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| Boulez, Pierre (1925--) |
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| Influential composer and conductor considered one of the leaders of the postwar avant-garde. As a composer, he is associated with an atonal modernist idiom; as a conductor, he has  sought to change the listening habits of the concert-going public by initiating them, through concerts and recordings, into the classics of modernism from the first half of the twentieth century (Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Bartók, Berg, etc.). As a music administrator, he has founded many important institutions in his native France, including the Cité de la musique and the music research institute IRCAM (Institut de recherche et coordination acoustique/musique).  Although Boulez dispenses with total serialism after a brief but decisive period, his concern with the formal unity of a work of art remains a central concern throughout his career. Other compositional preoccupations have been the dialectic of freedom and control in a series of open or mobile works such as the Third Piano Sonata and the interface between the performer and digitally processed sound (e.g., in *Répons*). |
| French composer Pierre Boulez is an influential composer of the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. He is considered a leader of the musical avant-garde since 1945. In addition, through his international career as a conductor, he has sought to change the listening habits of the concert-going public by initiating them, through concerts and recordings, into the classics of modernism from the first half of the twentieth century (Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Bartók, Berg, etc.).  Boulez’s early works, such as the First Piano Sonata (1946) and the Sonatine for flute and piano (1946) testify to his assimilation of the serial language inherited from Webern and Schoenberg, into which he was initiated through informal lessons by the Polish-born composer René Leibowitz (1913-1972), as well as an approach to rhythm which owes much to his teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992). It was with the publication in 1950 of the Second Piano Sonata (1946-48) that Boulez’s personality came to be publicly identified with the avant-garde. With its violent gestures and overlapping layers, the Sonata conforms to Boulez’s characterization of the piano as “the instrument of frenzy.”  In 1951-52, Boulez experimented with integral or total serialism, in which the proportions of a tone row are used to regulate the succession of durations, dynamics and timbres. This technique, which would prove decisive for Boulez’s musical thinking, even if he abandoned the strict application of its rules, is showcased in the frequently analysed *Structures* for two pianos, Book One (1951-52). Boulez originally gave the first piece the telling title ‘At the Limit of Fertile Ground,’ after a painting by Bauhaus artist Paul Klee. This attempt was born of a desire to unify musical discourse, a goal to which Boulez would aspire by other means in later works.  As a music administrator, Boulez has always applied himself to founding durable institutions. In 1954, the Domaine musical, the concert society he founded, produced its first concert of decidedly avant-garde leanings in Paris, presenting concerts of major works from the pre-war atonal repertoire (Schoenberg, Webern and Berg) as well as new compositions by a younger generation of composers.  Boulez’s most famous work remains *Le Marteau sans maître* (1952-55), in which Boulez created a sound world meant to correspond to the surrealist poetry of René Char. The exotic instrumentation of the *Marteau* was consciously chosen to evoke the traditional musics of Japan, Bali and Central Africa.  Many of Boulez’s compositions remain unfinished, even if various successive versions have been heard in concert and commited to recordings, such as *Répons* (1980-82), the Third Piano Sonata (1955-57; 1963), *... explosante-fixe ...* (1991–93). This tendency to constantly expand works (sometimes decades after their first composition) can be traced to Boulez’s fascination with James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* and the Stéphane Mallarmé’s poetics.  *Poésie pour pouvoir* was an aborted attempt from 1957 to marry instrumental sound (that of an orchestra) with pre-recorded tape. This characteristic combination of instrumental and electronic sound was to be a perennial source of inspiration for Boulez, leading him, in the 1970s, to found IRCAM, a Parisian institution devoted to the development of interactions between musicians and technology. ‘Real-time electronics,’ in which the sound of an instrument is modified and broadcast through speakers in the concert hall virtually instantaneously, remains one of Boulez’s chief preoccupations, one that he has put into practice in several works which combine instrumental and electronic sound, such as *Dialogue de l’ombre double*, *...explosante-fixe...*, *Anthèmes 2*, and especially *Répons*.  In works such as *Éclat* (1965), the second book of *Structures for two pianos* (1956/61), and *Domaines* for clarinet with or without ensemble (1961-68), Boulez explored the possibilities of various forms of open-endedness (what he calls ‘works of mobile trajectory’). Explaining his attraction to mobile forms, Boulez invokes the poetic ideal of Stéphane Mallarmé, who had planned a ‘Livre’ [‘Book’], an immense unfinished project of poems that could be explored by the reader in a variety of directions, a project which was reconstructed with much aplomb in 1957 by Jacques Scherer. In a passage that must have struck the thirty-two-year-old composer, Scherer wrote that for Mallarmé, ‘in order to eliminate [chance] even more radically, the Livre refuses the passivity of unilinear continuity and develops in a hyperspace in a great number of dimensions as it has been imagined by non-Euclidean geometry’.  In later decades, Boulez’s work reveals a growing interest in large-scale form. The turning point might well be *Rituel in memoriam Maderna*, a work from 1975 of some twenty-five minutes’ duration. *Sur Incises*, composed in successive versions between 1996 and 2006, runs to some forty minutes, while Dérive 2, in the most recent version revised in 2009, runs to a full forty-five minutes.  Boulez’s catalogue forms a rich and varied corpus. Although Boulez dispenses with total serialism after a brief but decisive period, his concern with the formal unity of a work of art remains a central concern throughout his career. List of Works: *Douze Notations*, for piano (1945)  *Trois Psalmodies*, for piano (1945), withdrawn  *Variations*, for piano left hand (1945), withdrawn  *Première Sonate*, for piano (1946)  *Quatuor pour quatre ondes Martenot* (1945-46), withdrawn  *Sonatine*, for flute and piano (1946)  *Le Visage nuptial*, first version: for soprano, contralto, two Ondes Martenot, piano and percussion (1946); Second version: for soprano, contralto, women’s choir and orchestra (1951); Final version: for soprano, mezzo-soprano, choir and orchestra (1985-89)  *Symphonie concertante*, for piano and orchestra (1947), unpublished; manuscript lost  *Deuxième Sonate*, for piano (1947)  *Le Soleil des eaux*, for soprano, mixed choir and orchestra, on poems by René Char (1947-1965)  *Sonate pour deux pianos*, revision of the *Quatuor pour quatre ondes Martenot* (1948)  *Livre pour quatuor* (1948-49)  *Polyphonie X*, for eighteen instruments (1950-51), withdrawn  *Deux études*, for tape (1951-52), unpublished  *Oubli signal lapidé*, for twelve voices (1952), unpublished  *Structures pour deux pianos*, First Book (1951-52)  *L’Orestie*, incidental music for the Aeschylus trilogy, for voice and instrumental ensemble (1955), unpublished  *La Symphonie mécanique*, for tape; music for a film by Jean Mitry (1955), unpublished  *Le Marteau sans maître*, for alto voice and six instruments (1953-55)  *Structures pour deux pianos*, Second Book (1956-1961)  *Le Crépuscule de Yang Koueï-Fei*, Music for the radio play by Louise Fauré (1957), unpublished  *Strophes*, for flute (1957), unpublished  *Troisième Sonate*, for piano (1955-1963)  *Figures-Doubles-Prismes*, for orchestra (1963-64)  *Poésie pour pouvoir*, after Henri Michaux for tape and three orchestras (1958)  *Pli selon pli*, portrait of Mallarmé for soprano and orchestra (1957-1962)  *Éclat*, for 15 instruments (1964-65)  *Éclat/Multiples*, for 27 instruments (1966-1970)  *Domaines*, for clarinet solo and six instrumental groups (1961-68)  *Livre pour cordes* (1968), string orchestra version of Ia and Ib of the *Livre pour quatuor*  *Pour le Dr. Kalmus*, for ensemble (1969; 2005)  *Über das, über ein verschwindelaren* (1969), for a capella voices  *cummings ist der Dichter...*, for sixteen solo voices and ensemble(1970; 1986)  *Explosante-fixe* (1972-74) for ensemble and live electronics  *Rituel in memoriam Maderna*, for orchestra in eight groups (1974-75)  *Messagesquisse*, for solo cello and six cellos (1976)  *Dérive*, for six instruments (henceforth *Dérive 1*) (1984)  *Notations I-IV*, for orchestra (1980)  *Notations VII*, for orchestra (1998)  *Répons*, for six soloists, chamber ensemble, electronic sounds and live electronics (1981-84)  *Dialogue de l’ombre double*, original version for clarinet and tape (1985); version for bassoon and electronics (1985-1995)  *Memoriale (...explosante-fixe... Originel)*, for flute and eight musicians (1985)  *Initiale*, for brass septet (1987)  *Dérive 2*, for eleven instruments (1988-2006)  *Anthèmes*, for violon (1991) (henceforth *Anthèmes 1*)  *...explosante-fixe...*, for MIDI flute, two flute solos, ensemble and electronics (1991-93)  *Incises*, for piano (1994; 2001)  *Sur Incises*, for three pianos, three harps and three percussionists (1996-98)  *Anthèmes II*, for violin and electronics (1997)  *Une page d’éphéméride*, for piano (2005) |
| Further reading:  (Boulez) |