Computer music forges a new Stanford-Paris connection

By PAUL EMERSON

Pierre Boulez, the eminent French composer and conductor, is a man equally at home with the classics and the avant-garde.

But he admits that for him the futuristic and arcane world of computer music is "like trying to learn a whole new langaguage."

An attempt to assimilate this new language is one of the reasons Boulez, conductor of the New York Philharmonic and an internationally respected composer, is currently visiting Stanford University.

Most of his time this week is being spent at Stanford's pioneering computer music center, which operates as part of the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, located in an isolated spot in the rolling hills west of Highway 280.

He's boning up on advances Stanford has made in computer music during the past decade, hoping to apply this new knowledge to IRCAM, a Paris-based research institute devoted to attacking the problems presented by current evolutions in music.

Boulez, who has been appointed director of the institute, disclosed this week that he plans to resign from his prestigious New York Philharmonic post after only two more seasons to devote full-time to the institute and creating so-called "computer music." IRCAM (which stands for Instit de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustiqie/Musique) is expected to be completed before the end of the year. It will be part of the Centre Beaubourg, a huge new 20th century arts center springing to life in the heart of Paris.

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Boulez and a group of his European and American colleagues involved with ICRAM, held a press conference Thursday at Stanford's Computer Music Center to discuss details of the Paris institute's innovative architectural and organization structure. Experts believe it will be the world's most comphrehensive and sophisticated facility devoted solely to exploring the new horizons of music.

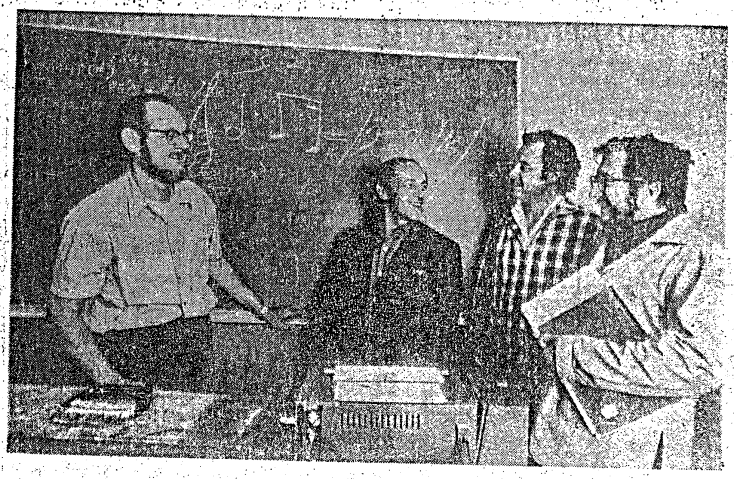
Among those participating in the press conference was the Italian avant-garde composer Luciano Berio, who will be an integral part of the staff at ICRAM.

To keep the new structure compatible with the older section of Paris surrounding it, Boulez explained, much of the institute has been built three floors underground. One of the chief goals of the institute will be interdisciplinary research, in which physicists, engineers, psychologists and electronics experts will join with composers and musicians in solving the tehnical and esthetic challenges of new compositional techniques.

Boulez said he hopes to get scientists and musicians working together on the same problems, speaking the same technical language and using the same research, scientific and research tools.

Because of the excellent reputation Stanford already has forged in this field (primarily through the work of John Chowning, Leland Smith, John Grey, Loren Rush and James Moorer), Boulez has been using the Stanford group to participate in the planning for, and research within, IRCAM. The two research centers are expected to maintain very close ties in the years to come.

Stanford's reputation in this field also has attracted the attention of two top funding organizations in this country. Grants totaling more than $400,000 from the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts have made possible the establishment of a new Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics this fall as part of the Stanford Music Department.



(Times photo by Jon Malena)

Computer music specialists, from left, Leland Smith, Pierre Boulez, John Chowning and Luciano Berio at Stanford's Artificial Intelligence Lab.