

Something Special in a Concert Hall

By Henwell Tircuit

Whatever else its glories, Stanford University is currently host to the world's most distinguished school boys, a creme de la creme group of 13 musicians and scientists from Paris headed by Pierre Boulez, no less.

Boulez, who has announced that he will give up his post as music director of the New York Philharmonic in 1977, will head the new, government-sponsored Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique-Musique—or IRCAM, as it is known to intimates. IRCAM will devote itself to artistic and technical cooperation in musical research, bringing together a quite incredible dream cast of major figures and providing them with the ultimate facility.

Within sight of Notre Dame Cathedral, the IRCAM buildings are expected to open in December, 1976. Everything about them is special, including the main studios and performing hall, all encased in separate "boxes" with air space between the walls and three floors underground. Thus, the Institute will be protected from the fabled street sounds of Paris.

Acoustical isolation achieved, composers like Boulez and Luciano Berio—head of the electro-acoustics branch—will search out the artistic possibilities latent within the latest computer technology.

Composer-investigators Leonard Smith and John Chowning of Stanford have worked for several years in this area. They have already achieved breakthroughs which make an electronic synthesizer look like a child's toy piano.

Thanks to a \$400,000 grant from the National Science Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts, Stanford will open its Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics (CCRMA) this fall.

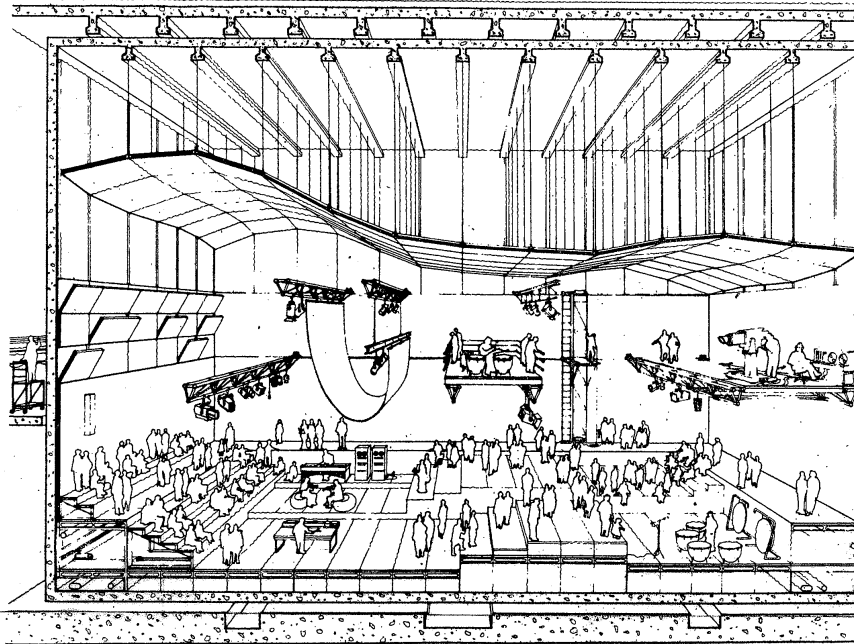
The French group is currently undergoing an intense series of seminars, with the Stanford staff providing the information gained in years of work.

"I saw Mr. Smith set up an print a full score page to Gyorgy Ligeti's 'San Francisco Polyphony' in a matter of minutes," observed Boulez of the piece commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony.

"What we want to do here," continued Boulez at the Thursday press conference, "is have all departments represented, to learn about computers here. We hope, later, to come regularly. Once we are set up in Paris, we plan to invite artists and technicians to come and study our progress."

While the Stanford and Paris centers will be major projects, others already exist. Boulez listed those of Stockholm, Utrecht and London, "but these are more specialized."

Although IRCAM members are to work without fixed deadlines—a rare feature of such



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studios—live performances will form an important element of the Institute.

Not least astounding of these is the new hall. Every aspect of that hall is mobile. The walls can move, the ceiling and even the floor can be changed to new shapes and dimensions. This can occur while the performance is taking place.

"Along with different physical configurations," said Boulez, "the walls have movable panels. You can change the tonal characteristics to reflect sound, absorb sound or half and half from any point in the room."

The human element of art will not be lost, and indeed, Boulez scoffed at the idea that the new technology will replace traditional instrumental music. As to a possible Fourth Piano Sonata, he smiled, "Yes, that is still possible."

Engineer Jean-Claude Risset and Stanford's James Moore confirmed that one aim is to have small computers, portable machines which can be played from a stage as live performances

rather than via prerecorded tapes.

Boulez himself is not keen "loudspeaker" concerts. "From my own experience—to hear only loudspeakers, and they often want to turn down the lights, reminds one of being in a crematorium. What will happen to us?"

"We shall have to develop a new sociology of attending music," observed Boulez. The new hall will be a help.

Stanford, again, is a little ahead of this project. Along with composers and engineers, psychologist John Grey is part of the Center's staff.

"Our policy," noted Boulez, "will be: if we find something good, present it. If we don't, let's wait."

"The project will also enable us to produce a periodical, compendiums and books. All will be printed in French, German and English, which is very important."

As to the value of Stanford's efforts, he noted that his group has sampled "with surprise and awe."



Pierre Boulez