

Theodora Serbanescu-Martin

Theodora Serbanescu-Martin is a pianist, musicologist, and interdisciplinary scholar whose work bridges performance, literary studies, material culture, and the history of embodiment. She is completing her PhD in Music and Sound Studies at Cornell University and holds dual BA degrees in Music and English, with a minor in German Studies, from the University of California, Berkeley.

Her scholarly and artistic work centers on nineteenth-century pianism, with particular attention to virtuosity, pedagogy, fashion, gender, and the material conditions of performance. Her doctoral dissertation, *Fashionable Concealments: Myth, Material, and Method in Nineteenth-Century Pianism*, reconstructs the piano as a cultural instrument shaped by bodily discipline, clothing, technologies, and literary ideals. Moving beyond genealogical narratives of virtuosity, the project examines how Romantic concepts of expression, authenticity, and artistic labor were produced — and contested — through concrete practices of training, performance, and reading. This research forms the basis of her forthcoming book project, *Fashioning Pianism: A Material History of Pianistic Punishment and Pleasure*.

Her scholarship appears or is forthcoming in the *Oxford Handbook of Arrangement Studies* (OUP), *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, music criticism journals, and exhibition catalogues, and she has presented widely at conferences including the American Musicological Society and the North American Conference on Nineteenth-Century Music. At Cornell, she served as assistant curator for the exhibition *Sounding Fashion* and organized the conference-festival *Performing Clara Schumann*. Her research has been supported by the American Musicological Society, the Cornell Council for the Arts, the Mario Einaudi Institute for European Studies, and the Timothy Murray Fellowship.

As a performer, Serbanescu-Martin identifies as a “Romantic pianist,” using the term to describe an approach grounded in nineteenth-century aesthetics of flexibility, virtuosity, improvisation, and expressive risk, while remaining critically attentive to Romanticism’s ideological afterlives. Her performances do not claim historical “authenticity,” but instead treat Romantic materials as living, mediated practices shaped by context, technology, and embodiment. She is particularly interested in how visual, literary, and material dimensions— dress, gesture, space, furniture, and staging — shape musical meaning.

She has appeared throughout Europe and the United States as a soloist and concerto performer, with repertoire including Brahms’s Second Piano Concerto, Prokofiev’s Second, and Scharwenka’s Fourth, and has performed with ensembles such as the UC Berkeley Symphony Orchestra, the Saratoga Symphony, the Peninsula Symphony, the Lublin Philharmonic, and the Kostroma Symphony. Her performance work has been recognized with prizes at the Los Angeles International Liszt Competition, the International Sussex Piano Competition, MTAC competitions, and the Eisner Prize in the Creative Arts.

Current projects include a complete recording and critical edition of H el ene de Montgeroult’s *Cours complet pour l’enseignement du forte piano* on historical keyboards, performances of Marie Ja ell’s rarely heard First Piano Concerto, Liszt’s *De Profundis*, and other virtuosic Romantic repertoire, as well as performance-based research with historical instruments through the Cornell Center for Historical Keyboards, the Westfield Center, and the Ira F. Brilliant Beethoven Center.