

Columbia University in the City of New York

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Columbia Throws Birthday Celebration for French Composer Pierre Boulez

Few birthday parties involve a film screening, panel discussion and concert, but that is exactly how Columbia celebrated the 85th birthday of world-renowned French composer and conductor Pierre Boulez. Boulez is known for his work with atonal experimentation in postwar classical music and for his radical and sometimes contentious viewpoints on music and art.

But raising eyebrows and composing are not Boulez's only strengths. Boulez is perhaps most well known for his roles as chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra from 1971 to 1975 and music director of the New York Philharmonic from 1971 to 1977. He is also known for his sharp criticism on music examining aesthetics and music theory. Many of his writings have been collected in *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, published by Oxford University Press.

Boulez was invited to campus by Columbia's [Miller Theatre](#) for the U.S. premiere of his piece *Dérive 2* (1988/2006). "Pierre Boulez is one of the most important figures in music of the 20th and 21st centuries," said Melissa Smey, director of Miller Theatre. "I was thrilled by the chance to have Mr. Boulez in attendance for a concert featuring a United States premiere, and to work with colleagues to make this a truly campus-wide celebration." *Dérive 2* was performed by the Talea Ensemble, a group known internationally for performing premieres of contemporary music. In addition, Talea conductor James Baker led the ensemble through four other Boulez pieces, including *Dérive* (1984), *12 Notations*, *Improvisation I sur Mallarmé: "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui"* (1957) and *Improvisation II sur Mallarmé: "Une dentelle s'abolit"* (1957).



Composer Pierre Boulez speaks at a panel discussion at Columbia's Maison Française. Columbia music professor Fabien Lévy (left) organized the morning panel.

Image credit: Eileen Barroso/Columbia University

While the concert at Miller Theatre was the culmination of the Boulez celebration, the day-long series of events started with a screening of the documentary film *Pierre Boulez and the Lucerne Festival Academy: Inheriting the Future of Music* at the Roone Arledge Cinema in Lerner Hall. The film centers on Boulez working with young musicians and composers, who traveled from countries around the world to study with the maestro. The Lucerne Festival Academy is an annual summer workshop founded in 2004 by Boulez and Michael Haefliger, executive director of the Lucerne Festival, a three-times-a-year music concert series.

Following the film, Boulez took center stage for a panel discussion alongside [Fabien Lévy](#), assistant professor of music at Columbia; Miller Puckette, associate director of the Center for Research in Computing and the Arts and chair of the department of music at University of California, San Diego; Martin Scherzinger, associate professor of media, culture and communication, Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development at New York University; and [George Lewis](#), Edwin H. Case Professor of American Music in the Department of Music at Columbia. The film screening and panel discussion were hosted by the [Maison Française](#) and the Department of Music at Columbia. Lévy was instrumental in putting together the panel of noted music scholars.

Much of the panel discussion focused on Boulez's long career as a composer, conductor and writer and his involvement with the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique, also called IRCAM, which was founded by Boulez upon personal request by then-French president George Pompidou in 1970.

"Pompidou explained to me the center he wanted to have for the arts and he said there is no section for music and I would like you to be involved in the music department," said Boulez. "There was a department for painting, there was a department for design, there was a department for literature and there was a department for music. Pompidou wanted to provoke the creation of new things." To this day, IRCAM is a thriving institute where scholars study the science of avant garde electro-acoustic sound.

"The discussion at the morning roundtable underlined what an enormous influence he has had in the field of contemporary music, in the creation of landmark institutions such as IRCAM, and even—through his theoretical writings about music—in philosophy and critical theory, where his writings about music have

MULTIMEDIA

[Student Ballet Dancers Perform New Works](#)

The Columbia Ballet Collaborative presented a [program of new works](#) from Nov. 19-21.



MILESTONES

David Helfand, chair of the Department of Astronomy, was elected president of the American Astronomical Society, the professional organization for astronomers, astrophysicists and planetary scientists in North America.

Eric Foner, DeWitt Clinton Professor of History, has received the 2011 Lincoln Prize for his book, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*. The \$50,000 prize, awarded annually by Gettysburg College and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, recognizes the finest scholarly work in English on Abraham Lincoln, the American Civil War soldier or a subject relating to their era.



ALUMNI NEWS

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This month's edition includes President Bollinger's letter to alumni and information about upcoming Cafés Columbia.

influenced philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault,” said Shanny Peer, director of the Maison Française.

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