





## HANS OTTE

PART 1	10:27
PART 2	9:18
PART 3	6:26
PART 4	3:04
PART 5	5:07
PART 6	2:16

## CONOR HANICK

## BOOK OF SOUNDS

PART 7	6:59
PART 8	4:15
PART 9	2:11
PART 10	10:45
PART 11	2:26
PART 12	5:10

## PIANO

Produced by: Richie Hawley/ Il Pirata Records. Recording Engineer: Ryan Streber/ Octaven Audio. Editing and Mixing: Richie Hawley. Atmos Mixing: Richie Hawley. Mastering Engineer: Silas Brown/ Legacy Sound.  
Album Design: Dom Cooper.  
Cover and Additional Art: Lydia Diemer.  
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**IL PIRATA RECORDS™**

From the prologue to  
Das Buch der Klänge:

“With this “Book of Sounds” the listener is rediscovered as a partner of sound and silence, who, in search of their world, wants to be completely one with sounds. With this “Book” the piano is rediscovered as an instrument of sound and silence with all its possibilities of dynamics, color, resonance. With this “Book” playing is rediscovered as a way to experience yourself sounding, with all these sounds in space, to be able to become one in time. With this “Book of Sounds” a world of sound phenomena is rediscovered, which could only now be written by the sounds on this earth due to a completely different consciousness”

- Hans Otte (1982)

## The Sound behind the Sounds

As Hans Otte was coming of age in postwar Germany, the musical avant-garde, whose epicenter was in U.S.-occupied Darmstadt, declared a new beginning. Sometimes known as *Stunde null*, or the “zero hour,” this turning-point was intended to mark an abrupt break from history and its burdens. A radical alienation from the basic familiarity of tonal language resulted, and this is part of the context against which Otte emerged with his own musical philosophy. In his introduction to *The Book of Sounds*, for example, he clarifies one of the work’s aims thus: “It rediscovers a world of consonant experience which could only now be written because of a totally changed consciousness of sounds on earth.” In other words, that context of “zero hour” alienation is what paved the way toward Otte’s “rediscovery” of a musical language in which far more than choices of style seems to be at stake.

“It’s no wonder that this was coming out of the explosive changes in postwar music and hyper-controlled serialism and the like,” explains AMOC’s Conor Hanick. *The Book of Sounds* “takes all of those shackles and strictures of form and says no to them but lets the music do a completely different thing.”

Otte, who began as a prodigy on piano and organ, keenly followed American developments. He won a grant to Yale (where he studied composition under Paul Hindemith, as well as organ) and, when he was back in Germany, helped disseminate the ideas of John Cage and the early exponents of American Minimalism, including Terry Riley and La Monte Young, as well as the young Steve Reich. His position at Radio Bremen, where he served as music director from 1959 to 1984, gave

Otte an influential platform to introduce these new trends from the United States. He also founded two important festivals, one devoted to early music and the other to contemporary composers, including such leading German avant-gardists as Karlheinz Stockhausen. Otte meanwhile composed prolifically, producing a catalogue that includes more than 100 compositions, from works for solo piano to orchestral and choral scores. He also created numerous multimedia installations and was active in projects involving theater and the visual arts.

*The Book of Sounds* from 1979-1982 might be seen as taking an alternative “zero hour” approach. It invites fresh questioning of what kind of exchange actually happens when we interact with music. While traces of Otte’s deep knowledge of the piano repertoire as a performer abound—echoes ranging from Chopin, Debussy, and Satie to Messiaen—these dozen pieces foreground the sensory experience of sound color from an astonishingly original perspective, reveling in the piano’s wondrous timbral palette and resonance. At the same time, the materiality of sound is transformed into a vehicle for liberation from the material world. Otte articulates this quasi-mystical aspect, in his introduction to *The Book of Sounds*, when he asserts that the work “rediscovers the listener as a partner of sound and silence, who in the quest for his or her world, wishes for once to be totally at one with sound.”

Otte’s interest in American composers who looked to the spiritual traditions of the East for inspiration—particularly John Cage—left a mark on his own quest for musical truth. Indeed, the cover of the first edition of *The Book of Sounds* reinforces Otte’s fascination with Zen Buddhism (which became even more pronounced

in his *Book of Hours* from the 1990s): a stylized, pseudo-Japanese calligraphy illustrates the numbers 1-12. The scoring of the 12-part cycle even dispenses with bar lines, further indicating a music that seeks to remove itself from the everyday divisions of temporality. The Zen-like paradoxes this involves are conducive to meditation; many listeners have even found Otte’s music, through its re-sensitization of the process of listening itself, to have a healing power.

The deceptive simplicity of Otte’s language, with its use of repetition and intense focus on harmonies and gestures that seem, as we first hear them, “obvious,” sets us up for startling revelations along the arc of the entire cycle. Each of the twelve pieces inhabits a world onto itself. At the same time, explains Hanick, the cycle seems to become “more and more chromatic as it moves toward the center, and then the chromaticism dissipates as it proceeds toward the conclusion.” At the center, in Part VI, the harmonies become implicit: Otte presents an almost entirely single line of chromatic melody that unfolds in close intervals in the treble. Part VIII, by contrast, comprises a parade of dense chords, juxtaposing extremes of volume. By the conclusion, each harmony radiates with the beauty of a rare gem. Both spareness and lush color, silence and dramatic exclamation, coexist as essential coordinates of the universe mapped out by *The Book of Sounds*. As Otte writes: “*The Book of Sounds* rediscovers playing as the possibility of experiencing oneself in sound, of becoming at one in time and space with all the sounds around one.”

—Thomas May

Pianist **Conor Hanick** is regarded as one of his generation's most inquisitive interpreters of music new and old whose "technical refinement, color, crispness and wondrous variety of articulation benefit works by any master." (*New York Times*) Hanick's playing, "a revelation of clarity and bite," recalled to the *Times*' Anthony Tommasini a "young Peter Serkin," and his performance of John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* was, according to *Times*' critic David Allan, "the best instrumental concert I have seen all year," praise echoed by the *Boston Globe*, which named the performance "Best Solo Recital" of 2019.

Hanick has recently performed with the San Francisco Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Alabama Symphony, Orchestra Iowa, and the Boston Modern Orchestra Project, been presented by the Gilmore Festival, New York Philharmonic, Elbphilharmonie, De Singel, Centre Pompidou, Caramoor, Cal Performances, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Park Avenue Armory, and the Ojai Festival, where in 2022 with AMOC\* (American Modern Opera Company) he served as the festival's artistic director. A fierce advocate for the music of today, and "the soloist of choice for such thorny works" (*NYT*), Hanick has premiered over 200

pieces and collaborated with composers both emerging and iconic; among them, Pierre Boulez, Kaija Saariaho, Steve Reich, Tania León, and Charles Wuorinen, in addition to the leading composers of his generation, including Nico Muhly, Caroline Shaw, Tyshawn Sorey, Christopher Cerrone, Anthony Cheung, and Samuel Carl Adams, whose piano concerto, *No Such Spring*, he premiered in 2023 with Esa-Pekka Salonen and the San Francisco Symphony. Since 2014 Hanick has been a faculty artist at the Music Academy of the West and in 2018 became its director of Solo Piano. He has given lectures and masterclasses in Asia, Europe, and throughout the US, including Northwestern University, the New England Conservatory, UCLA, University of Washington, University of Massachusetts Amherst, and University of Iowa. He is a member of the keyboard and chamber music faculty of The Juilliard School, Mannes College, and the CUNY Graduate Center.



photo: Laura Desberg