

CONTACT:
Christina Kellogg 510.643.6714
ckellogg@calperfs.berkeley.edu
Joe Yang 510.642.9121
scyang@calperfs.berkeley.edu

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 30, 2007

**CAL PERFORMANCES COMPOSER PORTRAIT SERIES EXPLORES THE WORK OF
CONLON NANCARROW AS PERFORMED BY NEW MUSIC ENSEMBLE
ALARM WILL SOUND SUNDAY, MARCH 11 AT HERTZ HALL**

**KEY NOTES: MUSICOLOGIST LORETTA NOTARESCHI AND MEMBERS OF ALARM WILL
SOUND WILL DISCUSS NANCARROW'S WORK, SUNDAY, MARCH 11 FROM 1:00-2:30 P.M. IN
THE SEABORG ROOM AT THE MEN'S FACULTY CLUB ON CAMPUS**

BERKELEY, January 30, 2007—Cal Performances, in collaboration with the Miller Theatre at Columbia University, presents the 2006/07 season's third and final Composer Portrait concert, an in-depth examination of the works of MacArthur Award winning-composer **Conlon Nancarrow** (1912-1997), **Sunday, March 11 at 3:00 p.m. in Hertz Hall**. This unique composer lived in relative isolation in Mexico and, as a result, obscurity for the majority of his professional career. In recent years, however, his work written originally for his instrument of choice, the player piano, has risen to wide acclaim for its daring explorations of complex, sometimes clashing, rhythmic relationships. The composer György Ligeti called his music "the greatest discovery since Webern and Ives...the best of any composer living today."

The 20-member ensemble **Alarm Will Sound**, seen last season at Cal Performances Centennial Gala Performance and in the Composer Portrait presentation of works by John Adams, takes on the challenge of Nancarrow's compositions, including **Studies for Player Piano Nos. 2, 3a and 6**. Originally composed for player piano alone, these works have been arranged for performance by the entire ensemble. Led by conductor and artistic director **Alan Pierson**, the group has been hailed as "the future of classical music" by *The New York Times*

In conjunction with the concert, a *Key Notes* talk will be given by musicologist **Loretta Notareschi** and members of Alarm Will Sound focusing on the current revival of Nancarrow work. This event is free to ticketholders and will be held in the Seaborg Room at the Men's Faculty Club on UC Berkeley campus; light refreshments will be served.

-MORE-

PROGRAM

The Berkeley program will highlight three of his more than forty compositions created for player piano with **Studies for Player Piano No. 2, 3a** and **6**. Opening the concert is No. 6 performed with a 1992 arrangement by **Yvar Mikhashoff**. This composition is one of Nancarrow's most explicitly Spanish works with additional jazz and blues overtones. Study No. 2 is arranged by Alarm Will Sound's general manager and composer **Gavin Chuck** and is built over a traditional jazz chord progression; the work juxtaposes a single note in four different tempos. No. 3a, like No. 2, utilizes some of the most complex rhythmic structures ever heard; additionally, it is considered the most sophisticated of these studies; it was arranged by Alarm Will Sound's **Derek Bermel**.

Nancarrow's entire compositional output for live musicians was composed before 1948 and after 1983. The five selections in this category on the program are **Piece No. 1 for Small Orchestra** (1943), his ninth extant composition and a work that contains explicit jazz references recalling his background as a jazz trumpeter; **String Quartet No. 1** (1945) hints at what is to come in some of Nancarrow's player piano pieces; and **Sonatina for Piano** (1941) contains references to Bartók's music. **Septet** composed in 1940 and **Three movements for Chamber Orchestra** in 1993, one of Nancarrow's later works, complete the program.

The concert also contains one work by **Johannes Cicconia** (1370-1412) *le Ray Au Soleyl*, from the early music era, was chosen by Pierson because of its startlingly similar approach to complex rhythms.

CONLON NANCARROW

Born in Texarkana, Arkansas in 1912, **Conlon Nancarrow** was active in his early years as a trumpeter, playing jazz and other types of popular music. He attended the Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music and later studied composition and counterpoint in Boston with Nicolas Slonimsky, Walter Piston and Roger Sessions (Sessions later taught at UC Berkeley). Nancarrow

valued most his work with Sessions the most: “The only formal studies I did that were important were the studies I had in strict counterpoint with Roger Sessions...they were rigid!” In 1937, Nancarrow enlisted in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to fight against Franco in the Spanish Civil War where he fought for two years. On his return to the United States, Nancarrow became involved in the New York new music scene, associating with other composers such as Elliot Carter and Aaron Copland. Nancarrow, however, was a dedicated socialist, which made him politically unacceptable. Angry at having been turned down for a passport, he moved to Mexico City in the early 1940s and became a Mexican citizen in 1956. He continued to compose there in virtual isolation until his death in 1997.

Nancarrow, early on in his composing career, found that the extreme technical demands his works made on musicians limited greatly the number of satisfactory performances. The situation was exacerbated during his time in Mexico where he had little access to musicians. Taking a cue from Henry Cowell’s book New Musical Resources, Nancarrow found the solution in the player piano with its ability to produce extremely complex rhythmic patterns at a speed far beyond the abilities of humans. He had two specially made Ampico mechanical pianos that he worked with for forty years.

In 1976, Peter Garland began publishing Nancarrow’s scores in his *Soundings* journal, and Charles Amirkhanian began releasing recordings of the player piano works on his 1750 Arch label. At age 65, Nancarrow began receiving public attention. In 1982, Nancarrow received a MacArthur Award. This increased interest in his work prompted him to write for conventional instruments; he composed several works for small ensembles one of which, Three movements for Chamber Orchestra, is part of the Berkeley concert. Nancarrow’s complete *Studies for Player Piano* have been recently released on compact disc by Wergo (Germany), produced by Charles Amirkhanian.

ALARM WILL SOUND

Formed in 2001, **Alarm Will Sound** is a 20-member ensemble committed to innovative performances and recordings of today's music. Musical artists-in-residence at Dickinson College, they have established a reputation for performing demanding music with energetic virtuosity. Described by the *London Financial Times* as "equal parts exuberance, nonchalance, and virtuosity" and as "a triumph of ensemble playing" by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Alarm Will Sound is a force worth recognizing in the music world. With wide ranging experience in composition and improvisation, in jazz, early and world music, the band brings intelligence and a adventure to all of its performances.

Alan Pierson, the artistic director and conductor of Alarm Will Sound, began conducting studies while pursuing a physics degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a composition degree at the Eastman School of Music. He has collaborated with many major composers and performers, including Yo-Yo Ma, Steve Reich, Augusta Read Thomas, David Lang, La Monte Young and Wu Man.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for **Alarm Will Sound** performing the work of composer **Conlon Nancarrow**, **Sunday, March 11 at 3:00 p.m.** at Hertz Hall are priced at **\$32.00**. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperformances.net; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens and other students receive a \$2 discount, and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$3 discount (Special Events excluded). For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988, or visit the Cal Performances web site at www.calperformances.net.

#

Cal Performances' 2006/07 Season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

Classical 102.1 KDFC and SFStation.com are 2006/07 season media sponsors.

This presentation is made possible, in part, by the generous support of Liz and Greg Lutz.

#

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Sunday, March 11, 1:00-2:30pm

KEY NOTES

Seaborg Room, Men's Faculty Club

UC Berkeley Campus

Musicologist **Loretta Notareschi** and members of Alarm Will Sound will discuss Conlon Nancarrow's unusual life and career.

#

Sunday, November 11 at 3:00 p.m

Hertz Hall, UC Berkeley Campus

College Ave. at Telegraph Ave., Berkeley

20th Century Music & Beyond

**Composer Portraits: Conlon Nancarrow
with Alarm Will Sound**

Alan Pierson, conductor and artistic director

Program:

Nancarrow/Piece No.1 for Small Orchestra (1943)

Three movements for Chamber Orchestra (1993)

Septet (1940)

String Quartet No. 1 (1945)

Studies for Player Piano Nos. 2 and 3a (arr. Alarm Will Sound);

Studies for Player Piano No. 6 (arr. Yvar Mikharshoff)

Sonatina for Piano (1941)

Cicconia/le Ray Au Soleyl

Tickets: \$32.00, available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperformances.net; and at the door.
