

## Pierre Boulez talks to the press during his stay in Madrid to collect the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in Contemporary Music

- Boulez has combined composition at the very highest level with the direction of leading orchestras, an intense teaching labor, and the leadership of front-line music institutions like IRCAM or Ensemble Intercontemporain
- The French composer's name has entered the history of thought and culture for his tireless pursuit of those subtle and fragile points where simplicity and complexity meet
- The jury deciding the award cited his "acute awareness of the artist's intellectual and social responsibility in the modern age"

**Madrid, June 19 2013.-** Pierre Boulez will collect the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in Contemporary Music at a ceremony tomorrow evening, in recognition that "he is not only an eminent composer, with a determinedly forward vision, but also a key figure engaging in every aspect of musical reflection and transmission," in the words of the award citation. "The sum of his activities," the jury concludes, "evidences an acute awareness of the artist's intellectual and social responsibility in the modern age."

Pierre Boulez (Montbrison, 1925) was a leading figure in the "historical avant-garde" that flourished in Darmstadt (Germany) in the 1950s, formed also by composers of the stature of Stockhausen, Berio, Ligeti and Nono. Boulez is considered to be the nexus between his forebears, his own generation and the composers of today.

His name has entered the history of thought and culture for his tireless pursuit of those subtle and fragile points where simplicity and complexity meet. An idea that connects, in turn, with his passion for science: "Science and music are in essence two forms of thought," the maestro remarks, "and I have always favored their union." In this, as in other domains, the composer champions the role of intuition, imagination and poetry.

The new laureate is clear about the differences between scientific and artistic creation: "In science you have progress. What scientists do today is more concrete than what they did back in the 16th century. Not because they are more intelligent, but because they were born when science was at a more advanced stage. In music, there is not progress, only change. Wagner does not represent progress with respect to Mozart, they are on the same level of excellence."

The career of Pierre Boulez has been an outpouring of energy in favor of a cause: the musical creation of the time he lives in. And this vocation has led him to pursue an exemplary career in three interrelated areas: composition, orchestral conducting and the creation and management of avant-garde institutions. Boulez, however, defines himself as "first and foremost a composer. My other facets – as a performer or institutional mover – came later, and arose in organic fashion, without any prior script."

### **The complete musician**

In his central endeavor as a composer, theorist and teacher, his works and writings have marked a radical change in the way of understanding music, and are now an established part of the contemporary repertoire: *Penser la Musique aujourd'hui* (1964), *Relevés d'apprenti* (1966), *Par volonté et par hasard* (1975), *Répons* (1980-1984), *Notations* (1984 and 1999), and *Points de repère* (1985) are some examples of his legacy in this respect.

Boulez has always favored pushing the repertorial envelope in contemporary music. "If you give the audience a provocative work that is also well written, there is no need to fear their reaction. On the contrary. The public may be surprised by what they heard, though without understanding it. Then perhaps they will listen a second time, and might understand something. The listener starts to doubt, and I think it is interesting to provoke that doubt, so it becomes part of the program. That is very important for the future of music."

The second strand in his career, as an orchestral conductor, has taken him to the festivals of Bayreuth (1966 and 1976), Donaueschingen, Salzburg, Berlin and Edinburgh, and led him to take the helm of some of the world's finest orchestras, including Cleveland (1967), the BBC Symphony Orchestra (1971-1975), the New York Philharmonic (1971-1978), and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (1995), with whom he continues to appear as Principal Guest Conductor. And here too he has pursued every opportunity to bring the public to a new understanding of music.

Boulez himself has this to say about balancing the two labors: "The problem with my life is that I am actually living two lives. I have the life of a composer, which is pure creativity, and I have the life of a performer, which involves reproducing something that is already there (...). The real complication is finding time for the two. If I was told you're not going to conduct any more... it wouldn't bother me

for long; what is really important to me is to compose. If, on the other hand, I was told you are not going to write anything else, but just conduct, that would make me very unhappy, because it would kill a part of my creativity."

But there is still a third facet: the institutional Boulez, the force behind groundbreaking initiatives in the investigation and practice of the music of our time, like the Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM), Ensemble Intercontemporain, Cité de la Musique or the Opera Bastille.

Boulez's towering presence in these three domains – composition, conducting and arts management – has been permanently at the service of opening up new sound possibilities, gifting to the listener a music that captivates the ear while presenting an unequalled portrait of its time.

### **BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards**

Pierre Boulez will join the other laureates in the eight Frontiers of Knowledge Award categories at a formal presentation ceremony addressed by BBVA Foundation President Francisco González, to be held tomorrow Thursday in the Marqués de Salamanca Palace, the Foundation's headquarters in Madrid.

Established in 2008, the Frontiers of Knowledge Awards aspire to be both showcase and tribute to those who dedicate their efforts to the advancement of knowledge and innovation. As such, they are fully congruent with the knowledge map of the 21st century, with eight categories stretching from classical disciplines like Basic Sciences, Economics, Finance and Management or Biomedicine to others addressing the challenges of our time, like Development Cooperation, Climate Change, Ecology and Conservation Biology, Information and Communication Technologies and Contemporary Music, or extending the boundaries of our aesthetic and cultural universe.

These international awards have been devised and developed in Spain with assistance from the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), and form part of the BBVA Foundation's broad-ranging support program for scientific knowledge and cultural creation. The philosophy of the Frontiers Awards also connects with the BBVA Group's long-held conviction that our individual and collective possibilities in the national, corporate and personal spheres depend more than ever on the promotion of scientific knowledge and innovation and their positive impacts on the environment, health and quality of life.

### **Pierre Boulez bio notes**

Pierre Boulez was born on March 26, 1925 in Montbrison (Loire). He began studying mathematics at college in Lyon, before deciding at age seventeen to leave for Paris and devote himself to music. "I never had a moment's doubt. I knew I had a gift for music above anything else, and was drawn to it as if by a magnet. I felt I had to do it," he recalls today.

In Paris, he trained with Olivier Messiaen – his maestro – Andrée Vaurabourg and René Leibowitz, who introduced him to the twelve-tone technique.

Soon he would be leading a rupture in the way of understanding music in the wake of great composers like Mahler, Schönberg, Stravinsky or Webern. This change, which Messiaen glossed, before recanting, in his brief but celebrated study for piano *Modes of Values and Intensities*, resided in the extension of Schönberg's ideas on the twelve-tone technique and the series as an organizing harmonic principle, to what Boulez called "generalized series", consisting of the application of transformational and combining principles not only to pitch, but also to durations, dynamics and modes of attack.

In 1946, aged just 21, he was appointed Music Director of the Renaud-Barrault Company, which brought the "total theater" concept to France and spread its message round the world. It was at this point that Boulez began to develop his total serialism technique.

In the early 1950s, he began teaching musical analysis at the Darmstadt Summer Courses, where he would exert a decisive influence in the new musical languages emerging after the Second World War. It is in this academic and creative setting that he composed the work that would seal his growing reputation: *Le marteau sans maître* (The Hammer Without a Master, 1955) to texts by the surrealist poet René Char. This work was written for a musical grouping of the most unconventional variety, comprised by mezzo-soprano, alto flute, viola, guitar, vibraphone, marimba, and percussion. The instrumentation found room for non-Western percussion traditions, extended vocal techniques, and textures that explored other forms of perceiving time. It was also a vehicle for Boulez to develop his ideas of proliferation and multiplication of the sound material through a set of matrices interwoven with a sharply fragmented discourse of short rhythmic and timbric patterns to form a discontinuous continuum that was entirely innovative in its time.

From the 1960s, his growing prestige as a conductor led to invitations from leading orchestras, initially in Paris, then Los Angeles, Bayreuth (Germany), Japan,, concluding in 1967 with the post of Guest Conductor with the Cleveland Orchestra. In 1969, he was appointed Principal Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, alternating his duties there with his work as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic, where he took over from Leonard Bernstein. He also found time to teach conducting courses in Basel and to publish works which would stand as cornerstones of contemporary aesthetic thought: *Penser la musique aujourd'hui* and *Relevés d'apprenti*.

He left his post with the British orchestra in 1976 (and the American in 1977), in order to concentrate on the institutional facet of his musical enterprise. It was in these years that he set up the Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) – one of the world's top electronic music studios, housed in the Pompidou Center – which he founded and led until 1991. In 1976, he

established Ensemble Intercontemporain, which not only specializes in the performance of contemporary works, but also promotes musical creation by commissioning works from authors in every corner of the world, selected by a panel of composers, musicologists and eminent professionals. Each year's commissions, between three and five, are later premiered in the Tremplin concerts. More than 500 compositions owe their existence to this Ensemble Intercontemporain funding program. The Ensemble also engages in multimedia projects wedding music, dance, cinema, opera, theater and visual arts.

Despite his dedication to the IRCAM, he found time in the 1980s to compose a number of pieces including *Dialogue de l'ombre double*, *Dérive*, *Antiphonies* and *Répons*, to tour Europe, the United States and Australia with Ensemble Intercontemporain, and to take on regular conducting duties with the BBC, Cleveland, Los Angeles and Chicago orchestras.

His conducting activity became even more intense after he stepped down as head of IRCAM. In 1995, he inaugurated the Cité de la Musique concerts in Paris; toured Paris, London, Vienna and New York with the London Symphony Orchestra; took part in the Boulez Festival in Tokyo; conducted Schönberg's *Moses and Aaron* in the Amsterdam Opera House; received two Grammys, along with the Edison and Grammophon awards; and was named principal guest conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In 1997, he premiered *Anthèmes 2*.

In the first decade of the 21st century, Boulez took some periods of leave from his busy conducting schedule to compose and premiere *Dérive 2*. In 2005, coinciding with his 80th birthday celebrations, he was appointed honorary member of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde Wien and the Vienna Philharmonic, and honorary conductor of the Staatskapelle Berlin.

In the words of composer and musicologist Jonathan Goldman, "Boulez's stature . . . owes much to the way in which his ideas, elaborated in many thousands of pages of writings, appealed to public intellectuals like Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Boulez's music and writings also interface with philosophical, literary or art-historical themes and are informed by fruitful reflections on thinkers, poets and artists, from Paul Klee to René Char, from Paul Valéry to Henri Michaux, from Stéphane Mallarmé to James Joyce."

Among his many compositional milestones, we can cite the *Third Piano Sonata* (1956-1957), with which he initiated his exploration of the open-ended work. Open-endedness refers here to a form of scoring where certain choices are left to the performer, who may elect to follow one or other of several paths which sub-divide, in turn, giving rise to an infinity of interpretative possibilities. Boulez himself has frequently compared this kind of score to a city map which the traveler can navigate in countless different ways. Works like *Dialogue de l'ombre doublé* (1985), *Répons* (1981-1988), *Explosante-fixe* (1991-1993) and *Anthèmes 2* (1997) are representative of the time spent at IRCAM investigating the relationship between instruments and electronics.

From his symphonic repertoire, perhaps the key works are *Visage nuptial* (1946-1989) for soprano, alto, *ondes martenot*, piano and percussion, an example of Boulez's famous "works in progress" which has spawned several subsequent versions: *Visage nuptial* (2nd version) (1951) for soprano, alto, female chorus and orchestra; and a definitive version (1985-1989) for soprano, mezzo-soprano, chorus and orchestra, alongside *Éclat Multiples* (1966-1970), *Rituel in memoriam Bruno Maderna* for orchestra in 8 groups (1974-1975), *Notations I-IV* for full orchestra (1980) and *Notations VII* for orchestra (1989).

Asked about his three-way activity as composer, conductor and institutional mover at a recent talk in the Italian Cultural Institute in Paris, Pierre Boulez replied that he had often got involved out of sheer circumstances. Quite simply the need was there and he stepped in. In the *Domaine Musical* concerts, for instance, there was no conductor, so he ended up leading one of his own works and went on from there to a conducting career.

The search for solutions to current problems in composition led him to envision a center where scientists and artists could explore the acoustic principles of sound, develop new compositional strategies bridging music and science, and integrating electronic and IT resources. The result was IRCAM, which, along with similar institutions in other countries, has made the use of electronics and real-time processing an indispensable part of the composer's armory, particularly among the younger generations. Similarly, *Domaine Musical* or the *Ensemble Intercontemporain* could be said to have arisen from the imperative of having performers skilled in the use of this new language. "One thing I can't stand," says Boulez, "is when people complain that there is no X or that they're missing Y. If you need something and it's not there, then you have to create it."

The jury, finally, makes reference to Boulez's pedagogical labors: "In the past few years," it states, "he has been engaged in an educational project in Lucerne aimed at training new generations of musicians in the repertoires of the 20th and 21st centuries, an effort which the recently created Foundation bearing his name will now carry forward."

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