



June 3, 2010
Contact: Aaron Friedman
646/283-4154
aaron@makemusicny.org
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CELEBRATION OF XENAKIS IN CENTRAL PARK

MAKE MUSIC NEW YORK, JUNE 21, 2010

New York, NY – **Make Music New York**, described by city officials as “one of the largest musical events in the city’s history,” celebrates the music of Greek composer **Iannis Xenakis** with performances at locations throughout Central Park on June 21, 2010. The performances are made possible by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and are part of the 2010 Make Music New York festival.

Most dazzling will be the first American open-air performance of *Persephassa* (1969), a thunderous work for six percussionists. The musicians will be situated around the lake, with the audience members in the center – *in rowboats*.

In addition, the composer’s sole opera, *Oresteia*, will be performed in Central Park’s Swedish Cottage Marionette Theater in a puppet production directed by **Luca Veggetti**, and a variety of shorter Xenakis works will be played by the Yale Percussion Group at the historic Naumburg Bandshell.

PERSEPHASSA ON THE LAKE

No doubt the performance of *Persephassa* around the lake will be one of the summer’s most spectacular events. This piece, for six percussionists, has never before been performed in the US outdoors, as originally intended, and certainly never around a lake, with the audience in rowboats! On a summer’s evening, with the reflective beauty of the lake, and the New York skyline rising up in the background, it will certainly be a memorable occasion. Two performances will be given, at 4:15pm and 5:45pm.

The six percussionists will be placed in a roughly hexagonal arrangement around the west side of the lake – two in lakeside gazebos, one on a rock outcropping and three on floating platforms built especially for the event. The percussionists include **Steven Schick**, formerly of the Bang on a Can All-Stars, who is a world-renowned champion of contemporary music and Xenakis specialist, and **Doug Perkins**, formerly of So Percussion. In addition to listening from rowboats, customarily rented to tourists and others for lake outings, audience members will gather on paths and bridges surrounding the lake.

Xenakis composed *Persephassa* for the first Shiraz Festival in 1969, which was organized by the Empress of Iran and held within the ancient desert ruins of Persepolis. The title refers to the goddess Persephone, “the personification of telluric forces and of transmutations of life.” The work makes considerable use of spatial effects, as when accents or imitative rhythms are passed around the ensemble, or layers of sound are rotated in

[MORE]

XENAKIS IN CENTRAL PARK – page 2

different directions, each at its own tempo, in a kind of space-time collision. Throughout *Persephassa*, the percussionists use a wide range of instruments and sound effects, including sirens, maracas, and pebbles, along with an arsenal of drums, wood blocks, whistles, cymbals, and gongs.

The floating stages atop which three percussionists will play are being constructed by boat building group Floating The Apple (www.floatingtheapple.org), based in New York City. Each plywood platform will be mounted astride two boats and, in addition to the percussionist, will have an oarsperson onboard to keep the stage steady.

Persephassa lasts nearly thirty minutes and culminates in a spectacular ending that has been described as having “a ferocious near-impossible complexity.” After this stunning conclusion, members of the audience will row their boats back to the dock.

Along with Stephen Schick and Doug Perkins, participating percussionists are Greg Beyer, Robert Esler, Brett Reed and Nathan Davis.

Performance details

<u>Time:</u> 3:45pm	First audience boards boats
4:15-4:45pm	First performance
4:50-5:45pm	First audience returns boats; second audience boards
5:45-6:15pm	Second performance

Place: The Lake in Central Park. The rowboat concession is next to the Boat House Café. For best views, audience members may also use the Western shore of the lake, the path between Bow Bridge and the Ramble, and the newly renovated Oak Bridge, at the north end of the lake.

The event is free and open to the public. Free tickets to the rowboats may be distributed onsite in advance; details to be announced.

ORESTEIA AT THE SWEDISH COTTAGE MARIONETTE THEATER

Choreographer and stage director **Luca Veggetti** will direct a marionette version of *Oresteia* at the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theater in Central Park. This Xenakis work, based on Aeschylus’s tragic trilogy of retribution, will be adapted and re-imagined for this enchanting setting, using marionette puppets. The pre-recorded music performance comes from the ICE Ensemble’s 2008 production at Columbia University’s Miller Theatre, which Veggetti also designed, choreographed and directed. That production – the U.S. premiere of *Oresteia* in its final form – was praised by the *New York Times* as “sharp-edged” and “other-worldly.” In it, an ensemble of wind and percussion was joined by a lone cello and accompanied by varying choral groups, of men, women and children. *Oresteia* is one of Xenakis’s lengthiest works, and the only one he returned to twice, over nearly thirty years, to complete. Xenakis envisioned it more as a musical projection of the Greek playwright’s universe than a condensed version of the trilogy.

Wrote Allan Kozinn of the *Times*, “the choruses convey much of the drama in a highly stylized, changeable language that at first has the rhythmic and melodic character of church chant and later takes on a freer, more

[MORE]

XENAKIS IN CENTRAL PARK – page 3

idiosyncratic accent that, combined with the text in ancient Greek, conveys a modernist’s vision of a starkly elemental, nuance-averse ancient ritual.”

Italian choreographer and stage director Luca Veggetti has worked in Europe’s most important theaters and with prestigious musical ensembles. In 2004 he was invited by Peter Martins to participate at two sessions of the New York Choreographic Institute creating *November Steps* (Takemitsu) with the School of American Ballet and *Duo* (Hosokawa) with the New York City Ballet. In March 2007, *Works & Process* at the Guggenheim presented an evening of three of his works on the music of Toshio Hosokawa, including the world premiere of *Night/Sounds*. In 2009 he directed and designed the Japanese premiere of Hosokawa’s opera *Hanjo* at Suntory Hall in Tokyo.

Performance details:

Time: Four shows throughout the day; showtimes TBD. Check website for details.

Place: Swedish Cottage Marionette Theater. Enter the park at West 81st Street. Veer right at the fork, cross the road, and walk south.

This event is free and unticketed; seating is limited.

YALE PERCUSSION GROUP AT THE NAUMBURG BANDSHELL

To round out the day’s Xenakis programming, Yale Percussion Group will present some of Xenakis’s most important percussion works. From *Psappha*, a masterful creation of percussion architecture, to the trio *Okho* and powerful drum sextet “Peaux” from *Pléiades*, YPG will set the Bandshell ablaze with percussive energy and immediacy.

Founded in 1997 by Robert van Sice, the Yale Percussion Group has been called “something truly extraordinary” by composer Steve Reich. It is composed of talented and dedicated young artists who have come from around the world for graduate study at the Yale School of Music. For these performances, the members of the group will include Victor Caccese, Candy Chiu, John Corkill, Ian Rosenbaum, Adam Rosenblatt, and Michael Zell.

Performance details

Time: 12:30pm

Place: Naumburg Bandshell, just south of the 72nd St. cross-town parallel.

This event is free and open to the public.

ABOUT IANNIS XENAKIS

Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001), Greek composer, music theorist, and architect, is commonly recognized as one of the most important modernist post-war composers. Xenakis’s distinct style eschewed the traditional devices of harmony and counterpoint. Instead, he organized his works through “stochastic,” or random, procedures based on mathematical principles, such as applications of probability, calculus and set theory. He would “immerse” his audience into instrumental, electro-acoustic or computerized musical compositions that often featured raw and

[MORE]

XENAKIS IN CENTRAL PARK – page 4

brutal sounds. Xenakis also invented several compositional techniques that now constitute the lingua franca of the avant-garde.

Xenakis's works include *Metastaseis* (1953–4) for orchestra, which introduced independent parts for every musician of the orchestra; percussion works such as *Psappha* (1975) and *Pléiades* (1979); compositions such as *Terretektorh* (1966) that introduced the idea of spatialization by dispersing musicians among the audience; electronic works created using Xenakis's UPIC system (a computerized drawing board for the composition of music); and the massive multimedia performances he called "polytopes." The composer's fascination with ritualism, most often that of ancient Greece, found its fullest theatrical form in his setting of the *Oresteia* (1966).

Born to Greek parents in Romania, Xenakis attended boarding school on the Aegean island of Spetses and trained as a civil engineer in Athens. He was an active member of the student faction of the Greek resistance movement during the Nazi occupation of his country, and he suffered gravely when, hit in the face by shrapnel, he lost one eye. Imprisoned several times for his political activities, he finally managed to escape. Xenakis attempted to flee to the U.S., but landed in Paris and decided to settle there; he became a French citizen in 1965.

Xenakis worked first as an engineer then architect in the studio of Le Corbusier. From 1947-1959, the two collaborated on a number of projects, most notably the Dominican convent Sainte Marie de La Tourette outside of Lyon. Xenakis began publishing musical works in the 1950s, and was particularly influenced by the courses he audited between 1951 and 1953 given by composer Olivier Messaien, who suggested that Xenakis apply his mathematical training to music.

A formative experience for Xenakis was designing, while working for Le Corbusier, the Philips Pavilion for the Brussels World Fair in 1958. The building was a self-supporting shell based on hyperbolic paraboloids, with a multimedia show playing within and upon its walls. Inside, Edgard Varèse's *Poème Electronique* featured the sounds of percussion, electronic tone generators, machines, and the human voice played through some 400 loudspeakers, mounted to enable "sound routes" to project through the space. The experience also included Le Corbusier's projected images of animals, religious icons, nuclear explosions, and examples of his own architecture.

This fusion of space and sound, of architecture and music, in a total immersive environment became a preoccupation for much of Xenakis's work. In his "polytopes," spectacles of light, sound and often movement, he either designed the spectacle for the space, or the space for the spectacle. Xenakis saw music as a "matrix of ideas," not to be passively consumed, but rather to be actively discovered through both the intellect and the senses.

SPONSORSHIP

Celebration of Xenakis in Central Park is made possible entirely through generous funding by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation.

[MORE]

MAKE MUSIC NEW YORK

Make Music New York, now in its fourth year, has been described by city officials as “one of the largest musical events in the city’s history.” Featuring over 1,000 free concerts in public spaces throughout the five boroughs of New York City, MMNY takes place on the first day of summer, Monday, June 21, from 11 in the morning until 10 at night. During those hours, musicians of all ages and musical persuasions — from hip-hop to opera, Latin jazz to punk rock — will perform on streets, sidewalks, stoops, plazas, cemeteries, parks and gardens. Alex Ross of *The New Yorker* called last year’s installment “impressive – more than 800 events across five boroughs. Subversive...musical disruptions invite urban dwellers to abandon their tight routines and let the rhythms of the city take over.”

This year, Make Music New York will be livelier and more diverse than ever. In addition to the Celebration of Xenakis in Central Park, there will be other new and old events, including interactive electronic performances in the Meatpacking district, more than one hundred punk bands on Governors Island, and hundreds of homegrown ensembles playing all over town. From the Bronx down to Staten Island, musicians of all kinds will be taking to the streets to perform for passersby, turning New York into a giant party – a chance for people to come out from under their headphones to listen, sing, and dance with their neighbors.

“Make Music New York is a great example of why New York City is one of the world’s cultural capitals,” says **Mayor Michael Bloomberg**. “With performances ranging from beginning musicians to world-class ensembles, Make Music New York gives residents and visitors a chance to experience the City’s diverse musical riches in their own backyards or explore the sights and sounds of other neighborhoods.” As always, MMNY takes place simultaneously with similar festivities in more than 300 cities around the world, all based on France’s *Fête de la Musique*. Further details can be found at www.makemusicny.org.

Along with the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, major support for Make Music New York 2010 is provided by Bloomberg LP, the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, and the Cultural Services of the French Embassy. Media partners include Metro New York, Time Out New York, and WNYC.

Oresteia was recorded live at Miller Theatre at Columbia University, September 13-17, 2008. Recording provided courtesy of Miller Theatre and the ICE Ensemble. Valuable artistic advice and coordination was graciously provided by the New York based Xenakis Project of the Americas.

#