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Catherine Christer Hennix – *Selected Early Keyboard Works*

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A new collection of the Swedish composer's early experiments on Fender Rhodes, synthesizers, and magnetic tape shines a long overdue spotlight on an unsung electronic pioneer.

Ten years ago, followers of drone, experimental electronic music, and minimalism might have noticed that something was amiss with the canon: Most of the big names there were men, with very few women or people of color represented. But recent reissues have sought to present a broader portrait of late-20th-century minimalism, one that ventures beyond La Monte Young,

Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and others of their ilk. From a long overdue reappraisal of the gay black composer Julius Eastman to crucial overviews of Pauline Oliveros, Laurie Spiegel, and Mary Jane Leach, such reissues have presented a far more diverse set of artists plotting new courses amid the sine waves.

Swedish polymath Catherine Christer Hennix is a composer, philosopher, writer, mathematician, and visual artist who has benefited from such a reassessment. Despite the fact that she has been working since the late 1960s and mingled with Young and Riley, it wasn't until 2010 that a recorded version of her bewildering 1976 drone work "The Electric Harpsichord" was finally made available. This year alone saw her first solo museum exhibition in over 40 years, *Traversée du Fantasme*, at the Stedelijk in Amsterdam; a retrospective archival show of her visual work at the Empty Gallery in Hong Kong; as well as two volumes of her writing, capped now by this two-disc set of previously unheard pieces drawn from rehearsal tapes made during the 10-day Dream Music Festival in 1976.

Exploring different corners of Hennix's soundworld, *Selected Early Keyboard Works* shows that she wasn't always just exploring fathoms-deep drones. Far removed from the scale of her just-intonation ensemble, the Deontic Miracle, these works document her work with a Fender Rhodes and sine-wave drone. The first half of the set presents 43 minutes of a piece entitled "Mode nouvelle des modalités" and it finds Hennix far from the world of her friend, colleague, and sometime collaborator La Monte Young and more taken with the quicksilver early electronics of Karlheinz Stockhausen. In the hands of most players of that era (think Lonnie Liston Smith, Herbie Hancock, or Stevie Wonder the Fender Rhodes created floating, placid tones, but Hennix quickly breaks them into shards and jags, rupturing the mood often to propel herself into strange new realms. On the second half of the composition, more space appears between Hennix's gestures so that the sounds seem to float like space debris in zero gravity.

The 13-minute "Equal Temperament Fender Mix" is charming, worthy of comparison to the early electronic keyboard works of Terry Riley, right down to Hennix deploying her own tape-delay system to create multiple

layers of bubbling sound. This should come as no surprise: The Swedish were some of the earliest audiences to embrace Riley's revolutionary approach to improv and composition.

The sparkling and unnerving 18-minute highlight "The Well-Tuned Marimba" is closely related to Hennix's drone piece from that same year, "The Electric Harpsichord," and might be the more intriguing composition, folding together Hennix's Yamaha keyboard, sine-wave generator, and the sheng, a traditional Chinese polyphonic reed instrument, whose wheezing overtones add a preternatural buzz to the skin-prickling electronic layers. While some of the most revered minimalist composers and compositions present a calm exterior, these newly discovered efforts of Hennix show us a disquieting—and welcome—new wrinkle to those serene surfaces.

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