

Sunday, March 13, 2011, 3pm  
Hertz Hall

## Les Percussions de Strasbourg

Jean-Paul Bernard, *artistic director*  
Claude Ferrier  
Bernard Lesage  
Keiko Nakamura  
François Papirer  
Olaf Tzschoppe

### PROGRAM

Edgard Varèse (1883–1965) Ionisation (1929–1931)

Edmund Campion (b. 1957) Ondoyants et Divers (2005)

Philippe Manoury (b. 1952) Le Livre des claviers (1987–1988)

### INTERMISSION

Raphaël Cendo (b. 1975) Refontes (2008)

Yoshihisa Taïra (b. 1937) Hiérophonie V (1974)

*Les Percussions de Strasbourg are sustained by the continuing support of the French Ministry for Culture and Communication: Regional Director of the Cultural Affairs of Alsace; Strasbourg, Ville de Culture; the Alsace Region; the General Consul of the Bas-Rhin; SACEM; and SPEDIDAM.*

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*Cal Performances' 2010–2011 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.*

### Edgard Varèse (1883–1965) Ionisation (1929–1931)

Born in Paris 1883, Edgard Varèse was one of the pioneers in electronic music and one of the most important 20th-century avant-garde composers, who developed a series of acoustic and theoretical principles that defined the boundaries between music and noise, dissonance and consonance.

Varèse began his music studies in Paris in 1903, and continued later in Berlin, where he met composers Ferruccio Busoni and Richard Strauss. In 1915, he moved to New York, where he started working in dissonant harmonies and complex polyphonies. In 1921, Varèse founded the International Composers' Guild along with Carlos Salzedo, performing numerous works for small ensemble.

Varèse's determination to work with electronic sounds became an obsession. In 1927, he contacted Harvey Fletcher, director of acoustical research at Bell Telephone Laboratories, asking to set up a studio for the research of electronic music, but his proposal was turned down. In 1932, he offered to work for Bell in exchange for the use of the studio, even sacrificing his career as a composer to find new electronic sounds. During the 1930s, Varèse began a series of works employing electronic instruments, such as the theremin and the ondes martenot.

In 1954, Varèse produced the percussion and tape work *Deserts* at the renowned Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Studio, followed by *Poème électronique* for the 1957 World's Fair in Brussels, which was performed on 425 loudspeakers and accompanied by projected images. This was one of the first large-scale multimedia productions ever.

Varèse died in New York in 1965 at age 82. He was a major influence on some of the most innovative pop artists in the 1960s, including Frank Zappa, The Beatles and Pink Floyd, as well as the whole electronic experimental scene of the 1990s.

*Ionisation* has taken its place among the masterpieces of 20th-century music. It is the first piece in the history of Western music written for percussion alone, the first to consider percussive sounds as true musical material—"the basis of rhythm, it is the immobile charged with its power."

Four basic cells, which represent the sound material with which Varèse composes all his works, disintegrate into over a hundred different rhythms, until the final explosion, which is total disintegration.

We know that before Varèse, Oriental folk music (mainly Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Balinese) made abundant use of percussion, but we can detect only the slightest influences of folk music in his work. By playing solely on the instrumental timbres which he varies according to more and more complex combinations, Varèse developed a new plasticity of sound, where, for the first time, sound appears to be treated scientifically, before the imagination or sensitivities can get a hold on it. Thus, *Ionisation* represents an essential stage in this never-ending quest for new instrumental material, which can specifically feed and translate the composer's inner world of sound.

But it is also a work that reflects the urban environment that was dear to Varèse. Originally written for 13 percussionists and a conductor, *Ionisation* will be performed by the six Strasbourg percussionists, thanks to particular methods of arranging the instruments (claves on a stand, pedal sirens, etc.), which in no way mutilates the original version. This version for six percussionists was arranged by Georges Van Gucht, Strasbourg's former Director of Percussion, with the composer's agreement and was performed for the first time on November 11, 1967, on Südwestfunk Radio in Baden-Baden.

**Edmund Campion (b. 1957)  
Ondoyants et Divers (2005)**

Edmund J. Campion, born in Dallas, Texas, in 1957, received his doctoral degree in

composition at Columbia University and attended the Paris Conservatory, where he worked with composer Gérard Grisey. In 1993, he created the piece *Losing Touch* (Billaudot Editions, Paris) at IRCAM. He was then commissioned by IRCAM to produce a large work for interactive electronics, *Natural Selection* (2002). Other projects include a Radio France Commission, *L'Autre*, the full-scale ballet *Playback* (commissioned by IRCAM and the Société des Auteurs et Compositeurs Dramatiques) and *ME*, for baritone and live electronics, commissioned by the MANCA Festival in association with the Centre National de Création Musicale.

Dr. Campion is currently Professor of Music at UC Berkeley, where he also serves as Co-Director of the Center for New Music and Audio Technologies (CNMAT). His prizes and honors include the Rome Prize, the Nadia Boulanger Award, the Paul Fromm Award at Tanglewood, a Charles Ives Award given by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a Fulbright scholarship for study in France. Recent projects include a Fromm Foundation commission for *Outside Music*, written for the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, and a French Ministry of Culture Commande d'Etat for *Ondoyants et Divers* (Billaudot Editions, Paris), written for Les Percussions de Strasbourg. *Ondoyants et Divers* was premiered on WDR German Radio in fall 2005. *Practice*, commissioned by the American Composers Orchestra, was premiered in New York's Zankel Hall in March 2006. Recent commissions include a new work with dance in collaboration with the Drumming Ensemble of Portugal and *From Swan Songs* (2008) for the violin and piano duo of David Abel and Julie Steinberg.

*Ondoyants et Divers* is a piece concerned with total cooperation, a practice that can lead, on one hand, toward militarism, and on the other hand, toward a balanced, healthy community. The piece calls for five nonpitched percussion instruments per musician: one skin, one wood, one metal, one pitched metal and one auxiliary. The music depends collectively on the six

musicians at all times. To remove one part is to destroy the whole. *Ondoyants et Divers* depends on space and physical placement of the musicians. The composite sound of the six musicians creates an invisible seventh player, a musical part which dances above and between the six musicians. The focus is on the players and not the timbres, it is a concerto for six.

The words of the title originate with one of the essays (Book I, Chapter 27) of the French writer Montaigne "on friendship." Before I discovered the origin, I heard the phrase *Ondoyants et Divers* used in several different places and under different circumstances. I heard a scientist describe the universe as *Ondoyants et Divers*. I heard a sociologist describe human behavior as *Ondoyants et Divers*. All of this has nothing whatsoever to do with how Montaigne himself used the words in his essay, nor the subject of the essay itself. The words of Montaigne have catapulted away from his essay and have taken on a life beyond their original intent. I have used these words as a title for a piece of music because they are evocative of my musical goals, not as a reference or homage to Montaigne.

*Ondoyants et Divers* was commissioned by Les Percussions de Strasbourg and was funded by a Commande d'Etat from the French Ministry of Culture.

Edmund Campion

**Philippe Manoury (b. 1952)**  
**Le Livre des claviers (1987–1988)**

Born in 1952 in Tulle, France, Philippe Manoury began playing music at the age of nine. Very quickly he taught himself how to compose, and at the beginning of the 1970s, definitively embarked on the path toward being a composer. His first musical influences were Karlheinz Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez and Iannis Xenakis.

Participating in major contemporary music festivals and concerts since age 19, Manoury made a name for himself with the performance of *Cryptophonos*. Upon his return to France in 1981, he was invited to be a researcher at

IRCAM. From 1983 to 1987, he was in charge of pedagogy at the Ensemble Intercontemporain. He went on to be a professor of composition and electronic music at the Conservatoire National Supérieur Musique et Danse de Lyon (1987–1997).

From 1998 to 2000, he was an official of the Académie Européenne de Musique at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. His works include every genre: solo pieces, mixed electronic music (most recently *On-Iron* for a choir, video and electronic music, and *Partita I*, for viola and electronic music), chamber music, and choral and orchestral works.

Since fall 2004, Philippe Manoury has lived in the United States, where he teaches composition at UC San Diego. His career has been marked by numerous awards: the SACEM award for chamber music (1976), grand prize for composition by the city of Paris (1998), the SACEM grand prize for symphonic music (1999) and an award from musical critics in 2001 for *K...*

*Le Livre des claviers* was commissioned by the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication and is dedicated to Les Percussions de Strasbourg.

*Le Livre des claviers* ("Book of the Keyboards") includes six relatively brief pieces designed to exploit the various possibilities of tuned percussion instruments laid out in the style of a keyboard and played with mallets. The techniques associated with these instruments were greatly developed during the course of the 20th century. If one compares Debussy's use of the xylophone with that of Messiaen, and later Boulez, one observes a clear progression that brought mallet percussion (from the marimba to the xylomarimba) into a true soloist's role.

In recent years, techniques employing perpetual motion with four mallets have pushed the possibilities even further. It is not just about developing a technique, however, but rather actualizing musical configurations that would have been impossible even a few years ago: polyphony, and the succession of chords of different natures at great speed. This strongly motivated my choice of mallet percussion.

Moreover, the construction of new acoustic instruments like the *sixxens* permitted me to tackle new scenarios in this sense: the notion of pitch is no longer predominant, but rather, it becomes more complex.

Pièce III: For sextet of *sixxens*: As the instruments are not tuned to the same pitches, nor are they capable of producing precise pitches due to their inharmonicity, it is on the level of melodic movement (ascending and descending) and of rhythmic configuration that a sense of unity emerges at times. Polyrhythm and homorhythm are the extreme axes of this piece, which plays upon the disintegration of rhythms (a superposition of six rhythmic layers derived one from the other, going from the most equal to the most irregular).

Pièce VI: For sextet of *sixxens*: More complex than Pièce III, this work plays principally with the notion of "depth of sound," where the same sound multiplied in two, four, or six parts creates an effect of "restraint" on the harmony of the instruments. Homorhythmic sequences, polyphonic states and global textures are continually enriched, passing from the simplest condition to the most complex.

Philippe Manoury  
(trans. Rebekah Ahrendt)

**Raphaël Cendo (b. 1975)**  
**Refontes (2008)**

Born in 1975, Raphaël Cendo studied piano and then composition at the Paris Music Teacher Training School, where he obtained his degree in 2000. He entered the Higher National Conservatoire in Paris in 2003 and worked on composition with Allain Gaussin, Brian Ferneyhough, Fausto Romitelli and Philippe Manoury. Cendo has written compositions for internationally known ensembles such as L'itinéraire, the National Orchestra of Île de France, the Ensemble Intercontemporain and the New Modern Ensemble, and his compositions have been conducted by such famous names as Pascal Rophé, Daniel Kawka, Lorraine

Vaillancourt and Peter Rundel. Many of his compositions have been played during various events such as *Lille, European Capital of Culture* at the Opéra de Lille, the Tremplin Concerts at the Centre Pompidou, the Radio France Festival in Montpellier, the New Voices Festival at Royaumont, Radio France's Présences Festival and the Musica Festival in Strasbourg. In 2005, he was commissioned by IRCAM and the Ensemble Intercontemporain to write a piece for 25 musicians. He is currently on the annual composition and computerized music course at IRCAM.

Essentially based on metallic sounds, *Refontes* ("Recastings") continuously develops a material, dense and saturated. The primary rhythms governing the principal axes of the form gradually diminish, giving way to colliding masses of different sonorities in which a complex sonorous volume surges, in close relation to the electronic processing. In effect, rhythm is here envisaged as an ultimate consequence of the developments of saturated sounds invading the sonorous space. The primary task of composition consisted in discovering solutions for timbral fusion between the different percussion instruments, and in defining the complex electronic sonorities that exist in permanent relation to the instruments. Gestures and dynamics—closely linked in this score—proceed by conjunct movement to the interior of a musical discourse that never ceases intensifying. *Refontes* attempts to affirm a form of direct composition in which the instrumental gesture and its physical implication become the principal parameters of musical execution.

*Refontes* is dedicated to Les Percussions de Strasbourg.

*Raphaël Cendo*  
(trans. Rebekah Ahrendt)

**Yoshihisa Taïra (b. 1937)**  
**Hiérophonie V (1974)**

Born in Japan in 1937, Yoshihisa Taïra studied at the Arts University of Tokyo and then in Paris, where his teachers included André Jolivet, Henri Dutilleux and Olivier Messiaen. His compositions have premiered at the major contemporary music venues of Europe, North America and Japan. Taïra now teaches at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Musique in Paris.

His aesthetic is based on song and the natural world. He believes in the "inner chanting of a prayer which makes me be."

This work, which begins with the primitive acts of Percussion and the Shout, goes on to negate those very acts in the second part. Can we not perceive the serenity of the soul in the continuous vibration of the instruments? ... One can almost hear the drums of the folk festival, as if people were able to reach one another by striking the instruments and thus by singing the breath of life.... With the repeated rhythmic ostinato I wish to affirm, in my own way, the essential pleasure of the body.

*Hiérophonie Vis* is dedicated to Les Percussions de Strasbourg.

*Yoshihisa Taïra*



WE COULD BEGIN the history of Les Percussions de Strasbourg with the first official concert given at the ORTF on January 17, 1962, bringing together Serge Nigg of France, Hungary's Béla Bartók, and the French-American composer Edgard Varèse. But we should first revisit a concert given a little earlier, in 1959, conducted by Pierre Boulez, when the six founding members of Les Percussions de Strasbourg came together for the first time on one stage. For several years, the percussionists of the Orchestre Municipal de Strasbourg (under the direction of Ernest Bour) and those of Charles Bruch's Orchestre Radio-Strasbourg had traveled between Strasbourg and Baden-Baden; the energetic Henrich Strobel, head of the music department at Südwestfunk Radio, had regularly invited them to give contemporary music concerts of new symphonic works with a strong percussion element. Our six musketeers, or more precisely, our "Strasbourg drummers," became a force on the German stage, and a new cultural alliance between Germany and France was born.

In the the group's pioneering years, a new repertoire for percussion took shape and the demand for a percussion orchestra was confirmed. Our musicians first took a name more technical than it was glamorous—"Groupe Instrumental

à Percussions"—but the name "Les Percussions de Strasbourg" caught on quickly, in Europe and then internationally. Like "Les Tambours du Bronx," Les Percussions de Strasbourg became a name, a brand representing French excellence with equal measures of innovation and grace. From its first concert to those of today, Les Percussions de Strasbourg has given over 1,600 performances in more than 70 countries.

The 50th anniversary of Les Percussions de Strasbourg is an occasion to look back over the repertoire with new eyes, to pay homage to the founders and driving forces behind the group. But it is also a moment to view the second generation of Les Percussions de Strasbourg in perspective, with an eye to future convergence as the group continues to evolve.

Today's group is different, since today's members are different; the founders are no longer among us. A new history is being made. Fifty years in the life of an ensemble is exceptional, even unique. Rather than take part in the cult of memory, we pay tribute to the group's past by recreating and reinventing it.

The anniversary celebrations begin with a North American tour in early 2011, ending at the close of the 2012–2013 season. World premieres, events, shows and the publication of a book will punctuate the festivities.