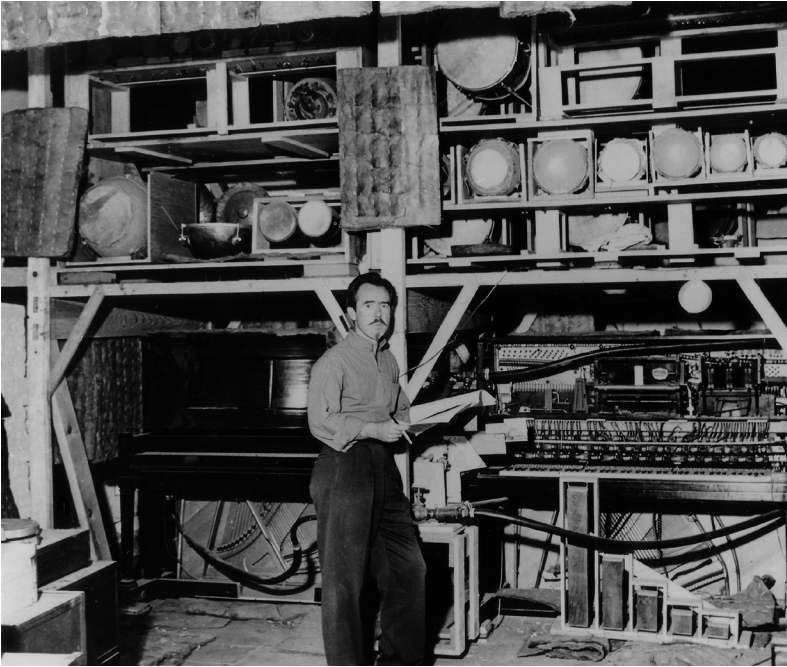


Friday–Sunday, November 2–4, 2012
 Cal Performances
 UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

Nancarrow at 100 A Centennial Celebration



Nancarrow at 100: A Centennial Celebration
 is produced by Cal Performances in collaboration
 with Other Minds and the UC Berkeley Art
 Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

Cal Performances' 2012–2013 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.

Nancarrow at 100 A Centennial Celebration



FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2012

- | | |
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| 5:30–7pm, BAM/PFA
(2626 Bancroft Way) | Festival Opening Event:
In Conversation: Trimpin and Lucinda Barnes |
| 7pm, PFA Theater
(2575 Bancroft Way) | Film Screening No. 1: Don't Shoot the Player
Piano: The Music of Conlon Nancarrow |

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2012

- | | |
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| 11–12:30pm, Hertz Hall
(UC Berkeley Campus) | Discover Nancarrow No. 1:
The Expanding Universe of Conlon Nancarrow |
| 2–4pm, Hertz Hall | Nancarrow Concert No. 1:
Trimpin & Rex Lawson |
| 8pm, Hertz Hall | Nancarrow Concert No. 2:
Calder Quartet |

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2012

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 12–2:30pm, Hertz Hall | Discover Nancarrow No. 2: Eyeballs Out:
How Performers Learned to "Play" Nancarrow |
| 4pm, PFA Theater | Film Screening No. 2: Don't Shoot the Player
Piano: The Music of Conlon Nancarrow |
| 7pm, Hertz Hall | Nancarrow Concert No. 3:
Rex Lawson, Chris Froh, Graeme Jennings,
Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo |



A Welcome from Other Minds



WELCOME, NANCARROVIANS! Conlon Nancarrow was not big on celebrating birthdays. But I know he will excuse us for making this centennial an occasion for paying tribute to his life and music, given that he left us 15 years ago, and by now we need a good reason to reunite and reminisce.

The ingenious complexity of Nancarrow's *Studies for Player Piano*, giving composers a way to activate several melodies at simultaneously different speeds, has been one of the most pivotal achievements in music's last century. But Nancarrow's technical prowess would be clinical empty stuff in the hands of a lesser mind. Conlon took his mastery of counterpoint from two years of study under Roger Sessions, a deep influence from Bach and Stravinsky, along with jazz artists Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, and Earl "Fatha" Hines, his experience as a jazz trumpeter, and his conclusions on the perception of time garnered from his study of music from India and Africa, and melded these into one of the most listenable and striking *œuvres* in 20th-century music.

Perhaps most astonishing is that Nancarrow completed most of his *Studies* without the world knowing about them. They were composed in Mexico City during his long residency there (1940–1997), following his decision to leave the United States at the tender age of 26. But by the late 1970s the secret was out, and his genius began to be more and more widely celebrated. His

hermetic existence was no longer possible, and gradually the very modest composer found pleasure in his new-begotten fame.

Many people have provided support for his work and written eloquently about it, and we are privileged to have a select few of these in our midst as participants in this festival. We are deeply honored to welcome the one person who spent more time with Conlon Nancarrow than anyone else—his widow, Dr. Yoko Sugiura Yamamoto. Born in Japan in 1942, Sugiura emigrated to Mexico and has worked there as one of the country's leading archæologists. She married Nancarrow in 1971 and was his greatest support and inspiration. Accompanying her will be the Nancarrow's son Mako, a civil engineer, and his daughter Isabella, now nine years old. Among Conlon's confidants and partners in music we welcome composer Peter Garland (from Maine), sound sculptor Trimpin (Seattle), and Kyle Gann (Bard College). Mr. Garland was first to publish large numbers of Nancarrow's elegant music scores in the periodical *Soundings*. Mr. Gann is the author of an authoritative book on the structure and substance of *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow* (Cambridge University Press, 1995). And Trimpin not only converted all of Nancarrow's perforated piano rolls into MIDI information, making them available for performance around the world, but has planned for three years to reconstruct Nancarrow's dream of a self-playing percussion orchestra. We are thrilled to have its introduction at BAM/PFA in conjunction with this centennial event.

From London we welcome Rex Lawson, the world's greatest living pianolist, who illuminates the capabilities of piano roll technology. Conlon greatly admired Rex for his historical research and his ability to perform rolls with live orchestra, following a conductor to recreate, for example, Percy Grainger's playing of the Grieg Piano Concerto and George Antheil's *Ballet mécanique* with live percussion ensemble.

Also from England we have composer Dominic Murcott, a charming and brilliant musical mind, who curated and organized an admirable Nancarrow festival this past April at London's Southbank Centre. His arrangement

of Study No. 21 (Canon X) for chamber orchestra, premiered in London, is a thrilling achievement. His transformation of Nancarrow's *Piece for Tape* into a virtuoso work for solo live percussionist will be performed here by Chris Froh.

Musicologist Felix Meyer is a specialist in music of the American Experimental Tradition. As Director of the Sacher Foundation in Basel, he is in charge of preserving and curating the original manuscripts of Nancarrow, in addition to the correspondence, photos, pianos, perforating machine, and libraries (books and phonodiscs) of the composer. He has worked diligently to restore the instruments and research the correspondence and hopes to publish a new volume of research on Nancarrow in due course. Rounding out our distinguished list of participants are Helena Bugallo (Switzerland) and Amy Williams (Pittsburgh), the brilliant piano duo, who will perform four-hand and two-piano arrangements of Nancarrow's *Studies*. And we are pleased to present the Calder String Quartet, based in Southern California, to perform music by Nancarrow, one of his favorite composers, Bartók, and a man whose work has been highly influenced by Nancarrow, English composer Thomas Adès.

My deepest thanks to Matías Tarnopolsky of Cal Performances, who has been so enthusiastic and supportive of this event. At BAM/PFA, Larry Rinder and Lucinda Barnes welcomed our proposal to collaborate with Trimpin to present the percussion orchestra installation, and Steve Seid graciously worked with filmmaker Peter Esmonde (*Trimpin: The Sound of Invention*), a member of the board of directors of Other Minds, to curate the film portion of our event. Other Minds is privileged to work in collaboration with such distinguished company in honoring the genius of Conlon Nancarrow.

Charles Amirkhanian
Executive & Artistic Director
Other Minds

FOUNDED IN 1992, Other Minds in San Francisco is a leading organization for new and experimental music in all its forms, devoted to championing the most original, eccentric, and underrepresented creative voices in contemporary music. From festival concerts, film screenings, radio broadcasts, and the commissioning of new works, to producing and releasing CDs, preserving thousands of interviews and concerts, and distributing them free on the Internet, Other Minds has become one of the world's major conservators of new music's ecology.

Cal Performances collaborated with Other Minds on the organization's very first presentation: Charles Amirkhanian interviewed composer György Ligeti and pianist Volker Banfield performed the American premiere of Ligeti's *Etudes, Books 1 and 2*. This took place onstage at Hertz Hall nearly 20 years ago, on Friday, January 29, 1993. During Other Minds Festival 3 (on November 24, 1996), Hertz Hall hosted a concert of music by Kui Dong, Charles Shere, George Lewis, Mitchell Clark, and Olly Wilson. The concert closed with a performance by the Kronos Quartet of ex-UC Berkeley Music Department student La Monte Young's lengthy *Chronos Kristalla*.

Charles Amirkhanian, as Music Director of KPFA Radio, first collaborated with Director Betty Connors and the Committee for Arts and Lectures (which was renamed Cal Performances in the 1980s), on a concert of music by George Antheil (1900–1959) on November 20, 1970. That event literally launched a revival of the composer's career, including his early music from Paris in the 1920s. It is available for listening at Other Minds' audio preservation site, www.radiOM.org. Performers include pianist Julian White, violinist Nathan Rubin, percussionist Lou Harrison, soprano Miriam Abramowitsch, and other notable Bay Area figures. In addition, the world premiere of the complete opera by Ezra Pound, *Le Testament de Villon*, was given at Zellerbach Hall on November 13, 1971, as a benefit for KPFA Radio. Robert Hughes conducted members of the Western Opera Theatre.

To learn more, visit otherminds.org.

Friday, November 2, 2012, 5:30pm
UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive

Festival Opening Event

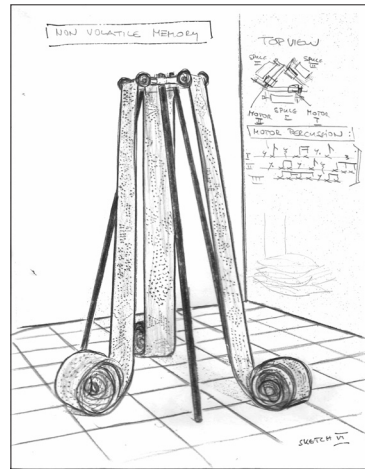
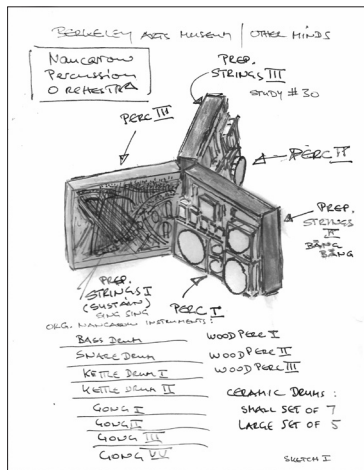
PROGRAM

Trimpin: Nancarrow Percussion Orchestra/MATRIX 244

FOR THIS MATRIX EXHIBITION, Trimpin creates an interactive sound sculpture incorporating three reconstructed pianos. The installation, which features Nancarrow's Study No. 30 (n.d.) for prepared player piano, pays tribute to the composer's rhythmically complex and intensely layered studies, and includes percussive elements originally designed by Nancarrow.

Trimpin: Nancarrow Percussion Orchestra/MATRIX 244 is on view
Wednesday–Sunday, 11am–5pm, through December 23, 2012.

*Commissioned by Other Minds in collaboration with the
UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.*



IN CONVERSATION: TRIMPIN AND LUCINDA BARNES

On the opening evening of UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive's presentation of *Trimpin: Nancarrow Percussion Orchestra/MATRIX 244*, Chief Curator and Director of Programs and Collections Lucinda Barnes talks with Trimpin about his new installation and Conlon Nancarrow's legacy.

Friday, November 2, 2012, 7pm
PFA Theater

Film Screening No. 1

Don't Shoot The Player Piano: The Music of Conlon Nancarrow

In Person Yoko Sugiura Nancarrow, Mako Nancarrow,
Trimpin, Charles Amirkhanian



James Greeson *Conlon Nancarrow: Virtuoso of the
Player Piano* (2012) (United States,
56 minutes) (West Coast premiere)

Who would have thought that the miraculous maestro of Mexico City, the infamous Conlon Nancarrow, was born and bred in Texarkana, Arkansas? Living in semi-obscurity for more than a half-century until his death in 1997, he was a composer of demanding, multirhythmic canons for player piano. James Greeson's smoothly composed *Conlon Nancarrow: Virtuoso of the Player Piano* provides contrapuntal insights about an irascible composer who invented a virtuosic, heavily cadenced music that outdistanced the skills of flesh-and-blood musicians. Champion of the player piano, the only instrument robust enough to undertake his music, Conlon Nancarrow could roll with the punches.

Steve Seid

Preceded by

Alban Wesly *Study No. 2 and Study No. 18* (2008)
(Netherlands, 7 minutes)

The Dutch reed quintet Calefax creates visual puzzles that express the cadences of Nancarrow's compositions.

NOTES ON THE MUSIC

Probably written straight after Study No. 3, Study No. 2 has a similarly bluesy harmonic basis but with an intriguing rhythmic structure. The whole piece is over a bass line in 5/8 against a ticking pair of notes in 3/4. The bass line, however, is three notes and a rest in length, so it doesn't fit the five-note bar length and seems to change chords at unexpected places as a result.

Study No. 18 uses the same material at different speeds to create complexity. Here the faster voice enters later, but both finish their material at the same time.

Dominic Murcott, 2012



Saturday, November 3, 2012, 11am
Hertz Hall

Discover Nancarrow No. 1

The Expanding Universe of Conlon Nancarrow

PANELISTS

- Yoko Sugiura-Nancarrow

Archaeologist, widow of the composer
- Felix Meyer

*Director of the Sacher Stiftung,
preserving the Nancarrow archives*
- Kyle Gann

*Composer and author of The Music of
Conlon Nancarrow*
- Peter Garland

*Composer and original publisher of
Nancarrow's Studies for Player Piano*
- Trimpin

Composer and sound sculptor
- David Makoto Nancarrow

Civil engineer, son of the composer
- Charles Amirkhanian

Moderator

*This panel session will begin with a performance of Study No. 25
and conclude with Study No. 12.*

NOTES ON THE MUSIC

THE SUPER-FAST GLISSANDI in Study No. 25 have a different qualities about them, according to the dynamics and whether the sustain pedal is down. The final twelve seconds contain 1,028 notes! Study No. 12 is a beautiful study with a character unlike almost all the others. Using the Phrygian mode, irregular bar lengths, and guitar-strum-like glissandi, this work of pure genius captures the spirit of flamenco.

Dominic Murcott, 2012

Saturday, November 3, 2012, 2pm
Hertz Hall

Nancarrow Concert No. 1

Trimpin & Rex Lawson

PROGRAM

- Conlon Nancarrow (1912–1997)

Study No. 11
- Study No. 5
- Study No. 6
- Study No. 26
- Study No. 37
- Study No. 41c (for two pianos)

Trimpin, *piano*, *Vorsetzer*

INTERMISSION

- Nancarrow

Study No. 21 (Canon X)
- Percy Grainger (1882–1961)

Molly on the Shore
- Grainger

Shepherd's Hey
- Serge Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

Prelude in E-flat major, Op. 23, No. 6
- Jean Grémillon (1901–1951)

Film score to *Un tour au large* (1926)
United States premiere
- Rex Lawson, *pianola*

NOTES ON CONCERT NO. 1

STUDY NO. 11 is the last of the blues/ragtime/jazz pieces in the set, before this stylistic feature becomes submerged in the more abstract style of Nancarrow's later works. It exudes a nervous intensity reminiscent of Study No. 3, but its irregular rhythmic patterns and phrase lengths give this one a more improvisatory character than any of the earlier Studies.

Study No. 5 features an extraordinary series of repeating lines stacked on top of each other. Some remain unchanged throughout but others consist of gestures separated by a diminishing number of rests. As a result, the statements get closer and closer until everything is compressed into a manic conclusion.

In Study No. 6, deceptively simple bass line sounds like an ostinato, but through a numerical trick is always unstable, while a "cowboy" melody unfolds over the top. In the final moments the melody uses the same rhythmic pattern as the bass.

The antithesis of Nancarrow's trademark complexity, Study No. 26 (Canon 1/1) was championed by John Cage and is the only canon in the collection with all voices at the same tempo. The cool texture and ambivalent harmonic material is indeed reminiscent of Cage.

Study No. 37 features twelve separate canons, each with twelve voices at tempo ratios approximating those of the pitches in a chromatic octave. The first canon is a simple five-note melody played at twelve different pitches at twelve speeds, so the music seems to cascade down the instrument. Each canon uses a different version of this technique and each has a contrasting texture so it is possible to recognize when a new one appears. With a surprisingly luscious ending, Study No. 37 is arguably the perfect example of Nancarrow's innovative structural invention.

Now the fun begins: Study No. 41c! Study No. 41a plus No. 41b played on two separate pianos simultaneously! The crescendos of the first two movements overlap to create one of the most complex sections in musical history. Buried in the mix are almost all the techniques that Nancarrow has developed for the player piano.

Study No. 21 (Canon X) is the archetypal Nancarrow work. Two lines of broadly atonal music cross as one gets faster while the other gets slower. The pitches are merely a tool to allow the structure to unfold.

Dominic Murcott, 2012



Originally composed for string quartet/string orchestra, Percy Grainger's *Molly on the Shore* was written in 1907 as a birthday gift for his mother. An arrangement of two contrasting Irish reels, "Temple Hill" and "Molly on the Shore," the work was arranged in 1920 for wind band by the composer, as well as for orchestra. In a letter to Frederick Fennell, Grainger says that, "in setting 'Molly on the Shore,' I strove to imbue the accompanying parts that made up the harmonic texture with a melodic character not too unlike that of the underlying reel tune. Melody seems to me to provide music with initiative, whereas [*sic*] rhythm appears to me to exert an enslaving influence. For that reason I have tried to avoid regular rhythmic domination in my music, always excepting irregular rhythms, such as those of Gregorian chant, which seem to me to make for freedom. Equally with melody, I prize discordant harmony, because of the emotional and compassionate sway it exerts."

Grainger's *Shepherd's Hey* is a tricky, ingenious setting of the English Morris dance tune *The Keel Row*. To this day, in several agricultural districts throughout England, Morris dances are performed by teams of "Morris men" decked out with bells and quaint ornaments to the music of the fiddle or "the pipe and tabor" (a sort of fife and drum). The *Hey* usually involves the interweaving of two lines of dancers, which may be symbolized by the use of two parallel lines of music at the opening of *Shepherd's Hey*, rather than a simple statement of a theme that then moves into variants. Grainger adds stylistically authentic contrapuntal lines derived from the melody itself. Grainger commented of such early pieces as *Shepherd's Hey* that "where other composers would have been jolly setting such dance

tunes I have been sad or furious. My dance settings are energetic rather than gay."

Rachmaninoff's Ten Preludes of Op. 23 were completed in 1903. The most often performed of the set, No. 5 in G minor, was completed as early as 1901. The preludes were composed at the same time as his first extended piece for solo piano, the Variations on a Theme of Chopin, Op. 22, itself derived from Chopin's C minor Prelude. It is no surprise, then, that Rachmaninoff would take inspiration from Chopin's precedent and begin composing a set of his own. With the addition of the later Thirteen Preludes, Op. 32, and the most famous of his compositions, the C-sharp minor Prelude written when he was a teenager of 19, Rachmaninoff continued the tradition of Bach and Chopin by having written preludes in all 24 of the major and minor keys.

The young composer's marriage in May of 1902 and the impending birth of the couple's first child may have contributed to this amazingly fertile period, a creative re-emergence after the devastating failure of his First Symphony in 1895. In less than three years time, he had completed his Second Piano Concerto, the Second Suite for Two Pianos, and the Cello Sonata. The Op. 23 Preludes, with their alternating moods of nostalgic sadness, tenderness, and heroic vigor and joy, can plausibly be regarded as an autobiographical testament. Irina, the couple's daughter, was born on May 14, and author Julian Haylock tells us that, in response, "Rachmaninoff sat down the very same day and composed his E-flat major Prelude (No. 6), a microcosm of wide-eyed innocence and blissful contentment."

Though little known outside of France, Jean Grémillon is a consummate filmmaker from his country's golden age. A classically trained violinist who discovered cinema as a young man when his orchestra was hired to accompany silent movies, he went on to make almost 50 films—which ranged from documentaries to avant-garde works to melodramas with major stars—in a career that started in the mid-1920s and didn't end until the late 1950s. Three of his richest films came during a dire period in French history: *Remorques*, starring Jean Gabin, was begun in 1939 but finished and released after

Germany invaded France, and *Lumière d'été* and *Le ciel est à vous* were produced during the occupation. These are character-driven dramas that reveal either a society on the precipice of doom or people breaking free of societal limitations. Humane, entertaining, and technically brilliant, they show Grémillon to be one of cinema's true hidden masters.

In April 1927, Grémillon collaborated with Jacques Brillouin and Maurice Jaubert on a Pleyela player-piano musical accompaniment prepared for a screening of his film *Un tour au large* ("Voyage on the Open Sea") at the Vieux Colombier cinema in Paris. The publicity for this event advertises this "automatic music." In his account of this event, Paul Gilson (1927) praised the successful synchronization between film and music and its "heightening or punctuation of the images." The player piano seemed to have played an essential role, thanks to its precision—unmatched by a human orchestra—in the accompaniment of the filmed images. On the other hand, the critic for the magazine *Ménestrel* felt that the film suffered from a "race between two machines—often embarrassing, sometimes just sad...awkward synchronization between image and sound-machines running at ostensibly equal speeds, but with differences of seconds or split-seconds that detach one track from the other. The solution is to develop a dynamic relationship within the music itself, as in the Wagnerian drama or the Stravinsky ballet, and not as in the cinema—especially since the music here is 'automatic.' Grémillon finds himself trapped; the rhythmic rigor and the moving precision of his film leave no room, no respite for the music." Though the film is assumed lost forever, the piano rolls to this groundbreaking work remain intact.

Saturday, November 3, 2012, 8pm
Hertz Hall

Nancarrow Concert No. 2

Calder String Quartet

Benjamin Jacobson *violin*
Andrew Bulbrook *violin*
Jonathan Moerschel *viola*
Eric Byers *cello*

PROGRAM

Thomas Adès (b. 1971) Movement I: Nightfalls
from *The Four Quarters* (2010)

Conlon Nancarrow (1912–1997) String Quartet No. 1 (ca. 1945)
I. Allegro molto
II. Andante moderato
III. Prestissimo

Adès Movement II: Serenade: Morning Dew
from *The Four Quarters*

Nancarrow String Quartet No. 3 (Canon 3/4/5/6) (1987)
A measure = 72
B measure = 50
C measure = 92

Adès Movement III: Days
from *The Four Quarters*

Nancarrow Study No. 33 (*arr.* Paul Usher) (ca. 1968/2003)

Adès Movement IV: The Twenty-Fifth Hour
from *The Four Quarters*

INTERMISSION

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) String Quartet No. 5 (1934)
I. Allegro
II. Adagio molto
III. Scherzo: Alla bulgarese
IV. Andante
V. Finale: Allegro vivace

NOTES ON CONCERT NO. 2



THOMAS ADÈS composed *The Four Quarters* in 2010 on a commission from Carnegie Hall for the Emerson String Quartet, which premiered the work on March 12, 2011, in Stern Auditorium. The title of *The Four Quarters*, as with many of Adès's instrumental compositions, is suggestive but not programmatic, this one derived from traditional uses of the term to indicate divisions of time—quarter-hour, quarter of the year (as for financial dealings), quarter of a lunar month, quarter of an athletic contest, the old English concept of quarter of a twelve-hour night—to imply the cycle of a day. The fleeting sounds, firefly sparks and momentary outbursts of the first movement, *Nightfalls*, evoke the meditative hours of darkness. Eugene Drucker, violinist and founding member of the Emerson String Quartet, said that *Serenade: Morning Dew* “is almost entirely pizzicato, with many explosive chords interspersed with quieter plucking. One could imagine that the pizzicato explosions are like drops of dew on blades of grass, scintillating as they catch the sunlight.” *Days* is built around a repeating rhythmic murmur in the second violin that may suggest the steady flow of the hours or even of the days, one to the next. The other instruments wind slow-moving harmonies around this ostinato figure before it passes to the viola when the first violin begins a long, chromatic ascent that climaxes with the unanimous proclamation of the ostinato rhythm by the full ensemble. The intensity subsides, the unanimity dissolves, and the movement comes to an uneasy, dying close. The *Twenty-fifth Hour* broaches the surreal not just in its metaphysical title but also in its oxymoronic performance instruction—*Alla marcia, dolcissimo* (“in the manner of a march, sweetly”)—and its improbable time signature—25/16, parceled out in regular groupings of 4+4+3 and 4+4+3+3. “Adès's invention, his humor and his inscrutability are to be marveled at,” wrote Mark Swed in his review of the Emerson's performance of *The Four Quarters* in Los Angeles in March 2011.

Dr. Richard E. Rodda, 2011

Before Conlon Nancarrow began to work with the player piano, he wrote a whole series of works for conventional instruments. They include his String Quartet No. 1, written in Mexico City around 1945, which features a sequence of movement (fast, slow, fast) and specific thematic and harmonic figures that give it a neoclassical touch but also anticipates certain characteristics of the construction of Nancarrow's later music for player piano. The use of isorhythmic sequences and ostinati falls into the latter category, as does its almost obsessive use of canonic structures. For example, the bluesy slow movement is designed as one large canon (with seven bars between the entries); likewise, the outer movements are permeated with lengthy passages in strict imitation. In the finale, Nancarrow not only used the techniques of inversion, double, and tempo canons but heightened the conclusion by employing an eight-part canon in which each of the four players has to perform to two parts. It is hardly surprising then that there was no ensemble to be found in Mexico in the 1940s who wanted to take on such an intricate and technically taxing composition. The score lay around for decades before it was premiered in 1982 by the Kronos Quartet at the Cabrillo Festival in Aptos, California.

If Nancarrow's String Quartet No. 1 was written shortly before Nancarrow's decades-long retreat from official musical life, his String Quartet No. 3 marks the last phase of his life, in which his music, thanks to its dissemination on records and the committed advocacy of friends (including György Ligeti), finally came to be heard by a wider audience and its significance appreciated. Admittedly, the fact that the vast majority of his *œuvre* was written for the player piano remained a hindrance to its reception, since it was not really suited to reproduction in concert halls. Urged by various performers and impressed by the enormous improvements in the technical competence of some of the ensembles specialized in contemporary music, Nancarrow therefore decided in the 1980s to begin composing music for traditional, nonmechanical

instruments again. When he did so, he reduced the textual density of his music and dispensed (for the most part) with irrational tempo relations, which were impractical to notate and read, but otherwise continued his rigorous explorations of the organization of musical time. Not coincidentally, these late works are among the most difficult, in technical terms, in the modern literature for piano and ensemble.

The String Quartet No. 3 dates from 1987; Nancarrow wrote it to a commission from the Westdeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne for the Arditti Quartet, which premiered it on October 15, 1988, in the festival “Musik und Maschine: Nancarrow und Ligeti in Köln.” The work's subtitle (“Canons 3/4/5/6”) already makes clear what this successor to the String Quartet No. 1—a second, unfinished string quartet from the 1940s must be written off as lost—is about: namely, canonic structures in which the tempos of the parts stand in the relation 3:4:5:6 to one another. In fact, this proportion of tempos is the basis for each of the three movements, though Nancarrow varied the entry and convergence points of the four parts. In the first movement, in which the theme is introduced by the cello at a moderate tempo, the entries of the higher, increasingly rapid parts are arranged in such a way that there is never a convergence of all four parts; instead, in the middle of the movement there are six “mini” convergences in rapid succession between pairs of the parts (cello/viola, cello/violin 2, cello/violin 1, viola/violin 2, etc.). By contrast, in the slow movement, which stands out for its concentration on harmonics and pizzicati, the slowest tempo is assigned to the violin. After the lower instruments have entered in successively faster tempos, there is a convergence of all four parts already in the first third of the piece, after which the canon plays out, rising from the cello (fastest tempo) to the first violin (slowest tempo). The finale consists of three individual canons, of which the last, an acceleration canon, demands extreme technical agility from the quartet. Not only does this section consist of a series of virtuoso trills, tremoli, and glissandi, but the four parts accelerate at different rates—3% (violin 1), 4%

(violin 2), 5% (viola), and 6% (cello)—until they converge at a final figure that is so banal it seems like an ironic wink: A–B–C.

Paul Usher's arrangement of Study No. 33, whose irrational tempo ratio could only be notated approximately, reaches the absolute limit of what can be transcribed for string quartet. This is no question, however, that Usher fulfilled his well-nigh impossible task with considerable imagination, and the highly differentiated sound and great virtuosity of his arrangement pushed the mysterious, fragmented sound world of this piece to an even higher level. Thus, this transcription, like all the successful arrangements, represent a valuable contribution: although they have to make certain concessions in terms of the precision of reproduction, they make up for this loss with their greater coloristic variety as well as with their “analytical” qualities that clarify the structure.

Felix Meyer



Conlon Nancarrow has pointed to Igor Stravinsky and Béla Bartók as two of the biggest influences on his own music. During the mid-1940s, around the time he wrote his String Quartet No. 1, Nancarrow was familiar with, possibly even hearing live, some of Bartók's earlier string quartets. It is worth noting that in 1981, the year before the Kronos Quartet premiered Nancarrow's String Quartet No. 1 (nearly 40 years after it was written!), Mexico City hosted a festival in celebration of Bartók's centennial, which Nancarrow attended, going to nearly every single concert.

Bartók devoted much of his life to the study and collection of folk music from his native Hungary and other lands. In some of his works he incorporated folk material, but in his String Quartet No. 5, having thoroughly absorbed the idiom, he integrates its vitality and expressiveness into his own composition without quoting or copying folk music. The quartet, which Bartók composed in Budapest in the summer of 1934, consists of five movements, arranged in an

arch: the first and last movements, which are fast, share thematic material; the second and fourth are slow and similar in mood; and the third, a scherzo, is the keystone of the entire work.

The first movement constitutes an arch within the greater arch: its three main themes are developed and then recapitulated in reverse order. The second movement, an example of Bartók’s “night music,” begins with bird-call trills and half-heard murmurings, detached phrases and wisps of music, followed by an anguished melody that disappears into the shadows. The central movement has the symmetrical shape of a scherzo and trio, written throughout in Bulgarian rhythms. The slightly faster trio section, which is the center of the movement and the whole quartet, is followed by a modified version of the scherzo. The fourth movement parallels the second, but with pizzicatos in place of trills, and a similarly intricate and passionate middle section. The finale brings back the peasant-like vitality of the first movement, with a stamping rhythm, a flowing central section, and a fugue on the first theme of the first movement. Toward the end, a simple barrel-organ-like transformation of an earlier theme grows increasingly out of tune in a surrealist manner, before the original vigor returns to end the quartet.

Nigel Bolland

Sunday, November 4, 2012, 12pm
Hertz Hall

Discover Nancarrow No. 2

Eyeballs Out! How Performers Learned to “Play” Nancarrow

PANELISTS

Dominic Murcott & Chris Froh *Discussion and performance of Nancarrow’s Piece for Tape*

Helena Bugallo & Amy Williams *Piano duo*

Kyle Gann *Composer and author of The Music of Conlon Nancarrow*

Trimpin *Performance of Nancarrow’s Study No. 3a and other selected studies*

Rex Lawson *Pianolist*

Graeme Jennings *Violinist, formerly with Arditti String Quartet*

Charles Amirkhanian *Moderator*

Sunday, November 4, 2012, 4pm
PFA Theater

Film Screening No. 2

Don't Shoot The Player Piano: The Music of Conlon Nancarrow

In Person Yoko Sugiura Nancarrow, Mako Nancarrow,
Trimpin, Charles Amirkhanian

Hanne Kaisik & Uli Aumüller *Music for 1,000 Fingers* (1993)
(Germany, 45 minutes)



For almost sixty years, Conlon Nancarrow worked diligently in a secluded studio in Mexico City. Amidst his antique player pianos, massive library, and growing collection of piano rolls, this brilliant expat composer never faltered in his ongoing experiment with a music of such complexity it thwarted the skill level of most musicians. By the late 1970s, when Nancarrow's remarkable music began to find acclaim, a small number of critics, composers, and patrons did regularly visit his studio, but none recorded the maestro *in situ*

until Uli Aumüller. Hanne Kaisik and Uli Aumüller's film *Music for 1,000 Fingers* contains rare footage of Nancarrow as he explains his compositional methods and procedures for the first time on film. Drawing a connection from the multicultural complexity and activity of the bustling metropolis of Mexico City to Conlon's seclusion in his studio, this fascinating film, made for German broadcast in 1993, contains interviews with Along with Yoko Nancarrow and Charles Amirkhanian, and additional commentary by György Ligeti. This crisp portrait shows us Conlon Nancarrow in his well-worn space of vigorous creativity.

Steve Seid

Preceded by

Alban Wesly *Nancarrow Study No. 3c* (2008)
(Netherlands, 3 minutes)



The melodic patterns in Study No. 3c retain a somewhat blues flavor. Though not a strict canon, there are extended canonic passages, heard against a pizzicato-like bass line, all in a moderately fast tempo. A fragmented image resolves into wholeness as Calefax ebulliently performs Study No. 3C.

Tal Rosner & Sophie Clements *Study No. 7* (2007)
(United Kingdom, 7 minutes)



Taking a pure approach to the sound, this is a graphic representation of Conlon Nancarrow's Study No. 7 from the 2007 film of the same name by Tal Rosner and Sophie Clements. Beginning with the notational image of a piano roll, this graphical landscape sensuously embraces Nancarrow's ever-evolving tempos and timbres. The filmmakers draw inspiration partly from the music roll of the player piano and the experimental film and graphics of the 1920s. Geometric elements are introduced, with each "set" representing a motif in the music. As these motifs reappear in the piece—so do their graphic counterparts—each time changing and creating new geometric landscapes. Study No. 7 is the longest and most sophisticated of the early studies in which the opening staccato theme returns in an increasingly elaborated manner.

Sunday, November 4, 2012, 7pm
Hertz Hall

Nancarrow Concert No. 3

Rex Lawson, *pianola*
Chris Froh, *percussion*
Graeme Jennings, *violin*
Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo

PROGRAM

Conlon Nancarrow (1912–1997) Piece for Tape

Nancarrow Piece for Tape (*arr.* Dominic Murcott)
United States premiere

Chris Froh, *percussion*

Nancarrow Toccata for Piano and Violin (1935)

Rex Lawson, *pianola*
Graeme Jennings, *violin*

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971) Le sacre du printemps (1913)
First performance in America by a single performer

Part I: L'Adoration de la Terre

Introduction
Les Augures printaniers
Jeu du rapt
Rondes printanières
Jeux des cités rivales
Cortège du sage: Le Sage
Danse de la terre

Part II: La Sacrifice

Introduction
Cercles mystérieux des adolescentes
Glorification de l'élue
Evocation des ancêtres
Action rituelle des ancêtres
Danse sacrée (L'Elue)

Rex Lawson, *pianola*

INTERMISSION

Nancarrow Study No. 3b (*arr.* Amy Williams)

Study No. 4 (*arr.* Erik Oña)

Study No. 18 (*arr.* Oña)

Study No. 9 (*arr.* Helena Bugallo)

Study No. 44 (Aleatory Canon) (1981)
(*arr.* Bugallo)

Nine Early Pieces (early 1940s)

Sonatina for Piano (1941, *arr.* Yvar Mikhashoff)

Study No. 20 (*arr.* Bugallo)

Study No. 15 (*arr.* Mikhashoff)

Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo
Helena Bugallo, *piano*
Amy Williams, *piano*

NOTES ON CONCERT NO. 3

WHEN MAGNETIC TAPE recorders became commercially available after the Second World War, a small but influential group of composers seized the opportunity, not just to capture sound but to manipulate it into a whole new sonic experience. A combination of copying, layering, speeding up and slowing down, reversing, cutting, and splicing resulted in compositions that found musicality in everyday sounds, often transforming the original material beyond recognition. In Paris, Pierre Schaeffer coined the term *musique concrète* and argued for a new way of appreciating music that didn't rely on the listener knowing what the source material was.

During this time, in his quiet Mexico City suburb, Nancarrow was finally finding a way of hearing his own radical ideas via his newly acquired player piano. As ever, the motivation behind his music was a fascination with the plasticity of musical time: splitting it into layers that moved at different speeds—clashing, converging and merging with a mathematical intensity that no one had achieved before and few have since. By the early 1960s, he was fully committed to the player piano with around 30 groundbreaking studies completed. However, his early player-piano years, starting in 1947, were also spent contemplating a more expansive mechanical instrument. Adapting the player piano's pneumatic system, Nancarrow attempted to create an orchestra of pitched and unpitched percussion that could play his compositions from a punched piano roll. Unfortunately, his engineering resources were limited and the drums lay abandoned thereafter. (Sixty years later, Trimpin has re-imagined and rebuilt the percussion orchestra using Nancarrow's actual drums, to be unveiled at this very festival). In the early 1950s, however, Nancarrow himself considered the possibility of tape as an alternative means of realizing his music and set about creating a tape composition using the sounds of the now defunct percussion orchestra.

This *Piece for Tape*, as it has become known, is an unfinished idea that Nancarrow was quite

dismissive of. Nevertheless, he sent a copy to Elliott Carter in 1970, so he probably had an inkling that there was something interesting about it.

And of course there is!

A machine-gun burst of drums is followed by an equally rapid salvo of wood blocks before the recording ends at just over two minutes. As it speeds by, there is the sense of a battle between patterns, which threaten but never quite succeed in becoming dominant. Mutation and progression is also sensed but once again remain elusive.



The picture above shows Nancarrow in his studio, apparently at work with a tape machine. Credited by some sources as being from 1955, it is difficult to be sure of the exact date. We do know that the machine itself, a Brush Soundmirror, was available in the United States from 1952. The tape on the spool is hanging loose, suggesting that an edit is being made, though this of course may be just posed. Behind the tape machine, there is what looks like a cardboard box with a wooden dowel pushed through it, ideal to use as a spindle to hold a selection of tapes for easy access. Nancarrow explained many years later that he copied some percussion sounds many times, then cut them into different lengths according to the note value required. These were the days before multitrack tape recorders that could allow sounds to be layered with rhythmic precision, so the only way to make an accurate composition was to splice pieces together. This meant that the composition had to be essentially monophonic—that is to say that it could only have a single sound playing at any

one time. This might appear to be a problem for a composer who was already obsessed with layering musical lines to create complex combinations, but using an ingenious solution he did manage to do just that.

After an opening “theme” which is then repeated at half speed, there is a development section. Here, an African sounding groove of twelve notes to the bar played on high drums is juxtaposed with a repetitive strike every five notes on a low drum. Whenever the two coincide, the note from the twelve phrase is simply omitted. The ferocious speed at which this occurs produces two distinct results: The first is that the listener can feel both patterns but understand neither; the second is that it *sounds* like it is polyphonic—that there are more lines than one being played simultaneously. Using a delightful rhythmic number game, the section then uses this idea while moving through a progression of steps: A seven phrase against a six phrase (7:6) is followed by 8:5, 9:4, 10:3, and 11:2, concluding with a frantic 12:1.

Piece for Tape has no obvious musical precedents. It does not concentrate on the transformation of sonic material like the well-known *musique concrète* pieces from that period by Schaeffer, Stockhausen, Cage, and others. In fact, it is the only one to focus purely on virtuosic rhythms, more akin to the computer composers of today. This piece may therefore be not only one of the oldest pieces of tape music, but also completely unique in its musical ambition. It is also, however, remarkably similar to the direction that some jazz drumming took in the 1970s. Ed Blackwell developed a linear style where no two limbs strike at the same time, and his solo on the track “Handwoven,” on the Don Cherry record *Old and New Dreams* from 1977, sounds almost like it could have been drawn from the same material.

Trimpin has discovered a number of tapes containing just repeated single piano notes. Could these have been prepared for tape pieces using pitches material? Had he had access to the quality of studios that were developing in radio stations and universities, would Nancarrow have become a great electronic composer?

Although Nancarrow not only ran out of energy with tape composition but the piece itself, I became fascinated with it, and in 2009 conceived a version for a solo percussionist. In the 1940s, Nancarrow struggled to find players who were willing and able to perform his music. I was lucky enough to work with British percussionist Joby Burgess, who has been commissioning and performing adventurous percussion pieces for many years. By reducing the number of drums and re-barring Nancarrow's original score, a version emerged that was incredibly difficult but not impossible! Nancarrow's original score also continues beyond the original tape version (released in 2000 on the Other Minds label) but still stops, unexplained, in mid-flow. Employing a little artistic license, I reused the final few bars to produce a definitive end (definitive ends are a recurring feature in Nancarrow's music) and it was premiered by Joby in 2010 at the Cheltenham Festival in the UK.

There is always a risk when making arrangements for performers of Nancarrow's mechanical music. Will the essence of the work survive? The player-piano studies allow the listener to “commune” directly with the composer. Does the inclusion of a performer add excitement or dilute the experience? The risk seems to have paid off. Even though the live version is a little slower than the tape, the dexterity needed to play it is breathtaking, and the sense of rhythmic struggle survives the transcription.

When it was first performed, it became clear that the combination of drums and woodblocks and the way they are used bears a striking resemblance to Xenakis's *Rebonds*. Written in 1988 and also for solo percussion, it has become a regular amongst contemporary percussion recitals. Once again, without being a direct influence, Nancarrow seems to have anticipated key musical ideas many years before others have popularized them.

The piece has now been performed a dozen times by Joby and to also to great acclaim by the London Sinfonietta as part of their Nancarrow centenary concert in London in 2012. The percussion score of *Piece for Tape* is due for publication by Schott, and Joby Burgess's recording

of it, along with a companion piece that I have composed called *Armed Response Unit*, using the same percussion but adding electronics into the mix, will be released on the Signum label in November 2012.

Nancarrow's popularity arose from the recordings of the player-piano studies, but many chamber ensemble arrangements of them are now firmly established as classics in their own right. It will be interesting to see if this innocuous experiment will also creep into the canon and give percussionists the opportunity to play Nancarrow as well.

Dominic Murcott, 2012



The wild, neo-baroque Toccata for Piano and Violin was written in 1935 and first published in Henry Cowell's *New Music Quarterly* (January 1938). At that time, Nancarrow was off fighting in the Spanish Civil War. Some scores that he'd entrusted to one of his teachers, Nicolas Slonimsky, were passed on to Cowell who printed them without the composer's knowledge. According to Kyle Gann, "Nancarrow came to consider the piano part impossible to play at the tempo he wanted, so in the eighties, spurred by requests for live music, he punched a roll of the piano part. The Toccata has since been performed also by taped player piano and live violinist." The conventional designation "for violin and piano" is reversed by the composer, since the piano is active throughout and the violin drops out for 36 measures (out of a total of only 124) shortly after the opening.



THE RUSSIAN COMPOSER Igor Stravinsky spent some 15 years, one-sixth of his very long life, in close contact with pianolas of different kinds. He composed an original study for the instrument, planned it as part of the accompaniment to his ballet *Les Noces*, and actually rewrote most of his major early works especially for piano roll.

Pianolas were well known in Russia before the revolution, but it seems likely that Stravinsky first became aware of their real musical potential in Berlin in late 1912, where he joined Diaghilev's Ballets Russes on tour, for the opening of *Petrushka* on December 4. Arnold Schoenberg was in the audience that night, and was impressed, and four days later he invited Stravinsky to a performance of *Pierrot lunaire* in the Choralion Saal at Bellevuestrasse 4, nowadays a mere lamppost at the back of the Sony Centre! The Choralion Company was the Aeolian Company's subsidiary in Germany, and its showrooms were full of pianolas, *orchestrelles* (a sophisticated development of the American organ), and even pipe organs, all operated by perforated music roll. This visit clearly caused Stravinsky to think of using roll-operated instruments for his own music, because within a few days he had received a telegram from Diaghilev, reassuring him that pianola arrangements were not necessary for the rehearsals of *The Rite of Spring*, and a tart reply from the Parisian agency that supplied *répétiteurs* for the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, that its pianists were quite capable of mastering the complexities of his music.

A few years later, with his thoughts turning to *Les Noces*, he enquired of the Aeolian Company in London whether it would be possible to perforate pianola rolls for the accompaniment, and as a result of this contact he decided to write a series of studies for the pianola. In fact, he only completed one study, known nowadays as the *Etude pour Pianola*, written in 1917, but published and first performed in 1921.

Les Noces was one of the central works of Stravinsky's life. It combined his feelings toward the Russia that he had left, and that had changed forever, his religious beliefs, the musical discoveries that he had made as he traveled Europe, and not least his sense of humor. Initially he thought of arranging it for large orchestra and chorus, but he discarded this version in favor of a much more unusual orchestration. The full title of the work is actually *Svadebka* in Russian, *Les Noces villageoises* in French, and is best translated as *The Village Wedding* in English. It is a wedding, not of the rich bourgeoisie, but of

peasant folk, with all the excitement and mishaps that this entails.

So in trying to represent this peasant quality in music, Stravinsky combined a pianola, played in a deliberately mechanical way, two Hungarian cimbaloms, a harmonium, and a great deal of percussion. However, in the aftermath of the First World War, it was not easy to find virtuoso cimbalom players who could perform contemporary Western music, and so the Parisian firm of Pleyel decided to construct two-keyboard cimbaloms that could be played by music roll if necessary. The design was undertaken by a Belgian organ-builder, Georges Cloetens. Unfortunately, the project was not a simple one, and although the new instruments, known as *luthéals*, were designed and patented in 1919, they were not finally ready until 1924. Since Stravinsky had sold the exclusive rights of *Les Noces* to Diaghilev for a three-year period beginning in 1920, he had to abandon his ideal instrumentation in favor of the final version for four pianos and percussion.

Some accounts of *Les Noces* even claim that Stravinsky at one time intended the work to be accompanied by four pianolas. However, it is clear enough that he viewed the word "pianola" as a useful epithet for any keyboard instrument that played by means of music roll. Whether a cimbalom/*luthéal*, a harmonium/*orchestrelle*, or a normal player-piano, it was easier for him to refer to this plurality by the one simple term. Pianola, two cimbaloms, and harmonium were for him the selfsame thing as four pianolas.

During the 1920s, the firm of Pleyel, which was the major musical establishment in Paris, furnished Stravinsky with a studio in its headquarters in the rue Rochechouart. He was able to use this as an office, a studio for composition, a workshop for creating new piano roll versions of most of his early works, and as a *pied-à-terre* for entertaining guests, not least his future wife, Vera Soudeikina. In close cooperation with Jacques Larmanjat, Pleyel's head of music rolls, he made new arrangements of *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, *The Rite of Spring*, *The Song of the Nightingale*, *Pulcinella*, and a host of smaller works.

Pleyel cannot have made much money from the sale of Stravinsky's rolls, for they paid the composer on five counts for each and every roll of his that they manufactured, whether or not it was subsequently sold. These payments were for the mechanical copyright, for exclusivity (since the rolls represented the very first "recordings" of the works concerned), for the arrangement of the work for music roll, for the performance of the work (even though Stravinsky did not actually record any of the rolls at a keyboard), and for the musical copyright of the original work.

In 1924, Stravinsky's contract with Pleyel was acquired by the Aeolian Company in New York, and in January 1925 the composer traveled to America for a concert tour and to record some piano rolls for the Duo-Art system. The Sonata for Piano was actually published on roll before the sheet music appeared, and the first movement of the Concerto for Piano was also issued.

The Aeolian Company was keen to publish many of Stravinsky's works in its new "AudioGraphic" series of rolls, on which copious program notes and illustrations could be printed, so in addition to his actual keyboard recordings, Stravinsky worked on preparing *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, *Apollon musagète*, *Baiser de le fée*, and other works for the new system. Unfortunately, the Depression of the late 1920s caused the abandonment of this project, and much of the work was destroyed except a series of six rolls of *The Firebird*.

Tonight's presentation marks the first time in America that Stravinsky's rolls for *Le sacre* have been performed by a single pianolist, rather than two or three alternating individuals.

Rex Lawson



Discouraged by the lack of acceptable performances of his music, Conlon Nancarrow turned to the player piano in the late 1940s. This decision was largely motivated by Henry Cowell's treatise *New Musical Resources*, where the use of the player piano is suggested for the realization of complex rhythms. For decades, his creative

activity was confined to the privacy of his studio: he wrote the music, punched it manually in player-piano rolls, and listened to it played by his mechanical instruments. In 1975, he confided to composer Roger Reynolds: "...after I finish punching a piece and before I put it on, you have no idea how excited I am.... What is going to happen?" The feedback he received from the pianos was his principal encouragement for many years, and it was based on this feedback that his musical language evolved and matured. His exhaustive exploration of the medium's possibilities resulted in a series of 50 Studies, both highly idiomatic and utterly original.

In spite of his artistic isolation, numerous (and disparate) influences converge in Nancarrow's music. Jazz elements are openly present in the early works, of which Study No. 3 (often referred to as the *Boogie-Woogie Suite*) and Study No. 4 are clear examples. A conceptual connection to late medieval music is also apparent, especially in his fondness for extreme rhythmic complexities, which the composer also absorbed from Indian and African traditions. Moreover, Nancarrow's marked interest in imitative textures, in particular "tempo canons" (canons where the voices move at different speeds) evokes a practice first developed in the Renaissance. The great majority of the pieces in tonight's program represent this interest, to the point that the canonic procedure—defined by diverse tempo ratios—determines in some cases the work's overall form (e.g.: Studies Nos. 15 and 18).

The Duo's project of transcribing and performing Nancarrow's mechanical music began in 1998 in Buffalo, New York. The discovery of Yvar Mikhashoff's unpublished transcription of Study No. 15 provided the project's initial impulse. Working together with composer Erik Oña, we identified twelve additional Studies that could become piano duets. Nancarrow's published scores served as the primary reference during the subsequent transcription process, and a few final revisions were made based on the available recordings of the rolls. In the case of the more advanced Studies, No. 20 and No. 44, the original rolls and Nancarrow's so-called

"punching scores" served as the main source of reference for the transcriptions.

Most of the transcriptions feature an alternative notation of the original meters and rhythms. For the sake of coordination, the new notation tends to maintain a metrical reference shared by both players. While indispensable to realizing the music in performance, the new notation may occasionally blur the phrasing details implied in Nancarrow's scores. We find it important, therefore, to keep in mind aspects of the original notation when interpreting the music.

Nancarrow's pianos are characterized by a very brilliant, percussive attack followed by a relatively soft resonance with a rapid decay. He achieved this sonority by modifying the hammers with leather and metal. Given these qualities, it is not surprising that many of his musical ideas are essentially staccato or consist of brief legato phrases ending on a short note. Although imitating the attack of Nancarrow's instruments is impossible (and senseless), we try to approximate the machine in its clear staccato playing. In those Studies where longer and slower melodic ideas are predominant, we take advantage of the warmer sound and longer resonance of a modern grand piano. We also depart, almost inevitably, from the machine through the incorporation of dynamic phrasing, accented inflections, and nuances of balance that we believe befit the music, yet are not possible on a player piano.

Both the *Sonatina* and the recently discovered *Nine Early Pieces* date from Nancarrow's first years after his emigration to Mexico. The *Nine Pieces* are two-voice miniatures, almost abstract exercises, which explore different types of imitative techniques and are evocative of medieval, Renaissance, and baroque music. The *Sonatina*, originally conceived for solo piano, was eventually punched on a player-piano roll by the composer and recorded as such. The arrangement by Yvar Mikhashoff for piano duet is known to have been welcomed and valued by Nancarrow.

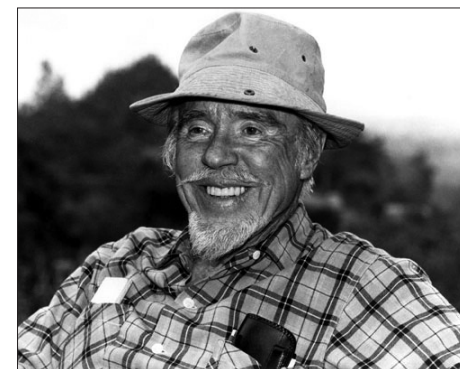
Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo, 2012

REMEMBERING CONLON

Author's note: Shortly after Conlon Nancarrow's death in Mexico City, on August 10, 1997, my wife and I moved to Mexico, where we lived for the next seven and a half years, returning to the United States in the spring of 2005. During that time, I immersed myself in intensive fieldwork and investigations into Mexican traditional musics. From 1998 to 2001, we lived in Tlacotalpan, Veracruz, a UNESCO-designated Cultural Patrimony of Humanity and a center for jarocho music and culture. In 1999, I was asked to write this text for MindReader, the Other Minds newsletter. Since Tlacotalpan did not have internet access back then, I never saw it published.

MY RELATIONSHIP with Mexico began at exactly the same moment as my personal friendship with Conlon Nancarrow; for me the two will always be intertwined. One week after I entered Mexico—after shrimp and beer on the beach in Veracruz, a visit to the Totonac ruins of Zempoala, where Cortez had his first contacts with the local Indians, followed by a visit to the old market in the center of Puebla City—we were sitting in Conlon and Yoko Nancarrow's comfortable home in the southern part of Mexico City. In 1975, I was 23 years old and Conlon was 63. Thus began one of the most remarkable friendships of my life—one which influenced me as much personally as musically—and which lasted for 22 years, up to the year of his death in 1997.

The Mexican people have a lovely phrase for welcoming friends, which translates as "my house is your house"; and during the mid- and late 1970s when I lived in Mexico, his house became my second home. With Conlon and Yoko I tried many foods for the very first time: *chicharrón*, maguery worms, the Aztec corn fungus, *huitlacoche* (which Yoko prepared in delicious crepes), *chayote*, squash flowers, *mamey*, and *zapote negro* (a soft, persimmon-like fruit which was a favorite dessert in the Nancarrow household). Since in Mexico the main meal is eaten in mid-afternoon, by one o'clock it was time for the first aperitif of the day, in my case beer. Once

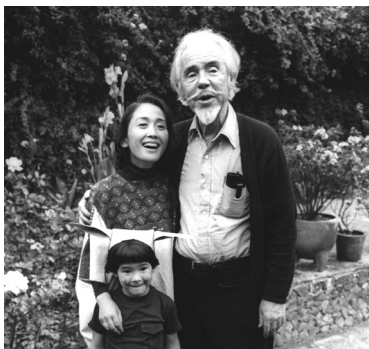


Conlon discovered my taste for Mexican *cerveza*, I could always count on there being two cold six-packs in the refrigerator any time I arrived. Yoko would get home from work in time to supervise the preparation of the main meal. After the meal—which was almost always a culinary feast—there would be a period of rest (Conlon would wander off to his studio) until around five o'clock, when it was time to make the daily trip up to the espresso café, which then existed at the top of their street. Over cappuccinos or espressos, spirits and energies would revive, and the conversation (which seemed constantly ongoing, despite Conlon's reputation for being a man of few words) would continue. We spent entire days—from breakfast until after a small, late supper and perhaps some time listening to his music in his studio—talking.

At the time, perhaps what left the greatest impression on me was Conlon's friendship with the painter and architect Juan O'Gorman. The two of them together, elegant old men cracking jokes, O'Gorman with his cane and cigar, were quite a sight. I remember vividly an evening in 1975 when the conversation turned to the subject of Augusto Pinochet—and my wife's and my embarrassment, as well as the look of exasperation on their faces, when it turned out we didn't know who Pinochet was. From that moment on, I became aware that people in Mexico and Latin America had a different understanding of their politics, history, and relationship with the United States, than we in the north do. One of the last times I saw O'Gorman, he

gave us a personal tour of his mural, then still in-progress, in the Castle of Chapultepec. In 1976, when I published *Soundings 10*, I asked Conlon to approach O'Gorman, to see if I could use a painting I'd been shown in his studio that was a critical parody of the Statue of Liberty (this was the year of the United States Bicentennial). Conlon assured me that, no, Juan never did anything for free, and he was sure that my request was hopeless. He was as surprised, as much as I was pleased, when O'Gorman agreed right away.

Since that first trip to Mexico and meeting Conlon in 1975, I have come to Mexico a dozen times or so, including several extended periods of residency. I have lived in the states of Oaxaca, Michoacán, Puebla, and Veracruz, and now speak fluent Spanish. Conlon used to joke that I, after a year and a half, knew more about Mexico than he did (that he only stayed in his "cave"—his studio—working). The other night during a fiesta here in southern Veracruz, I was playing the *jarocho* music I'd been studying



Carol Law

in a fandango, along with the young musicians in my hometown, and stepped up to a microphone for the very first time to sing verses of "La Bamba" in front of the people who created the song. I looked up at the full moon over the palm trees, and for some reason I thought of...Conlon. If only he could see me now.

He would laugh and shake his head, and be proud. Not only did he teach me about music, and his own example of someone who steadfastly kept to his own vision and integrity; he also taught me about Mexico—his Mexico, which has now become mine too. Viva Conlon! Viva Mexico!

*Para bailar La Bamba
Para bailar La Bamba
Se necesita
Una poca de gracia...*

*Peter Garland
Tlacotalpan, Veracruz
September 1999*

An Interview with Conlon Nancarrow

INTRODUCTION

PERHAPS THE MOST exasperating obstacle for those incurably addicted to the unique and mesmerizing beauty of Conlon Nancarrow's music is its very inaccessibility, not in a "music appreciation" sense but in a physical one. No recorded image of his compositions ever will reproduce the overwhelming sensation of the raw power and excitement generated when sitting in Nancarrow's soundproof studio in Mexico City and listening to his rolls "in the flesh." Such a combination of intellectual refinement and sheerly visceral stimulation is rare among avant-garde composers in the second half of the 20th century. At best, commercial records so far have been unsuccessful in transmitting the truly extraordinary impact of these sounds to the outside world.

Similarly, information about the composer Conlon Nancarrow and his music has been inaccessible to those unable to visit him personally. The strength and integrity of one of the great geniuses of present music history and the persistence with which he has pursued his solitary vision is, beyond question, one of the inspiring stories of our time.

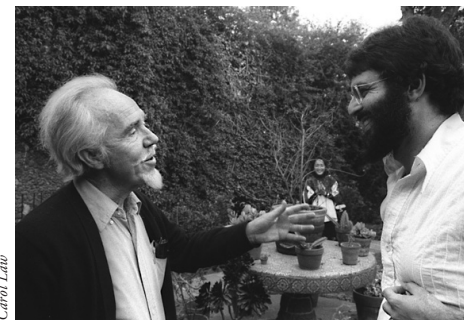
The following interview was recorded for broadcast over KPFA Radio (Berkeley, California) with no thought, at the time, of publication in print. It is geared to a nonspecialist audience and must be read with that in mind. Nevertheless, there will be much of interest to specialists who find themselves in sympathy with Nancarrow's music but without the means of visiting the composer personally, for until the publication of the *Soundings* book, there have been scarcely more than four or five short articles about the composer, and even these occasionally have contained unintentional errors of fact. (For example, Nancarrow did not defect to the Spanish in the Spanish-American War, nor the Mexican-American War, as was reported in Walter Zimmerman's book *Desert Plants*.*)

The happy occasion which resulted in the recording of this interview as a weeklong stay in Mexico City, during which time engineer Bob

Shumaker and I taped Conlon's complete music to date. These more modern, state-of-the-art recordings in Dolby stereo were made for 1750 Arch Records, which has projected a five-disc series, the first LP to be released in fall 1977. Hopefully, these recordings of Nancarrow's music and the present volume will pave the way for a wider appreciation of this composer's work and will stimulate further study and propagation of the paths his art has taken.

*Charles Amirkhanian
July 18, 1977
Santa Barbara, California*

** Editor Peter Garland's wry comment: ...which would make him approximately 100 or 150 years old, respectively....*



Carol Law

AMIRKHANIAN: Conlon, one of the problems that you must have had composing with the player-piano rolls was exactly how to punch your own music onto the rolls without going through a commercial institution of some sort. How did you get the idea to get a hole-punching machine, why did you get involved in it, and how do you actually, physically, do the work of punching the roll?

NANCARROW: For years, I had been obsessed with this idea of player pianos and to somehow do it. I went to New York and began asking all over the place—at places that made player-piano rolls—Oh! This is an interesting story, incidentally—did I ever tell you this story? About how I found out about making a machine? I first went to this place in the Bronx—this player-piano

company that had a—as a matter of fact, I think they *still* make rolls but now it's just popular music—and I found this one guy there who was very cooperative and helped me and everything—he had this little machine that he used for punching—similar to mine—as a matter of fact mine was copied from his machine. Well, after that, I went somewhere down in the Village—there was a *really* strange character—you know, I forget all these people's names. You know what he did? Only repaired medieval instruments—lutes and who knows what—a *real* character—but a very interesting guy. I was in there, and I was telling him my problem—how was I going to make a machine—I said I know someone who has a machine—I want it sort of copied—you know, the measurements and everything. He said, “Look, I have a good friend who has a machine shop.” You know, it was a strange combination—this medieval music shop—and he got his machine-shop friend and all of us went up to the guy who had the punching machine. It was the one who had the medieval music shop who understood the problem—the other guy was just, I mean, a friend, but he just knew...he could measure steel and so forth—and between the two of them they made this machine for me—even much better than the other guy's—and later I changed that also so it was better yet. Also, they gave me—what was this, in 1948 or 1947, I don't even remember—a price of \$300 to make this machine. And you know, I had to stay there in New York for three months and problems came up.

AMIRKHANIAN: You were living in Mexico at the time.

NANCARROW: This was the only time I went to the States since I came here.

AMIRKHANIAN: Since 1940.

NANCARROW: Since 1940. I went just for that.

AMIRKHANIAN: You couldn't have it done in Mexico?

NANCARROW: No. I *finally* after 20 years in Mexico found someone who *maybe* could have done it. So, anyway, the price was \$300. After months, it was finished and this guy said to me, “Okay, I've told you \$300, but if I had to do it again I'd charge you I don't know what!” Well, at that time I was a little short on money, so I brought it back, and several years later when I had some more money I sent this guy \$500 as a sort of thank-you.

AMIRKHANIAN: Were there machines to punch player-piano rolls by hand in existence at the time? You say this guy had one.

NANCARROW: Yeah, he had one—but, you know, you've seen these rolls by Ornstein and Rachmaninoff—

AMIRKHANIAN: Playing their own pieces—

NANCARROW: One of these people would sit down at the piano and just play. And while they were playing, a roll would go through the piano—a blank roll—with ink marking where they pushed a key down.

AMIRKHANIAN: Did it also give the dynamics?

NANCARROW: No, that they put in later.

AMIRKHANIAN: But there wasn't a hole made in the paper.

NANCARROW: No, it was just drawn. And then, after that, they went back and punched the holes by hand. And after they did it by hand, these big commercial machines could duplicate the hand-punched master.

AMIRKHANIAN: Well, now, let's say you compose a piece—one of the later studies—very complicated—how long does it take you, after you've composed the notes on paper, to put it onto the roll?

NANCARROW: Oh some of 'em six months—eight months.

AMIRKHANIAN: You've actually spent that long putting a piece of six or seven minutes' duration onto a roll.

NANCARROW: Right. Right.

AMIRKHANIAN: And is that the reason you have so few compositions.

NANCARROW: Right—because it takes so long.

AMIRKHANIAN: Because the duration of the music you've composed in 20 years in under four or five hours. It's almost like Webern, I guess you'd say—very compact and very extraordinary.

NANCARROW: But Webern had very few notes—I've got a *lot* of notes.

AMIRKHANIAN: Oh, you out-noted him!

NANCARROW: No, I'm not talking about quantity—but it *is* quantity—I mean an *enormous* amount of notes!

AMIRKHANIAN: Could you describe these two pianos—they're very similar. They're “reproducing pianos.” What does that mean?

NANCARROW: Well, are you going to play pieces of mine on this program?

AMIRKHANIAN: Absolutely.

NANCARROW: Well, I hope people don't get pissed off about the idea of—I *don't use* the kind of dynamics these pianos are built for.

AMIRKHANIAN: They can give very subtle differences between—

NANCARROW: Oh, extremely. Look, I use only terraced dynamics.

AMIRKHANIAN: How did you get onto that?

NANCARROW: That's my school.

AMIRKHANIAN: The terraced dynamics school.

NANCARROW: Well, so did Bach, you know. All he had to write for was organ and harpsichord, basically.

AMIRKHANIAN: So he couldn't make all these subtle, romantic—

NANCARROW: He didn't even *want* them. So there was no problem. Look, you know it would be fascinating to have a recording of an orchestra playing in Bach's time. I'm *absolutely* sure that orchestra-playing at that time was based on organ and harpsichord dynamics. I mean this thing of big crescendos and swooping—

AMIRKHANIAN: It didn't exist.

NANCARROW: I'm *sure* not. Well, I'm not sure, but I'm *almost* sure. It was part of the culture. So I'm old fashioned with my terraced dynamics.

AMIRKHANIAN: But you *do* use dynamics in your pieces. How do you control the dynamics?

NANCARROW: There are holes that let in more air or less air—there's a whole system of things for subtle dynamics that you can do—there's a fast crescendo, there's a slow crescendo—all kinds of things, combining pedals and everything.

AMIRKHANIAN: Let's say you have the roll and you're punching in it. Do you have certain limitations—for instance the number of notes you can put in one place—I mean, would the roll tear if it had too many notes?

NANCARROW: Oh, not so much tearing, but if I punched every note on the piano to play together with full volume in the same instant it would hardly sound. These pianos aren't built for playing 85 notes at a time.

AMIRKHANIAN: There's just not enough vacuum pressure?

NANCARROW: No, of course. This could be built to, let's say, play all the notes at once at full volume—but then there are other complications that other notes—well, that's another problem.

AMIRKHANIAN: Well, what are the differences in sound in these two pianos?

NANCARROW: Well, not so much really. This piano I put wooden hammers—pure wood—no felt at all—with a steel strip around it—that’s why this is more aggressive. This other one has the felt and a strip of leather and then something like a thumbtack.

AMIRKHANIAN: Which is louder?

NANCARROW: Everyone who has recorded has said that the one with the leather is the louder, but to me the one with the wood seems louder—I think it’s because the one with the wood is more “aggressive,” that’s all.

AMIRKHANIAN: This one with the wood hammers has a wedge depressing the *una corda* pedal all the time—in other words the soft pedal is down. What would happen if you took that off?

NANCARROW: Well, this piano used to break strings every day, practically, when I would use it. With the soft pedal on, it reduces the impact on the strings so the strings last a lot longer. I have a problem here with *both* pianos with strings breaking.

AMIRKHANIAN: You mentioned you were going to get a new piano and work with possibly preparing it, and you had done a prepared-piano piece before [Study No. 30]. Do you think there are a lot of interesting possibilities?

NANCARROW: Oh of course. I’d love to have, let’s say, these two pianos and a prepared piano *all synchronized*.

AMIRKHANIAN: But there’s a problem preparing uprights because things fall out of them.

NANCARROW: That’s what I’m going to look into—see if I can work out some way of, I don’t know, pasting things on the strings so they don’t drop.

AMIRKHANIAN: And then you would compose most of your pieces for one preparation?

NANCARROW: Oh yea, I wouldn’t *dream* of making—I’d get a set that I’d want and that’s it.

AMIRKHANIAN: I wanted you ask you about your lifelong interest in ethnic music. You’ve collected tremendous quantities of records and listened to just about everything throughout the world spectrum of musical experience, especially traditional music, and I know this must have had some sort of effect on your outlook about rhythm.

NANCARROW: I don’t quite understand.

AMIRKHANIAN: Well, in Western European music, which you’ve studied thoroughly, the rhythmic experimentation up to the time you began these studies was pretty minimal.

NANCARROW: Yeah.

AMIRKHANIAN: And I imagine that one of the ideas which might have influenced you to experiment with rhythm was your listening to music of other cultures. Is that possibly true?

NANCARROW: Yeah, except...no, it’s a little reversed. I had this idea, well, of *time* in music, from way back, and *that’s* why I went to these cultures. The cultures didn’t put me into the time thing. I went to these cultures to find out what *they* were doing with it.

AMIRKHANIAN: What did you find? What cultures interested you the most?

NANCARROW: Well, I guess the Indian...and African. Those two basically.

AMIRKHANIAN: Well, you know, West African drumming seems to have some of the most complex rhythmic combinations that you could imagine—

NANCARROW: Fantastic, yeah.

AMIRKHANIAN: and I would think that would have been a terrific inspiration.

NANCARROW: Well, it *was*. Some of these African things where there’s no conductor—it’s not written down—but there they are doing this complex thing against that other complex thing—really fantastic!

AMIRKHANIAN: Along those lines, too, you had an interest in jazz—you played jazz trumpet—you listened to a lot of jazz—and it seems to me that...the serious music composers then were a little bit out of tune with some of the more exciting things that happened in jazz and in ethnic music. And when you add up some of your interests—mathematics, jazz, ethnic music, your extensive background in classical music—it makes for a very unique combination which you actually can hear in these rolls.

NANCARROW: Do you think so?

AMIRKHANIAN: Oh, I think so absolutely. And I don’t know of any other composer who did the same—

NANCARROW: Well, *no one* does the same.

AMIRKHANIAN: —and who had practical experience in jazz—in playing it—and a feeling for improvisation which these pieces have even though they’re put down on rolls. It’s extraordinary, really, the way one of the canons will just burst into a fast rhythmic motif in the middle of a very straight kind of rhythm. It’s an amazing experience and really exciting. Who’d you listen to in jazz?

NANCARROW: My favorites were “Fatha” Hines, Louis Armstrong, and Bessie Smith.

AMIRKHANIAN: You still listen to them from time to time?

NANCARROW: Well, on these old 78s...oh, no—a few years ago I got a reissue of LP of the Louis Armstrong Hot Five and Hot Seven.

AMIRKHANIAN: How did you get interested in the idea of working with canons?

NANCARROW: Very simple. Well, as I’ve told you, I’m interested in this temporal thing, and for me, the uh...let’s say you have two tempi going at the same time—and if you have them both at the same, let’s say, *melodic* proportions, it’s easier to follow the temporal changes. So, in other words, let’s say one starts off this way, if it’s the same melody, you don’t have to follow the melody—you’re just hearing the temporal relationship. Well that’s one of the reasons I did. [A bit slyly:] Also, I forgot who pointed this out to me—I don’t have much of a what-do-you-call-it, *melodic* imagination—so if it’s the same melody going it’s easier for me. I just have to do it once! [Laughter]

AMIRKHANIAN: That’s funny. You know how we were talking about you have more of a relationship with the rhythms in the pieces than the harmonies—

NANCARROW: Yeah.

AMIRKHANIAN: But the harmonies are lovely, and the resulting counterpoint is just extraordinary—everything about the pieces is wonderful.

NANCARROW: But I only have to do the melody once—a four-part canon—it’s just one melody!

AMIRKHANIAN: Well maybe that’s enough, huh? [Laughter] Did you do canons before you did player piano music? In your instrumental music that preceded it?

NANCARROW: Well, sort of—you heard that *Sonatina* [written in 1941]—it’s canonic. The whole piece is canonic. I mean, well, it’s not a canon, but it’s canonic.

AMIRKHANIAN: When did you write your first piece of music, do you remember?

NANCARROW: First piece?

AMIRKHANIAN: Yeah. Were you three years old, or 15, or...

NANCARROW: Oh, around 15. I think that *New Music* piece was one of the first...well, *no*, I had done things before that, but I don't even remember. Incidentally, Slonimsky sent that to the, uh, *New Music*. When I was in Spain—that printed thing of the violin and piano—he sent it when I was there—I didn't even know about it till I—he had some things of mine there [Boston] and he just sent it.

AMIRKHANIAN: That's wonderful. He's a wonderful guy.

NANCARROW: Oh, he's fantastic, yeah!

AMIRKHANIAN: Do you ever see these people that you knew in the States? Do they come down and visit from time to time? Slonimsky, has he been down?

NANCARROW: He was here 30 years ago—35 years ago. No—well, occasionally—Peter Garland came, and Jim Tenney came a couple of years ago, Gordon Mumma came—Cage came here a couple years ago and gave a series of lectures and two concerts—but three lectures—oh, those lectures were fascinating—he's a real character, no?

AMIRKHANIAN: Musical activity in Mexico—does it include any of your performances?

NANCARROW: Oh, no. I have nothing...well, I told you about 15 years ago I gave a concert in Bellas Artes...and the ten people who came were my friends and they'd heard it anyhow...

AMIRKHANIAN: ...in your home...

NANCARROW: Yeah. It was ridiculous—the whole thing was really ridiculous. [*Interviewer's note: The concert was encouraged by the eminent Mexican composer Rodolfo Halffter, one of the few composers in that country to have taken any interest in Nancarrow's music. The concert involved moving Nancarrow's two Ampico upright player pianos*

to the hall and back. Since that time Nancarrow has insisted on moving the audience—anyone who wishes to hear the pianos live music visit his studio. The pianos have not left there since.]

AMIRKHANIAN: Well, you know, one of the fascinating stories about your career is the one about the performance they did of your *Septet*.

NANCARROW: The League of Composers in New York, you know, they were going to put on this concert—well, it was a concert of several pieces—and this one that I had written—this *Septet*—by the way, all the people who played in this—they were top people from radio stations...I mean they were top musicians who could read music just like that. But the one rehearsal—let's see, I forget—*four* people came—and the second rehearsal—there were only two rehearsals—*four*—and there was only an overlap of one [player who attended both rehearsals]. And so, the final concert—they even had a conductor for this—it was a little complicated—and in the middle of it—not in the middle—in the *beginning*, you know, they just didn't get together. Everything was lost. It was a real disaster.

AMIRKHANIAN: They didn't rehearse it together.

NANCARROW: There was never one rehearsal of all the people!

AMIRKHANIAN: Is that the first time you got the idea of eliminating the performer altogether?

NANCARROW: No—I'd had it before—because I'd written things for performers before that—no, ever since I'd been writing music I was dreaming of getting rid of the performers.

AMIRKHANIAN: Well, I think a lot of composers have wondered and thought and wished for that sometimes—performers are very often the people who don't want to try the new compositions—they want to try something tried and true and that shows off their technique. But I

don't know of anybody who so thoroughly abandoned the idea of performers.

NANCARROW: No, I don't think you're right on that. You know the, uh, what-do-you-call-it—

AMIRKHANIAN: Electronic music?

NANCARROW: No—the thing of performing. Once I had a discussion with Copland. He was discussing this thing of electronic, or mechanical, music. And he said, “You know, I go to a concert, and to me it's so exciting.” “No,” he said, “I don't want the first horn to miss the note, but the fact that he *might* miss it—the tension of *might miss it is...*” [Laughing] No, but I told him I'd rather have a good recording where he hit the note! “No,” he said, “that's very boring because you *know* he's going to hit it.” And also, you know, this whole thing of—well, that's a whole cultural thing, I mean, traditional—of people who go to concerts and this whole atmosphere—the orchestra tuning up, and the...well, you know, that's a whole other point of view, that's all, that I don't...

AMIRKHANIAN: I know you were interested for a time in doing mechanical music that revolved around percussion instruments. You actually built, or began building, an instrument that would have a series of timbales and kettle drums and all sorts of things. What happened? How far did you get with that project, and why did you abandon it?

NANCARROW: What do you mean how far I got? I got to the point where it wouldn't work! [Laughing] And so I stopped it.

AMIRKHANIAN: But you had tremendous quantities of instruments—were they all hooked up by a vacuum system?

NANCARROW: Yeah, yeah, yeah...

AMIRKHANIAN: And they were to run off of a roll?

NANCARROW: Yeah, played by a roll, same as a piano, but I mean, it just never worked. Well, I say didn't ever work—it never worked *well*. That's the reason I stopped it.

AMIRKHANIAN: What were some of the problems—you couldn't get enough pressure?

NANCARROW: No, there were mechanical problems which I didn't know enough about. So I finally dropped it then.

AMIRKHANIAN: What about electronic music? Have you ever thought of composing electronic music?

NANCARROW: Oh, *of course!* In fact, even before this I was thinking of electronic—I mean, what *might* have been electronic music. Except at this stage—look, I have *much* more control temporally with these [pianos] than these electronic composers have. I mean they're just not *interested* in the temporal thing. I mean pitches and sound qualities—the atmospheric effects—well, *also* that's every interesting—except *my main interest*...look, I've always thought if I could have a thing like this with *rolls*, with all the gamut of sounds of electronic music—to me that would be the ultimate. But these electronic composers are *not interested* in that control.

AMIRKHANIAN: What about computer control? Couldn't you do the same thing as with the roll?

NANCARROW: Unh...

AMIRKHANIAN: I suppose, well, there's a whole language you'd have to learn...

NANCARROW: Yeah, of course, but also—that's also theoretical. Look, the people who are working in this field—I mean electronics—I don't think I've heard one piece that I felt was interesting temporally.

AMIRKHANIAN: Yeah. Well, there is also the problem of the sounds—I mean, most of the electronic sounds sound like electronic sounds...and, uh, one of the nice things about this music

is that it's done on a piano—for what that may mean. It's not just that it's a "human" element because it's an instrument normally played by humans, but the sounds are, to me, in some way much more exciting than having the electronic sounds that we usually hear in a composition which have, you know, some variety, but basically have a certain boredom attached to them. Maybe it's because there are so many possibilities and all of them are explored in most pieces that we become bored by the sounds and, subsequently, with the temporal relationships which aren't very well worked out either.

NANCARROW: No, but that's another factor—the temporal thing—but, I mean, just the sounds' timbres—that's also unlimited, really. I told you this story, no? This thing when they first started making a lot of electronic music sounds. They made a sound of a flute, and people objected because the flute didn't have the wheeze of a flute player. Well, they put in the wheeze! You can put anything you want! You can put in the scratch of the violin bow, or anything. It's unlimited—I mean the sounds. And, well, okay, except that, uh...yeah, you're right though, I think...something happened there...I'm not quite sure what.

AMIRKHANIAN: No I'm not either. But I do know that most of the electronic pieces bore me—I think because of the sameness of the qualities of sound—the range of them, let's say. There aren't the scratchy...it's glossy—there's a glossed-over quality to it. Well, anyway, that's somebody else's problem. Do you play the piano?

NANCARROW: No.

AMIRKHANIAN: Never did?

NANCARROW: No.

AMIRKHANIAN: Never took lessons?

NANCARROW: No.

AMIRKHANIAN: Not even when you were a kid?

NANCARROW: *Oh!* For a year there when I was a—in fact, that's what soured me on music for a short time—this horrible piano teacher I had at the age of four, I don't know. *Naturally*, I never learned to play anything. So.

AMIRKHANIAN: But then you played trumpet for quite a while.

NANCARROW: Oh yeah, yeah, I played a lot of trumpet.

AMIRKHANIAN: You're largely self-taught as a composer but you *did* study for a time with Roger Sessions—counterpoint, I think. I would think that must have had some effect.

NANCARROW: Well, I'm sure it *did*. I don't know *what* effect. Oh no, he was a *real*, what-do-you-call-it, taskmaster, is that the word?

AMIRKHANIAN: I would say that's the word.

NANCARROW: You know, in this period when I was studying with him—I don't know—he was probably the only one I studied with for a certain amount of time—a year or two, I don't remember—and, uh, in that period I'd write music—you know, just *music*—not his strict counterpoint. I'd go there and say, "Well, what do you say about this piece of music I wrote?" "Very interesting—now where's your counterpoint exercise?" [Laughter]

AMIRKHANIAN: Right down to business.

NANCARROW: Right.

AMIRKHANIAN: *Anybody* can write music.

NANCARROW: Yeah, *anyone* can write music—no one can do counterpoint exercises! ... He probably doesn't even remember my name. You know, this was, what is it, 50 years ago.

AMIRKHANIAN: Oh, come on!

NANCARROW: Well, yeah...it was in the Thirties—early Thirties—'35...'35.

AMIRKHANIAN: Well, 40 years ago. Conlon, why don't you talk a little bit about living in Mexico. You've really made a home for yourself away from your native country, you've become a Mexican citizen, you know all the good restaurants in Mexico City—

NANCARROW: Not anymore!

AMIRKHANIAN: I mean, it's been an amazing thing, really, to switch countries, to go through the political hassles that you went through in the Thirties, and you've come out of it a great man—really—a person to *really* admire—and I think one of the great experiences of my life was meeting you in 1969, and I've been waiting for eight years to get back down here and talk with you again.

NANCARROW: Well, that's very flattering.

AMIRKHANIAN: But what was it like coming in 1940 here—I mean, it must have been difficult getting involved in a completely different life. Did you know Spanish well enough to get along at first?

NANCARROW: No, I didn't learn any Spanish in Spain. You know, I spent two years there in the Civil War in the International Brigade and spoke only English. I didn't know any Spanish. Where did you think I'd learn Spanish? So I learned it in Mexico.

AMIRKHANIAN: Well, did you find the people simpatico?

NANCARROW: Here?

AMIRKHANIAN: Yeah, and you got along all right?

NANCARROW: Oh yeah! As a matter of fact, up until fairly recently, you know I admired Mexico's foreign policy and everything—it was after '68 that I really got pissed off—oh, maybe you'd better not put this in, huh?

AMIRKHANIAN: ...they're not going to hear it down here.

NANCARROW: Oh, who knows—some creep is going to make a recording or something—you don't know.

AMIRKHANIAN: If there aren't 150,000 people who are pissed off with Mexico's foreign policy, I'd be surprised!

NANCARROW: Yeah, well...

AMIRKHANIAN: But politically—really it's been a ghastly experience the last ten years.

NANCARROW: The last ten. But before that it's been very good. Well, you know I came in here, really, in sort of the aftermath of Cardenas, which was a real liberal, progressive regime, and...oh! No, no...I'm not going to...

AMIRKHANIAN: Oh, go ahead, it doesn't matter!

NANCARROW: It doesn't matter? You know what George told me once?

AMIRKHANIAN: George Oppen?

NANCARROW: George Oppen [Pulitzer Prize-winning American poet, now living in San Francisco, but for ten years a political refugee from the McCarthy witch hunts]. You know, he was an ex-radical in a way. He said, "If they ever make a revolution here, I'm going to say good luck fellows—goodbye!" [Laughing]

AMIRKHANIAN: He'd *had* it!

NANCARROW: Yeah!

AMIRKHANIAN: What about *you*?

NANCARROW: Well, no—at that time I didn't feel that way. I do now, yeah.

AMIRKHANIAN: I guess there is some real despair now about the situation in the world—I mean

the situation in the Soviet Union, in China—where *is* there a...

NANCARROW: Oh, boy—this China thing! Look, China is now giving loans to Pinochet, and I just saw the other day that they're about to give a loan to South Africa.

AMIRKHANIAN: Unbelievable, isn't it?

NANCARROW: You know the only reason they're doing it? Because this is just to bother the Soviet Union. Whatever the Soviet Union does, they do the opposite! I've become really very cynical politically in my old age. Well, Juan [Juan O'Gorman—friend of Nancarrow's—a painter associated with the social realist muralists Rivera, Siquieros, and others since the Thirties—his murals adorn the exterior of the library at Mexico City University and the interior of Chapultepec Castle in Mexico City] also, you know...well, he became cynical before I did.

AMIRKHANIAN: You met Juan O'Gorman just after you came here, is that right?

NANCARROW: Well, shortly after, yes.

AMIRKHANIAN: And he, of course, was one of the very active political artists in Mexico who did murals for Mexico City University, for who-knows-what-all...but O'Gorman was also a friend of Trotsky as I understand it.

NANCARROW: Yeah.

AMIRKHANIAN: And were there other people in the circle besides...I mean Trotsky was obviously by himself out there...

NANCARROW: Yeah.

AMIRKHANIAN: ...in his house. What sort of political line was O'Gorman involved in—was he a Stalinist?

NANCARROW: Oh, I guess a *long* time ago, I guess he was *sort* of a Stalinist, but he got over it very

fast—in fact, when Trotsky came here he was, well not a *friend*...

AMIRKHANIAN: ...but interested anyway.

NANCARROW: Yeah, yeah; I mean he saw him various times. In fact I think it was part of... you know Juan was a sort of a, or *is*, a disciple of Diego Rivera. Of course, you know *that's* a real character!

AMIRKHANIAN: Diego Rivera? You must have known him then, huh?

NANCARROW: Oh, I met him a couple of times but, no, I didn't know him. Boy, what a character he was!

AMIRKHANIAN: What was he like? Oh, you said something about he wore overalls all over and into restaurants without a tie.

NANCARROW: Of course! And they wouldn't *dare* throw him out.

AMIRKHANIAN: But he must have been instantly recognizable.

NANCARROW: Of course! He was a monstrous [large] character—very distinctive face. But apart from that, you know, he did things like, say, giving a lecture, on whatever subject—pure fantasy, you know. Let's say it was a lecture on, I don't know, some artist, or whatever, he'd make up the whole thing from beginning to end—absolutely! With not one word in the whole thing that had anything to do with reality—he'd just make up the whole lecture.

AMIRKHANIAN: But it would be believable, I guess...

NANCARROW: Oh, he was *very* convincing! I should say!

AMIRKHANIAN: If you have the right delivery, you can put across anything!

NANCARROW: He did. He had a real, you know, what-do-you-call-it—*charisma* that came across.

AMIRKHANIAN: Were there other visual artists that were of great interest down here while you were here?

NANCARROW: Well, there was Orozco. You want a little anecdote about Orozco?

AMIRKHANIAN: I'd love to hear it—yeah.

NANCARROW: That's when I was married before—to Annette.

AMIRKHANIAN: She was involved in the art scene here.

NANCARROW: Oh yeah, of course! I mean, she was an artist and she worked with Orozco and she worked with Diego, and...

AMIRKHANIAN: ...actually painting some of the murals.

NANCARROW: Painting, yeah. You know, they would give the outline [and there would be a crew of artists who would complete the murals]...no, but this thing of Orozco—you know, when he died, he died at night—it was in his sleep—he was asleep—he had a heart attack while he was asleep. And *Time* magazine wrote an article saying that—he was one of the most famous artists here, in a way—that he died, and before he died he called for the priest—that he was an ex-atheist, but he called for the priest to confess before he died. Well, his wife, who's religious, I mean she was a believer—Orozco *wasn't*, he was a total atheist—she got indignant about the fact that this was a slander on her husband because he *didn't* call for a priest—he just died in his sleep. And so my ex-wife Annette knew them very well and so she [Señora Orozco] wanted to write the *Time* magazine...and so I wrote the letters—I mean, *she* signed them. Finally it got to the point where they said, "Our correspondent in Mexico says..." and *finally* they said they were going to accuse her of being a communist propagandist...I don't know—well,

finally it just stopped. They wouldn't even print a letter from her saying, "It's not true." They just refused. They liked their own story so much. Well...

AMIRKHANIAN: This must have been in the early Fifties?

NANCARROW: No, it was before that. [Jose Clemente Orozco, born 1883, died September 7, 1949, in Mexico City.] I wish I'd kept the correspondence with *Time* magazine.

AMIRKHANIAN: That would be a classic.

NANCARROW: Yeah, I think it would be.

AMIRKHANIAN: We'll probably find the other half in *Time's* archives.

NANCARROW: Oh, I'm sure *they* have it!

AMIRKHANIAN: Well, you're now working on your 39th Study and you've completed your 41st (so you're now going back and picking up one that was unfinished), but about how long will it take you to do it, and what is it going to be like?

NANCARROW: Oh, it's going to be very long. Because in the first place, it's *two* pianos (and, you know, one piano first and then two), and the commission they gave me is for something between 15 and 20 minutes [the piece was commissioned by the European Broadcast Union, a coalition of several government-run radio outlets of all the major countries of Western Europe], so I'll just make something between 15 and 20 minutes.

AMIRKHANIAN: How are you structuring this piece?

NANCARROW: Well, it's the one you were looking at there that I had—the 60 against 61.

AMIRKHANIAN: So there are two rhythmic voices—60 again 61. So there'd be a very *slight* change in rhythm over a period of time, I guess.

NANCARROW: Yeah. As a matter of fact, the only way you're really aware of that—no one can really hear 60 against 61, I mean as a unit—the only way you can hear it is that one part starts and another part starts and, well, little by little they finally get together. No one could say it's 60 against 61 but they could say it's a very close relationship that finally catches up.

AMIRKHANIAN: How fast do the rolls go through the piano? Do you have a standard speed that you set them all at?

NANCARROW: Oh, no, you can—from “stop” to up to fairly fast—as a matter of fact Study No. 27—do you remember that proportion thing of percentages—that one—it's the only time this has happened with me—no, usually I write a roll...I mean I figure out my—more or less the duration I want and, in the middle of the speed, in other words from “stop” up to maximum speed—and I usually try to calculate that in the middle so that when I finally play it a little less, a little more, I can vary it [faster or slower]. I *really* slipped up on that piece, and really it was the most difficult one to re-do because I had to re-do *all* the percentages of drawing—you know, the whole thing.

AMIRKHANIAN: Oh, my God, that's right, because you had different speeds.

NANCARROW: I *couldn't* just—like 60/61 I could just say double, or half, or whatever. No. This I had to redraw the whole roll and re-punch it because it was so far off. I really missed it on that one. Well, I only did it because, you know, I'm sort of fond of that piece, and I wanted it *right*.

AMIRKHANIAN: Is that the only time you ever miscalculated on a roll?

NANCARROW: Yeah, the only one.

AMIRKHANIAN: That's amazing.

NANCARROW: But a *bad* miscalculation. Boy, the *work* I spent on *that*!

AMIRKHANIAN: You know, it's just recently that I heard your Study No. 3, which I like very much—the five jazz pieces in a sort of suite arrangement. Those pieces were early compositions of yours. Did you do other pieces in that style?

NANCARROW: No...you've heard a couple of others that are vaguely similar.

AMIRKHANIAN: But these are the closest to a straight...

NANCARROW: ...well, yes, it's more straight. Actually I did these *before* beginning Study No. 1. In fact I finally just put them together in this one collection.

AMIRKHANIAN: You did another collection—*Seven Canonic Studies*—that are now Nos. 13 to 19. I guess you don't have them performed like that now—you withdrew a couple of pieces.

NANCARROW: Oh, no, I dropped the whole thing.

AMIRKHANIAN: It's not important to you to play them together.

NANCARROW: No, no. I mean, they're all related in their temporal relationships but, no, I just leave 'em alone.

AMIRKHANIAN: Could you talk a bit about the last Study—No. 41—which has such complicated relationships rhythmically.

NANCARROW: I don't know. What do you want me to say?

AMIRKHANIAN: Anything, Conlon.

NANCARROW: Well, okay. It's in three parts...A, B, and C. A is one piece; B is another piece; and C is A and B together.

AMIRKHANIAN: Did it take you a longer time to do this piece for any particular reason?

NANCARROW: Oh, yeah, I think I was about a year on that piece, or more maybe, I forget. No, because it's really *two* separate pieces. Well, the third one is the two together. But it's two long, complicated pieces. And the drawing, and the punching and everything...as a matter of fact, I still don't have a score of that—I mean a *legible* score that people can read.

AMIRKHANIAN: I'm just wondering if you find yourself tending to do more complicated things now—or do you think you'll go back and do something simple sometime close in the future?

NANCARROW: Who knows? Maybe I'll just start doing *totally* simple things. As a matter of fact, that one canon of the one-to-one [Study No. 26]...well, I sort of did that as a, you know, the other extreme of all the complicated...you know *one-to-one*—you know, it's four/four: one, one, one...

AMIRKHANIAN: Everything's hitting at the same time.

NANCARROW: Exactly the same time—in blocks. You know Peter [Garland] like that piece so much—I don't know *why*...okay, but you can like it for other reasons, I guess.

AMIRKHANIAN: Well, one thing that's a great testament to your persistence with all of this is the terrific originality and the great variety of all the pieces. That's what always strikes me: that there is a lot of variety...that you don't repeat yourself a helluva lot. I mean, once in a while you'll hear a series of tones that was in a previous study...but I don't see how you keep coming up with new and different combinations of rhythms and sounds.

NANCARROW: Oh...I'm sure everyone has his own clichés. In fact every composer has his own...

AMIRKHANIAN: ...well, sort of a language, I guess...

NANCARROW: ...yeah, a *language*. And so it's inevitable. For example, you hear Stravinsky, and even though you don't know the piece, you know *that's Stravinsky*. Because he has his own little quirks and so forth.

AMIRKHANIAN: But our experience in recording the complete music for Arch Records was one of total surprise at each roll—I mean there was always something new going on. And that was the exciting thing for me, I think. To see that each time a new problem was attacked. It just seemed like a tremendous amount of variety.

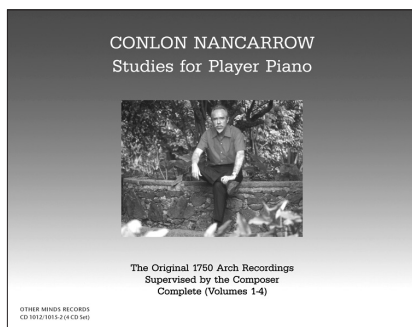
NANCARROW: You are doing *all* of this on radio?

AMIRKHANIAN: Oh, I don't know. We'll probably cut out parts here and there. Then again, if I'm lazy we'll just play the whole thing! [Laughter] Well, it would be great to see you come back to the States one day, Conlon. If you ever get it into your head to come up and visit us, then you can meet your critics directly! No...but it *would* be amazing to have you come up some day, and we hope you do. Thank you for talking with us and good luck with No. 39.

NANCARROW: Thank you. It was a pleasure...Is that it?

AMIRKHANIAN: That's it!

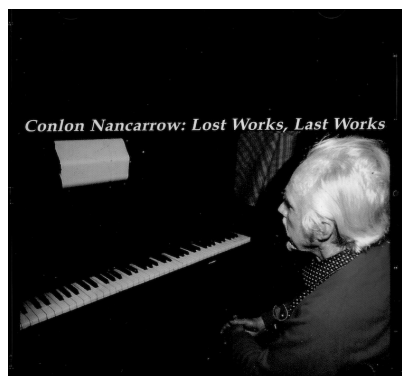
Reprinted by permission from *Conlon Nancarrow: Selected Studies for Player Piano (Soundings, Book 4, Spring–Summer 1977, edited by Peter Garland, interview © 1977 by Charles Amirkhanian)*.



Conlon Nancarrow: Studies for Player Piano

\$35 (OM 1012-15)

Newly remastered, this four-CD set contains the definitive recordings of Nancarrow's studies, and represents the most faithful reproduction of what Nancarrow himself heard in his own studio. This is the only available recording utilizing both of Nancarrow's original instruments: two Ampico player pianos, each of which has a distinctly different sound. The studies are presented in their original order, selected by the composer.



Conlon Nancarrow: Lost Works, Last Works

\$15 (OM 1002)

This historic CD offers a selection of previously unrecorded rarities by composer Conlon Nancarrow, including *Piece for Tape*, a dazzling rhythmic exercise in *musique concrète*. Listeners are also treated to the composer's own recording of his study for prepared player piano, as well as a rare interview with the composer himself.

Buy online at webstore.otherminds.org.

PERFORMERS

The **Bugallo-Williams Piano Duo** has been presenting innovative programs of contemporary music throughout North America and



Europe since 1995. Helena Bugallo and Amy Williams perform cutting-edge new works and master-

pieces of the 20th and 21st centuries for piano four-hands and two pianos, including works by Cage, Debussy, Feldman, Kagel, Kurtág, Ligeti, Nancarrow, Sciarrino, Stockhausen, Stravinsky, and Wolpe. They have premiered dozens of works, many of which were written especially for the Duo, and they have worked directly with such renowned composers as Lukas Foss, Steve Reich, Jukka Tiensuu, Betsy Jolas, Kevin Volans, and Bernard Rands. They also collaborate with composers who explore new approaches to the piano through multimedia applications, electronics, and extended techniques. They frequently perform with additional players in works for multiple keyboards, chamber works for duo piano and other instruments, and concertos.

The Duo has been featured at Cal Performances, the Warsaw Autumn Festival (Poland), Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ (Netherlands); Palacio de Bellas Artes (Mexico City); Miller Theatre, Merkin Concert Hall, and Symphony Space (New York City); Tampere Biennale (Finland), Spring Festival of New Music (York, United Kingdom); Cutting Edge (London), Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik (Witten); and Ojai Festival (California), to name a few. As part of their mission to expand the repertoire for piano duet, the Duo has undertaken an extensive transcription project of the Studies for Player Piano by Conlon Nancarrow. This resulted in a critically acclaimed recording of Nancarrow's music for piano duet and solo piano (Wergo, 2004). Their subsequent CD, *Stravinsky in Black and White* (Wergo, 2007), includes original

arrangements for piano duet and two pianos by the composer, two of which are world premiere recordings. They have also recorded the music of Jorge Liderman (Albany Records, 2005), Erik Oña (Wergo, 2007), Morton Feldman and Edgard Varèse (Wergo, 2009), and Alberto Ginastera (Neos, 2010). An all-Kurtág CD will be released by Wergo in 2013. Avid proponents of contemporary music, they frequently present master classes and lecture-demonstrations at colleges and universities in the United States and Europe.



The **Calder Quartet** (Benjamin Jacobson and Andrew Bulbrook, *violins*; Jonathan Moerschel, *viola*; Eric Byers, *cello*), called "outstanding" and "superb" by *The New York Times*, defies boundaries through performing a broad range of repertoire at an exceptional level, always striving to channel the true intention of the work's creator. Already the choice of many leading composers to perform their works—including Christopher Rouse, Terry Riley, and Thomas Adès—the group's distinctive approach is exemplified by a musical curiosity brought to everything they perform, whether it's Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, or sold-out rock shows with bands like The National or The Airborne Toxic Event. Known for the discovery, commissioning, recording, and mentoring of some of today's best emerging composers (over 25 commissioned works to date), the group continues to work and

collaborate with artists across musical genres, spanning the ranges of the classical and contemporary music world, as well as rock, dance, and visual arts; and in venues ranging from art galleries and rock clubs to Carnegie and Walt Disney concert halls. Inspired by innovative American artist Alexander Calder, the Calder Quartet's desire to bring immediacy and context to the works they perform creates an artfully crafted musical experience.

The 2011–2012 season included the Calder Quartet's Cal Performances debut with Thomas Adès, a Calder curated event at the Blum & Poe Gallery in Los Angeles featuring the quartet with iconic composer Terry Riley and DJ/artist Dave Muller, and performances at the Carlsbad Music Festival. On September 11, the Calder performed at a commemoration event at the University of Southern California and in the evening at the Hollywood Bowl. Other season highlights include performances at the Laguna Beach Festival alongside Joshua Bell and Edgar Meyer, the Edinburgh International Festival, the acclaimed new music series Jacaranda: Music at the Edge in Santa Monica, as well as an Austrian debut at the Esterházy Palace. The Calder also toured nationally with So Percussion.

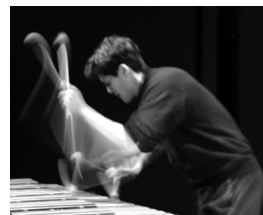
In 2010–2011, the quartet performed at Carnegie Hall, Washington Performing Arts Society, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, the Cleveland Museum of Art with Iva Bittova, a residency at Bravo! Vail Valley Festival, the Melbourne Festival with Thomas Adès, as well as concerts at Stanford Lively Arts and Le Poisson Rouge (New York) with Grammy Award-winning pianist Gloria Cheng. Other recent highlights include performances at Walt Disney Concert Hall on the Green Umbrella series, the Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, New Haven's International Festival of Arts and Ideas, and the world premiere of a new work by composer Andrew Norman for the USC Presidential Inauguration. The Calder Quartet also toured across North America with Andrew W.K. and The Airborne Toxic Event and has been featured on KCRW's *Morning Becomes Eclectic*, *The Late Show with David Letterman*, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, *The Tonight Show with Conan*

O'Brien, *Late Night with Jimmy Kimmel*, and *The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson*.

The group has longstanding relationships with composers Terry Riley, Christopher Rouse, and Thomas Adès. The Calder Quartet first met Riley when they shared a concert as part of the Los Angeles Philharmonic's Minimalist Jukebox Festival in 2006 and recently released a limited edition vinyl release of Riley's Trio and Quartet in commemoration of the composers' 75th birthday. The Calder is also the first quartet in two decades to have a work written for them by composer Christopher Rouse. This work was commissioned by Carnegie Hall, New Haven's International Festival of Arts and Ideas, La Jolla Music Society, and Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and premiered in the 2010–2011 season. The Quartet's album of Christopher Rouse works, *Transfiguration*, was also released in 2010. Of this album, *Gramophone* says, "Rouse's disquieting quartets are given powerful performances by the Calder." In 2008, the Calder Quartet released its first album, which featured the music of Thomas Adès, Mozart, and Ravel. What started as working directly with Thomas Adès on a performance of *Arcadiana* as part of the Green Umbrella Series at the Walt Disney Concert Hall in 2008 has evolved into collaborating on concerts together at the Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra's Konserthuset in 2009, the Melbourne Festival in 2010, and at Cal Performances in 2011.

The Calder Quartet formed at USC's Thornton School of Music and continued studies at the Colburn Conservatory of Music with Ronald Leonard, and at the Juilliard School, where it received the artist diploma in chamber music studies as the Juilliard Graduate Resident String Quartet. They have also studied with Professor Eberhard Feltz at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin, and collaborated with such notable performers as Anne-Marie McDermott, Menahem Pressler, and Joseph Kalichstein. The Quartet regularly conducts master classes and has been featured in this capacity at the Colburn School (where the quartet was in residence for four years), the Juilliard School, the Cleveland Institute of Music, the

University of Cincinnati College Conservatory, and the USC Thornton School of Music.



Principally committed to influencing and expanding the repertoire for solo percussion through commissions and premieres, **Christopher Froh**

is a member of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, Rootstock Percussion, Empyrean Ensemble, and San Francisco Chamber Orchestra. Known for performances hailed by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as "tremendous" and *San Francisco Classical Voice* as "mesmerizing," his solo appearances stretch from Rome to Tokyo to Istanbul. His critically acclaimed solo recordings can be heard on the Albany, Bridge, Equilibrium, and Innova labels.

A frequent collaborator with leading composers from across the globe, Mr. Froh has premiered works by dozens of composers, including John Adams, Chaya Czernowin, Liza Lim, David Lang, Keiko Abe, and François Paris. He frequently tours Japan with marimbist Mayumi Hama, and with his former teacher, marimba pioneer Keiko Abe. His solo festival appearances include the Festival Nuovi Spazi Musicali, Beijing Modern Festival, Festival of New American Music, Pacific Rim, and Other Minds. Active in music for theater and dance, Mr. Froh has recorded scores for American Conservatory Theater, performed as a soloist with Berkeley Repertory Theater, and composed original music for Oakland-based Dance Elixir.

Equally committed to pedagogy, Mr. Froh is a faculty member at UC Davis, where he directs the UCD Samba School and Percussion Group Davis.



Australian violinist and violist **Graeme Jennings** is a former member of the legendary Arditti String Quartet (1994–2005). He has toured widely throughout the world, made more than 70 CDs, given over 300 premieres, and received numerous accolades,

including the prestigious Siemens Prize (1999) and two Gramophone Awards. Active as a soloist, chamber musician, ensemble leader, and conductor, his repertoire ranges from Bach to Boulez and beyond. He has worked with and been complimented on his interpretations by many of the leading composers of our time. Mr. Jennings is a member of Australia's internationally acclaimed new music ensemble Elision, as well as the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, the Lunaire Collective, and the Kurilpa String Quartet. He has also performed as Guest Concertmaster of the Adelaide and Melbourne symphonies and Guest Associate Concertmaster with the Sydney Symphony.

As a recipient of two Australia Council grants, he undertook further studies at the San Francisco Conservatory with Isadore Tinkleman and Mark Sokol, completing a master's degree in 1992 and an artist certificate in chamber music in 1994. Having previously served on the faculties of Mills College, UC Berkeley, and Stanford University, he was appointed Senior Lecturer in violin at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University in 2009.

His recent recording of Brian Ferneyhough's *Terrain* with the Elision Ensemble was released on the Kairos label to much critical acclaim. Also available on Kairos is his recording with Irvine Arditti of Luigi Nono's *Hay Que Caminos (Sognando)*. Increasingly active as a conductor, Mr. Jennings has conducted ensembles on four continents and in recent seasons has presented major works by composers as diverse as Birtwistle, Harrison, Ives, Nancarrow, Pärt, Prokofiev, Sculthorpe, and Stravinsky.



In concert halls throughout the world, **Rex Lawson's** name is synonymous with the pianola—not the brash, mechanical variety found in cowboy films and backstreet bars, but rather the original pianola, a sophisticated instrument which

responds well to serious study, and which fits in front of the keyboard of any normal concert grand, playing it by means of a set of felt-covered wooden fingers.

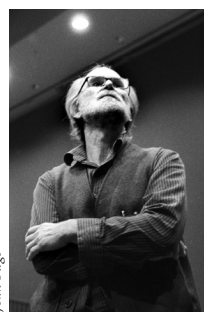
Mr. Lawson was born in Bromley, Kent, in 1948, to parents who met through playing two-pianos together. He studied music at Dulwich College, as a junior exhibitioner at the Royal College of Music, and at Nottingham University. Fascinated by his first pianola in 1971, he abandoned plans for a more traditional musical career and initially concentrated on concerts with reproducing pianos, bringing back Percy Grainger to play the Grieg Piano Concerto at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1972, over ten years after the pianist's death.

At the same time, inspired by William Candy, once the music roll critic of *Gramophone* and *Musical Times*, Mr. Lawson began studying the pianola, the foot-operated player-piano, making his major international debut in 1981 in Paris, performing in the world premiere of Stravinsky's *Les Noces* (1919 version) under the direction of Pierre Boulez.

Highlights of a rewarding international career have included an appearance in 1989 as soloist at Carnegie Hall in George Antheil's *Ballet mécanique*, the renewed resuscitation of Percy Grainger for the Last Night of the Proms in 1988, and the first concert performances of nearly all of Stravinsky's pianola works, including *The Rite of Spring* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris. In recent years, he has had two pianola concertos written specially for him, by the British composer Paul Usher and the Venezuelan Julio d'Escriván, and in 2007 he gave the first

pianola performance of Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3, with the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra under Yoel Levi.

In October 2011, Mr. Lawson accompanied the BBC Singers in the world premiere of *Airplane Cantata*, specially commissioned by the BBC from Gabriel Jackson and broadcast live on Radio 3. He has recorded extensively, with many CDs still in current catalogues—see pianola.org for more details. His recording of Stravinsky's *Les Noces*, along with music by Lutosławski, Rachmaninoff, Handel, and Sir Arthur Sullivan, are available on Other Minds Records.



John Fago

A sound sculptor, composer, engineer, and inventor, **Trimpin** has been called "one of the awesome musical geniuses of the early 21st century." A specialist in interfacing computers with traditional acoustic instruments, he has developed a myriad

of methods for playing everything from giant marimbas to stacks of electric guitars via computer. Described at times as a mad scientist or a magician, Trimpin has been described by composer/author Kyle Gann as "a genius at circuitry and machinery as well as acoustics and musical structure [who] manufactures orchestras that play themselves."

Trimpin (since his teen years, he has used only his last name) was born in southwestern Germany, near the Black Forest. His early musical training began at age eight, learning woodwinds and brass from his father, a woodworker. He spent several years living and studying in Berlin, working as a set designer and meeting up with artists from both Germany and the United States.

Trimpin learned about Conlon Nancarrow's music from Charles Amirkhanian, and traveled from Germany to Mexico City to meet the composer; they soon became friends and colleagues. Having relocated to the United States in 1979, Trimpin first achieved renown for devising a

unique way to transcribe Nancarrow's fragile player-piano rolls to MIDI files, saving the composer's work for future generations.

In 1996, Trimpin received both a MacArthur "Genius" Award and a Guggenheim Fellowship for his creative investigations of acoustic music in spatial relationship. Since that time, he has served as artist-in-residence at many universities, including Stanford, Princeton, and CalArts (which recently awarded him an honorary doctorate). Trimpin's work has been the subject of a full-length monograph, a multimuseum retrospective, a *New Yorker* profile, and a feature documentary. He continues to work out of his studio in Seattle.

Legendary choreographer and Trimpin collaborator Merce Cunningham summed up Trimpin's working method: "Trimpin isn't concerned about whether people like what he does or not. Probably, he hopes they do, but he's going to do it anyway."

COMPOSERS & PANELISTS



It was through the efforts of **Charles Amirkhanian** that the large body of studies for player piano by Conlon Nancarrow first became available on commercial recording, leading to wider recognition of his pivotal importance in the history of 20th-century music. Mr. Amirkhanian and his wife, visual artist Carol Law, traveled in June 1969 to Mexico City, where they experienced firsthand the power and originality of the composer's full output. In 1977, Mr. Amirkhanian recorded and produced Nancarrow's complete *Studies* for 1750 Arch Records with engineer Robert Shumaker (now reissued on four CDs by Other Minds). In 1986, a second version was done in digital sound for Wergo Schallplatten, including some newer works composed in the interim. Photographs by Carol Law were made at both sessions, and she designed the covers for the Wergo releases. As

Music Director of KPFA Radio in Berkeley from 1969 to 1992, Mr. Amirkhanian also produced many broadcasts of Nancarrow's work.

Born in 1945 in Fresno, California, Mr. Amirkhanian is known as a composer of text-sound compositions and works employing digital samplers to alter ambient sound sources. His music is available on two solo CDs, *Walking Tune* (Starkland) and *Mental Radio* (New World), and has also been released on the Cantaloupe, Centaur, Wergo, Other Minds, Perspectives of New Music, and Fylkingen labels, among others.

Mr. Amirkhanian has been awarded numerous composer commissions from the National Endowment for the Arts, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Meet the Composer, the BBC, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the 1984 Summer Olympics, the Arch Ensemble, Ensemble Intercontemporain, and other organizations. His music has been choreographed by Bill T. Jones, Anna Halprin, Margaret Fisher, Nancy Karp + Dancers, and Richard Alston (Ballet Rambert). From 1975 to 1986, he performed theatrical realizations of his sound poetry with projections by Carol Law at venues such as the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), the Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, New Langton Arts (San Francisco), and throughout Australia. He has appeared recently performing in Berlin, Beijing, Linz, Huddersfield, Moscow, and St. Petersburg. Along with filmmaker and art curator Jim Newman, Mr. Amirkhanian co-founded Other Minds in 1993 and serves as its Executive and Artistic Director. He is the initiator and programmer of the present Nancarrow Festival, in collaboration and consultation with Cal Performances and the UC Berkeley Museum of Art and Pacific Film Archive.

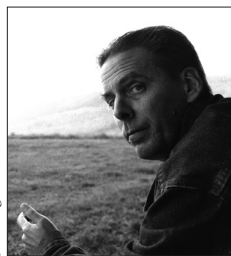


Kyle Gann, born 1955 in Dallas, Texas, is a composer and was new-music critic for *The Village Voice* from 1986 to 2005. Since 1997 he has taught music theory, history, and composition at Bard College. He is the author of *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), *American Music in the 20th Century* (Schirmer Books, 1997), *Music Downtown: Writings from the Village Voice* (University of California Press, 2006), *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"* (Yale University Press, 2010), and *Robert Ashley* (University of Illinois Press, 2012). He also wrote the introductions to the 50th-anniversary edition of Cage's *Silence* and to the new edition of Ashley's *Perfect Lives*, and is co-editing *The Ashgate Companion to Minimalist Music*.

Mr. Gann studied composition with Ben Johnston, Morton Feldman, and Peter Gena. Of his hundred-plus works to date, about a fourth are microtonal, using up to 37 pitches per octave. His rhythmic language, based on differing successive and simultaneous tempos, was developed from his study of Hopi, Zuni, and Pueblo Indian musics. His music has been performed at the New Music America, Bang on a Can, and Spoleto festivals. His major works include *Sunken City*, a piano concerto commissioned by the Orkest de Volharding in Amsterdam; *Transcendental Sonnets*, a 35-minute work for choir and orchestra commissioned by the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir; *Custer and Sitting Bull*, a microtonal, one-man music theater work he has performed more than 30 times from Brisbane to Moscow; *The Planets*, commissioned by the Relâche ensemble via Music in Motion and continued under a National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artists' Fellowship; and *The Hudson River Trilogy*, a trio of microtonal chamber operas written with librettist Jeffrey Sichel, the first of which, *Cinderella's Bad Magic*, was premiered in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In 2007, choreographer Mark Morris made

a large-ensemble dance, *Looky*, from five of Mr. Gann's works for Disklavier (computerized player piano).

In addition to his work at Bard, Mr. Gann has taught at Columbia University, Brooklyn College, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Bucknell University. His writings include more than 2,500 articles for more than 45 publications, including scholarly articles on La Monte Young (in *Perspectives of New Music*), Henry Cowell, John Cage, Edgard Varèse, Ben Johnston, Mikel Rouse, John Luther Adams, Dennis Johnson, and other American composers. He writes the "American Composer" column for *Chamber Music* magazine, and he was awarded the Peabody Award (2003), the Stagebill Award (1999), and the Deems-Taylor Award (2003) for his writings. His music is available on the New Albion, New World, Cold Blue, Lovely Music, Mode, Meyer Media, Brilliant Classics, New Tone, and Monroe Street labels. In 2003, the American Music Center awarded Mr. Gann its Letter of Distinction, along with Steve Reich, Wayne Shorter, and George Crumb.



John Fago

Born in 1952, **Peter Garland** grew up on the East Coast of the United States, spent the 1970s mostly in California and Mexico, and lived in New Mexico in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, he worked and traveled in 12 countries on five continents—the so-called Gone Walkabout years. From 1997 to 2005 he lived in Mexico, where he did intensive fieldwork and research on regional musical traditions. Since 2005, he has been living on the coast of Maine. In addition to his composing, he has been a prolific essayist and writer, though most of his work remains unpublished, especially his two-volume *Gone Walkabout* journals and the four-volume *Mexican fieldwork essays*. From 1971 to 1991, he was the editor and publisher of *Soundings*, and he played a prominent role in the rediscovery and re-evaluation of America's pioneer

modernist composers, such as Nancarrow, Revueltas, Bowles, Harrison, Rudhyar, and Partch, among others. All the while he has managed to eke out an occasionally precarious survival outside of academia and the mainstream musical-political support system. He first contacted Nancarrow in 1972 about publishing his scores in *Soundings*, and they first met in 1975. Due to his many years living in Mexico, he and Nancarrow became good personal friends. Conlon's and Yoko's home became a kind of refuge, a source of great food (not cooked on a Coleman stove!), hot showers, and cold beer—and sometimes emergency car repair.



Felix Meyer is the Director of the Paul Sacher Foundation. He has published widely on 20th-century music, and has edited and co-edited several books, including *Settling New Scores: Music Manuscripts from the Paul Sacher Foundation* (Schott, 1998), *Edgard Varèse: Composer, Sound Sculptor, Visionary* (The Boydell Press, 2006), and *Elliott Carter: A Centennial Portrait in Letters and Documents* (The Boydell Press, 2008). Mr. Meyer was born in St. Gallen, Switzerland, and studied at the University of Zurich, where he obtained his Ph.D. in 1989.



Dominic Murcott is a composer, percussionist, curator, and educator based in London. In April 2012, he was artistic advisor to the critically acclaimed festival "Impossible Brilliance: The Music of Conlon Nancarrow" at London's Southbank Centre, contributing among other things new Nancarrow arrangements for the London Sinfonietta and a new composition for percussionist Joby Burgess. His current project is collaboration with sculptor Marcus Vergette on the design of a half-ton bronze bell and the creation of a new ensemble

work to accompany it. Starting as a self-taught musician, his early career included playing drums with no-wave pioneers Blur and composing for the highly successful V-Tol Dance company. Academia and a Ph.D. came later. He currently plays vibes with the High Llamas and is Head of Composition at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance and has lectured internationally on the music of Conlon Nancarrow.



Dr. Yoko Sugiura Yamamoto is currently a Senior Researcher at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México's Institute of Anthropological Research. Born in Tokyo, Japan, she holds a Ph.D. in anthropology from UNAM. She is member of the National Council of Science and Technology and has been an advisor at CONACyT, among other organizations. Her research for the last four decades has focused on the study of potter communities and lacustrine adaptation in Mexico's Valley of Toluca. She has over 80 publications that include numerous books, articles, and documentary film appearances.

FILMMAKERS



Uli Aumüller is a Berlin-based sound engineer and filmmaker. Born in 1961 in Füssen, he got his start in theater before moving on to radio productions. Since the 1990s, he has worked as an author and director of radio and television programs for over 200 productions focused on avant-garde music and sound art. His films *My cinema for the ears: The musique concrète of Francis Dhomont and Paul Lansky*; *I Myself Am Genius: Hanns Eisler in Berlin*; *Music for 1,000 Fingers*; and countless others have been screened throughout Europe to critical acclaim.



Sophie Clements is a visual artist based in London. Taking inspiration from ideas in science and experimental music, Ms. Clements manipulates time to create highly constructed objects that grow from their surroundings, producing collages that rely on chance interactions and discourse between the concrete “real” and the constructed “unreal.” Her recent work explores the use of video as a form of sculpture, using devices including sculptural installation and video projection to deconstruct and reassemble time and material to question the notion of physical reality in relation to time and memory.

Much of Ms. Clements’s work is made in relation to sound and music—the expression of the two languages of sound and visual as a singular voice being a key driving force. She has worked in collaboration with a number of composers or sound artists, as well as various visual artists.



James Greeson is a Professor of Composition and Music Theory in the Department of Music at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. He received his doctorate in composition from the University of Wisconsin and M.M. and B.M. from the University of Utah (*magna cum laude*). His compositions have been published by Oriana Press, Cor Publishing, Willis Music, and SeeSaw Publishers.

In recent years, Dr. Greeson has focused on composing soundtracks to documentaries for public television and has completed nine, which have been broadcast in both the United States and Canada. In 2009, he was awarded an Emmy Award for his score for the PBS documentary *The Buffalo Flows*. Two other soundtracks have been nominated for Emmy Awards. His *Fantasy for Five Players* (1984), commissioned by the Da Capo Chamber Players, was performed by that group at Carnegie Hall and Symphony Space in New York City, and around the country. His *Trees of Arkansas* (1987), for soprano and

orchestra, has been performed in Arkansas, Kansas, and Bolivia. In 1983, he was selected as one of three finalists in the Music Teachers National Association’s “Composer of the Year” competition for his *Piano Fantasy*, which was commissioned by the Arkansas State Music Teachers Association. In 1979 he was the first-place winner in the St. Louis “Forum for Composers” competition, and in 1978 he was first-place Missouri winner in the Missouri Contemporary Music Composition competition. *Contra*, his composition for solo double-bass, has been recorded on Crystal Records by bassist Daniel Gwyn.

Dr. Greeson’s music for jazz ensemble is published by University of Northern Colorado Music Press and has been performed at the Clark Terry Jazz Camp and the Telluride Jazz Festival, as well as by various school jazz groups in the Midwest. He also serves as the jazz guitar consultant for Kendor Music Publishers in Delevan, New York, and produces guitar chord charts for many of their jazz ensemble publications. As a jazz guitarist and bassist, he has performed with Clark Terry, Bruce Barth, Nneena Freelon, Steve Wilson, Terrel Stafford, and many others.

Dr. Greeson is also active as a guitarist in the classical idiom. He is a member of the flute and guitar duo Novaria with Ronda Mains, and in 1996 they released a CD on the Nuance label featuring many original compositions and arrangements composed by Dr. Greeson. At the University of Arkansas Dr. Greeson directs the UA Jazz Ensemble, teaches a variety of music theory courses, and teaches guitar, bass, and composition. In 2007, he received a Fulbright College “Master Teacher” award.



Tal Rosner received his B.A. from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem (1999–2003) and an M.A. in graphic design from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London (2003–2005). He lives and works in London.

Since 2005, Mr. Rosner has worked closely with musicians, combining multiple layers of sound and visuals to create a new language of classical/contemporary music videos. His work includes collaborations with Katia and Marielle Labèque on Stravinsky and Debussy’s music for two pianos (released on DVD, KLM Recordings 2007), an interpretation of Conlon Nancarrow’s Study for Player Piano No. 7 (Barbican Festival 2007 and Serpentine Summer Pavilion 2008), and *Lachen Verlernt* with Jennifer Koh and Esa-Pekka Salonen (commissioned by Cedille Records, Oberlin Conservatory, 92nd Street Y, and Carolina Performing Arts).



Alban Wesly is a bassoonist, arranger, composer, and filmmaker based in Amsterdam. He is the co-founder of the innovative woodwind quintet Calefax, performs with the German ensemble musikFabrik, and freelances in the principal Dutch ensembles and orchestras. His musical training was at the conservatories of Amsterdam and The Hague, where his final exam was honored with the 1996 Kolfshoten Prize. Recently, he has been working with composers such as Gijsbrecht Royé, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Mauricio Kagel, Heinz Holliger, Mayke Nas, Jonathan Harvey, and Peter Eötvös.

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