

Pooneh Jahandidehorimi

## When Sculptures Perform with Humans

### Marisol Jiménez' *Sensuous Matter*

*Sensuous Matter* (2018) is a fascinating piece composed by Marisol Jiménez for a cybernetic ensemble,<sup>1</sup> inviting listeners into a unique interaction between human performers and machines. The title itself immediately sets the expectation of a work that explores the physicality and materiality of sound, especially through the interplay of acoustic instruments and electronic or mechanical devices.

The stage at the premiere<sup>2</sup> presents four musicians surrounded by an unusual array of metallic devices. Initially, the presence of a guitar leads the audience to assume a traditional guitar player will perform. However, almost instantly, attention shifts to the lower part of the guitar, where a round metal plate is attached, revealing that this is not an ordinary instrument. This subtle visual cue prepares us to experience a sonic world that transcends conventional acoustic sounds. Alongside the guitar, there is a violinist, a double bass player, and a percussionist, each using their own traditional instruments. Yet, around them, strange metallic objects and cybernetic devices create a hybrid soundscape blending organic and mechanical textures.

The piece begins with a deep, dark sound produced by striking what resembles a cymbal with a wooden stick. This percussive opening sets a mysterious and tense atmosphere. The violin contributes dry, continuous bowing in the lower register, producing eerie and textured tones. The double bass adds sustained, drawn-out notes in the background, accompanied by the subtle vibrations of a rectangular metallic strip, which introduces an element of resonance and adds complexity to the sonic layers. Meanwhile, the guitar is played in an unconventional way: Marisol designed this instrument with two mechanical arms that enable vertical and horizontal bowing movements across the strings, producing unique textures and timbres. The percussionist also employs a bow, but this time on a thin metal sheet, generating metallic sounds with a spring-like quality that further heighten the tension and spatial dynamics of the piece. Gradually, the sustained sounds begin to fade, leaving an impression of sonic fragility and transience.

Fig. 1: Marisol Jiménez: *Sensuous Matter* performance (2018), © Marisol Jiménez.





Fig. 2: Marisol Jiménez: Noise spring machines, © Marisol Jiménez.

What is interesting in *Sensuous Matter* is not just the strange metal instruments, but also how the musicians play their usual instruments along with these metal devices at the same time. The violin, double bass, and percussion players do not stop using their normal instruments. Instead, they add new sounds by using these special machines, mixing natural sounds with mechanical ones. This makes the music feel like a mix of human and machine sounds.

Marisol Jiménez's compositional approach embodies a philosophy of embodied listening and performing. As the composer stated in a personal conversation with the author after her performance on 29 June 2025 in Berlin, she loves to feel music through her body, to physically sense the vibrations and resonances, and to be able to touch and inhabit the sound.

Jiménez's artistic journey has been deeply influenced by her personal history of migration and overcoming limitations. Having faced cultural and geographical challenges, she transformed these experiences into creative strength, using her position between different worlds to expand the possibilities of musical expression. This background informs her work, lending it a profound sense of exploration, boundary-crossing, and a unique sensitivity to the materiality of sound.

In summary, *Sensuous Matter* is a compelling exploration of sound as a physical phenomenon. Marisol Jiménez's combination of traditional instruments and cybernetic devices, coupled with her embodied approach to music, invites listeners to engage with music

on multiple sensory levels auditory, tactile, and even visual. Her personal history and artistic philosophy enrich the piece's expressive depth, making it a remarkable contribution to contemporary experimental music.

## Endnotes

1. Jiménez, Marisol: *Sensuous Matter* for Cybernetic ensemble: violin, double bass, percussion, Double noise harp, and four autonomous spring sound machines (kinetic sound sculptures). Performative Installation and 41-minute electro-acoustic work. Premiered at Spektrum, Berlin, October, 2018. Idem, list of works: <https://marisoljimenezcomposer.com/works-2/> (accessed: 20 September 2025).
2. Jiménez, Marisol. "Sensuous Matter Excerpts." Vimeo video, 2019. <https://vimeo.com/333321912>. (0:00 to 1:09). Cf. <https://medias.ircam.fr/en/work/sensuous-matter>.

## Literature

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## Figures

Marisol Jiménez: *Sensuous Matter* performance (2018), Biliانا Voutchkova (violin), Matthias Bauer (doublebass), Emilio Gordo (percussion & feedback systems), Marisol Jiménez (Noise Harps, spring noise machines and electronics). Photos © Marisol Jiménez.

## Abstract

*Sensuous Matter* (2018) by Marisol Jiménez is an electroacoustic work and performative installation for cybernetic ensemble, including violin, double bass, percussion, double noise harp, and four autonomous spring sound machines. Premiered at Spektrum, Berlin, the piece merges human performance with kinetic sound sculptures, emphasizing the physicality of sound and inviting audiences into a multisensory experience that expands the boundaries of contemporary experimental music.

**Author**

Pooneh Jahandidehorimi studies at the master's program Music, Sound, Performance at Freie Universität and Humboldt University Berlin. She previously earned a master's degree in music with a focus on classical guitar and holds a bachelor's degree in engineering. She is particularly interested in interdisciplinary approaches to sound and music.

**Title**

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