

INTRODUCTION

Les îles des nombres III (2x12x12x4)

The piano quartet *Les îles des nombres III (2x12x12x4)*, written in 2018/2019 for the Mondrian Ensemble, is part of a series of works that can be traced back to a piece called *Postscriptum (2x11x12): The Melancholy of Perfection(ism)*, which concludes the piano cycle *cycle: 25 easy pieces* (2014-16). This composition harmonically consists of the eleven (11) intervals (2) – from small second to large sept –, played on each chromatic pitch (12). *Postpostscriptum (2x11x12x4): Les îles des nombres* for piano solo (2017) expands this initial idea; each interval can be found four times on each chromatic pitch. The 528 (11x12x4) intervals are grouped into 120 islands (îles), each island consists of 3-5 intervals. Two different types of islands can be distinguished: Islands that are built by the same sort of intervals, and islands that contain different intervals. Both pieces could be subtitled "in search of perfect structures": perfect in the sense of a „perfect“ arrangement of "perfect" (complete) material, with the aim of a highly balanced frequency distribution with regard to several parameters. Basically, the harmonic structure of *Postpostscriptum (2x11x12x4): Les îles des nombres* serves as the basis for *Les îles des nombres II* for 11 instruments (2018). The arrangement of the intervals is the same in both pieces. A similar, but new intervallic arrangement can be found in the piano quartet *Les îles des nombres III (2x12x12x4)*. One tiny difference constitutes the fact that in this piece the octave is incorporated; this explains the slightly different numbers in the title. As in *Les îles des nombres II*, a second, quite different harmonic idea is of equal importance: microtonal harmony, derived from the intervals or interval islands by a certain operation I like to call the division of intervals: Each interval can be divided right in the middle; the resulting tone is equidistant from the two tones of the interval. This operation, applied to certain intervals (small second, small third, perfect fourth, perfect fifth etc.), leads to quarter-tone harmony. The easiest operation is to divide one interval; but this division principle can also be applied to more than one interval. The most extreme case is the division of each intervallic relation of an island. Applied to an island that consists of five intervals, this operation would lead to 45 division tones. The composition of *Les îles des nombres III (2x12x12x4)* was supported by the City of Vienna and the SKE-Fonds. The piece was premiered in Basel, Gare du Nord, on May 29th, 2019 by the Mondrian Ensemble.