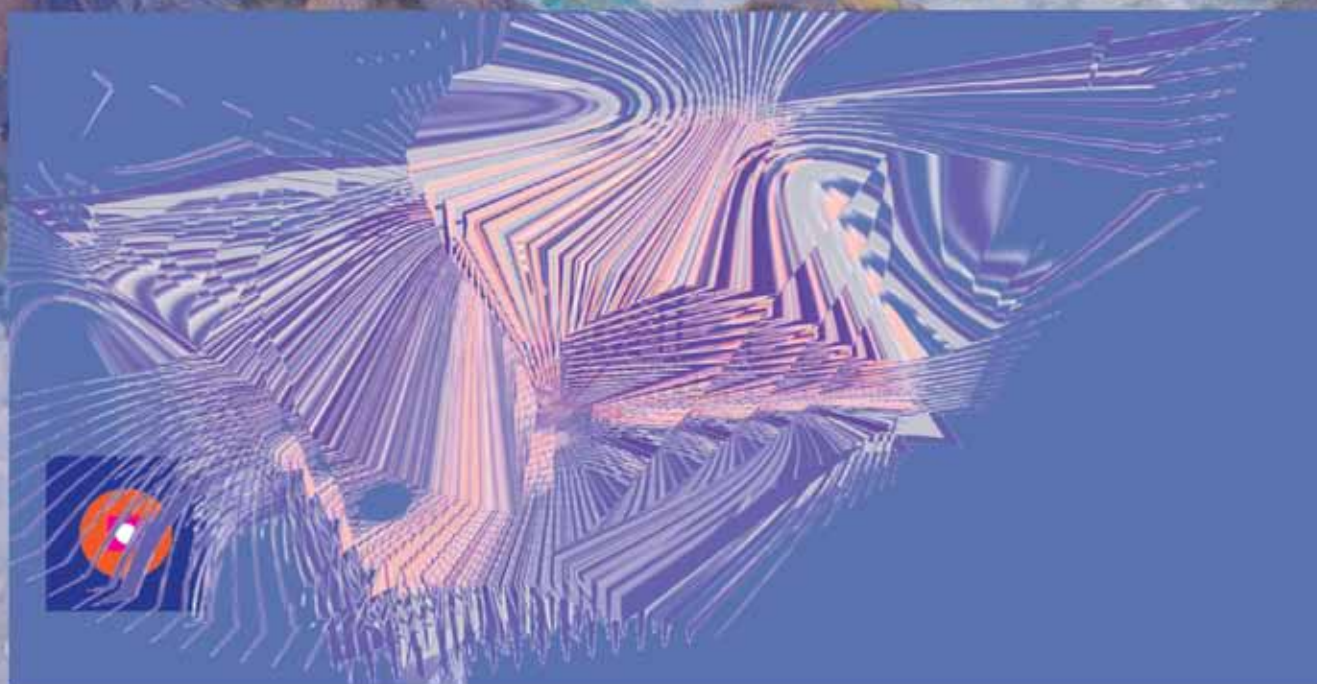


THE  
BOOK  
OF  
KEYBOARDS

PHILIPPE MANOURY

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# Third Coast Percussion



# The Book



# of Keyboards



For percussionists, who are perpetually balancing logistical challenges with artistic ambitions, the music of Philippe Manoury is a high stakes proposition. The visionary works on this album require an immense variety of resources. Three of these tracks are scored for Sixxen, a set of six instruments which must be built from scratch. Composer Iannis Xenakis, who first imagined these instruments, specified sonic parameters but left no specific designs, and Manoury further complicates Xenakis's concept with the addition of a pedal to control the instrument's sustain (similar to a vibraphone or piano). To purchase the Thai gongs called for in *Le Livre des Claviers*, which appear in a combined four and a half minutes of music, would have cost as much as hiring an additional ensemble member for the entire year in which we recorded the work (fortunately, we were able to rent and borrow the gongs for this recording). Some of the writing in the marimba/gong movements and vibraphone solo is brutally non-idiomatic; the fastest passages of many of the movements are almost unplayable at the printed tempos; and putting together the marimba duo, which is filled with arrhythmic gestures that still converge exactly (seemingly miraculously) at precise moments, is an arduous process, even after months of individual practice on the thousands of notes which are crammed into just seven minutes of music.

But what an amazing seven minutes! All of these works, actually, are remarkable musical statements, and nothing else written before or since sounds quite like this music. Manoury is certainly rooted in the tradition of Pierre Boulez, with a complex musical vocabulary that pushes performers to the edge of their abilities, and an artistic philosophy that blurs distinctions between composition and research. Manoury has no interest in the familiar, or in composing to the performers' comfort, but he clearly understands the physicality of the instruments for which he writes, and his writing stays right on the edge of impossible, never diving recklessly into it. Furthermore, he understands the sonic properties of these instruments, and, true to his roots as an electro-acoustic composer, Manoury creates unimaginable sound worlds, but here with purely acoustic musical instruments. Despite all the challenges of logistics and execution, this music achieves incredible clarity, evocative textures, and intriguing colors.

Our purpose in founding Third Coast Percussion twelve years ago was to bring great percussion music – logistical hurdles and all – to a life outside academia; to audiences everywhere. Even now, we're grappling with the challenges Manoury's music presents. But there is no question for us that these are spectacular works. We hope that this album – years in the making – will bring this unique and brilliant music to more ears, and inspire more percussionists to find opportunities to take on the exhilarating challenge of bringing this music to life.

**L** *Le Livre des Claviers* ("The Book of Keyboards") is a collection of six pieces for tuned keyboard percussion instruments. In addition to the typical vibraphones and marimbas, Manoury's definition of "keyboards" in this case includes very low-pitched Thai gongs and the microtonal, home-made instruments called Sixxen (we constructed ours using varying lengths of aluminum U-channel, an industrial construction material). The broad variety of sound worlds contained in this collection range from the epic clanging of the 6-player Sixxen movements (#3, #6) to the intimacy of the vibraphone solo (#4), both of which demonstrate a profound interest in the resonance of these metal instruments and the expressive power in manipulating that resonance. The first and fifth movements also employ the full cast of six players, utilizing 2 marimbas and 6 very low Thai gongs, which extend the depth of the marimba sound in supernatural ways. The marimba duo (#2) is a remarkable creation – a story (an ironic anecdote, perhaps) told in short, gestural fragments which align in moments of carefully orchestrated coincidence.

**L** Manoury built on the musical material from the Sixxen movements of *Le Livre des Claviers* to create his 23-minute Sixxen opus, *Métal*. One might guess, listening to *Le Livre*, that Manoury felt he had more to say, but it is still surprising how much this work explores the gentler side of this instrument. In Manoury's hands, Sixxen still have the capacity for the brutality they display in Xenakis's music, but they can also be fleet or ethereal – gentle extraterrestrial wind chimes, a chorus of machines, or a shrieking metallic beast. Beyond the

expressive range, it is remarkable how intentional the pitch content sounds, when in fact, Manoury could not predict the exact pitches (much less the relationship between the pitches) that these instruments would create; because there are no exact specifications for Sixxen size/ range/ tunings, every set is different. Manoury's deep understanding of the structures behind music is on display in *Métal*, as he creates coherency out of tensions between one note and many notes; alignment and chaos; and the power of contour, repetition, and surprise.

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**Tracks 1, 3, 5, 6, 7**, performed by Gregory Beyer, Owen Clayton Condon, Robert Dillon, Ross Karre, Peter Martin, David Skidmore **Track 2** performed by Robert Dillon, David Skidmore **Track 4** performed by Peter Martin **All tracks** produced by Third Coast Percussion

**Session Producers:** Robert Dillon (Track 4), Peter Martin (Track 2), Michael Lewanski (Tracks 1, 3, 5, 6, 7)

**Engineer:** Dan Nichols

**Assistant Engineer:** Jim Schram

**Editing, Mixing, and Mastering:** Dan Nichols

**Recorded at:** the Northern Illinois University Recital Hall, January 5, 2011 (Track 4); January 10, 2011 (Track 2); January 26–27, 2011 (Tracks 1, 3, 5, 6); January 13–14, 2013 (Track 7)

**Edited and Mixed at:** Aphorism Audio

**Art & Design:** © 2017 Sonnenzimmer LLC

**Liner Notes:** Robert Dillon

**Publisher credits:** Le Livre des Claviers © 1988 AMPHION Éditions Musicales (ASCAP); Métal © 1995 Editions DURAND (ASCAP)

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**Third Coast Percussion** (Sean Connors, Robert Dillon, Peter Martin, David Skidmore) is a Grammy Award-winning, artist-run quartet of classically-trained percussionists hailing from the great city of Chicago. For over ten years, the ensemble has forged a unique path in the musical landscape with virtuosic, energetic performances that celebrate the extraordinary depth and breadth of musical possibilities in the world of percussion. The ensemble has been praised for "commandingly elegant" (*New York Times*) performances,

the "rare power" (*Washington Post*) of their recordings, and "an inspirational sense of fun and curiosity" (*Minnesota Star-Tribune*). The four members of Third Coast are also accomplished teachers, and since 2013, have served as ensemble-in-residence at the University of Notre Dame's DeBartolo Performing Arts Center. Third Coast Percussion has commissioned and premiered over 40 new works, including music by Augusta Read Thomas, Donnacha Dennehy, Glenn Kotche, Lei Liang, Chris Cerrone, and Gavin Bryars.

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**Philippe Manoury** (born 1952, Tulle) is regarded as one of the most important living French composers and a forerunner in the field of live electronics. His work as a composer and researcher at IRCAM in Paris included collaboration with mathematician Miller Puckette on the development of Max/MSP, a widely-used programming language for interactive live electronics. Manoury has held teaching positions for the Ensemble Intercontemporain, Conservatoire de Lyon, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, and Académie Supérieure de la Haute-École des Arts du Rhin, and served as Composer-in-Residence for the Orchestre de Paris and the Scène nationale d'Orléans. He is professor emeritus of the University of California San Diego where he taught composition from 2004 to 2012, and has held his own academy of composition as part of the Festival Musica in Strasbourg since 2015. Manoury was named Officer of Arts and Letters by the French Ministry of Culture, and is a member of the honorary committee of the French-German Fund for Contemporary Music/Impuls Neue Musik and the Berlin Academy of Arts.

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The Book of Keyboards **Third Coast Percussion** Philippe Manoury

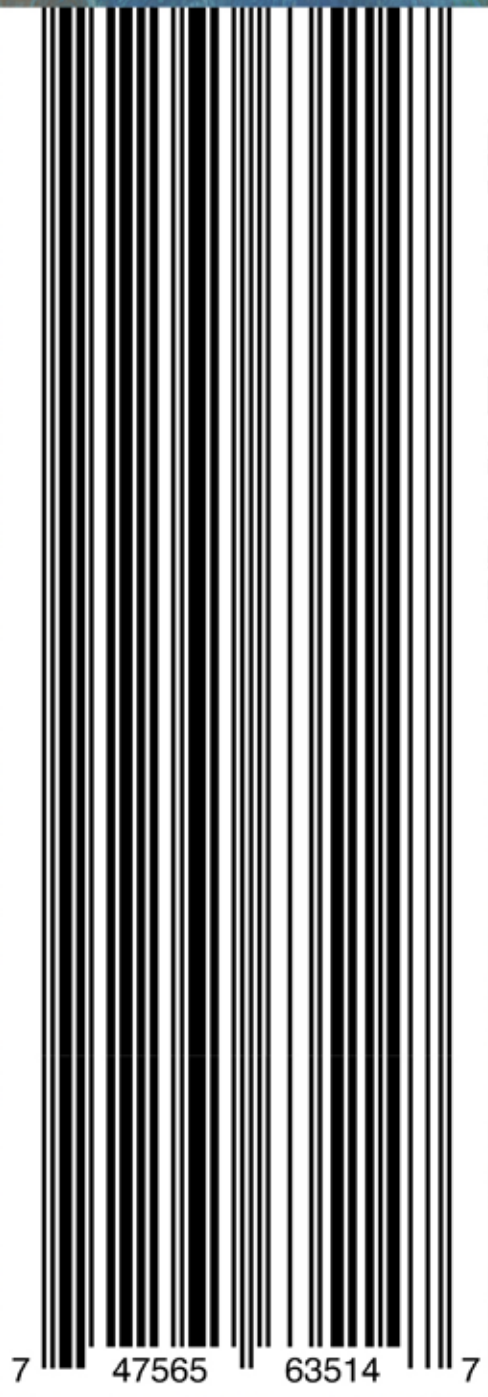
NEW FOCUS

**1-6 Le Livre des Claviers**

- I. 6 Thai Gongs, 2 Marimbas (1:24)
- II. Marimba Duo (6:32)
- III. Sixxen (3:03)
- IV. Vibraphone Solo (7:24)
- V. 6 Thai Gongs, 2 Marimbas (2:37)
- VI. Sixxen (6:31)

**7 Métal (22:17)**

NEW FOCUS  
RECORDINGS



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