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Contact: Deborah Horne

Telephone: 212-366-5260 x11

Email: deborah@amc.net

**44TH ANNUAL AMERICAN MUSIC CENTER AWARDS
TO HONOR SEVEN OUTSTANDING LEADERS IN
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MUSIC ON MAY 5, 2008**

In 2008, the **American Music Center** (AMC) honors seven American leaders in contemporary music. A formal ceremony will be held at the **Chelsea Art Museum** on **Monday, May 5, 2008** from **5:30 to 7:30pm**; and will take place as part of the American Music Center's Annual Meeting, open to AMC members, the press, and invited guests.

AMC's Founders Award will be presented to:

Steve Reich

AMC's Letter of Distinction will be presented to:

Robert Ashley, Joan La Barbara, Edgar Meyer, Ned Rorem, and Joan Tower

AMC's Trailblazer Award will be presented to:

Derek Bermel

(Biographies of the 2008 honorees follow.)

"The individuals we are honoring in our award ceremony this year," announces AMC Chief Executive Officer Joanne Hubbard Cossa, "are musical icons who have greatly impacted our musical community not just through their own compositions, but also through their extensive contributions as musical citizens."

Hubbard Cossa continues, "Each person represents a wide spectrum of musical styles and approaches. Robert Ashley redefined our concept of the word 'opera' in a series of magical works which erase the boundaries between speech and song. Joan La Barbara has shown us how the voice is capable of an endless variety of sounds, not only through vocal explorations in her own compositions but also in her performances of works by a broad range of composers. Edgar Meyer, equally proficient at classical music and country music, erases the boundaries between these styles in his own works, and in doing so has bridged seemingly-impossible-to-bridge audiences.

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“Ned Rorem continues to lavish us with a remarkable American art song repertoire that is as great a cultural legacy as the renowned lieder and chansons of Europe, while also creating an important catalog of concertos which are championed by soloists and orchestras in concert halls and on recordings. Joan Tower creates vibrant music for chamber ensembles and orchestras, including the multi-Grammy Award-winning work *Made in America*, which was co-commissioned and performed by orchestras in each of the 50 United States. Steve Reich, recipient of our Founders Award, transformed the way we listen and think about music, and his work continues to have a profound and lasting influence on all musical genres.

“Lastly,” notes Hubbard Cossa, “Derek Bermel, our Trailblazer Award honoree, is an exciting voice in our community not only as a composer and virtuoso clarinetist, but also as a mentor to young composers as the founding director of the ‘Making Score’ program of the New York Youth Symphony.”

AMC Awards: History and Descriptions

The American Music Center has awarded the **Letter of Distinction** annually since 1964 to recognize those who have made a significant contribution to the field of contemporary American music. This year’s Letter of Distinction recipients join a celebrated group of individuals and organizations who have received this honor, including George Balanchine, Leonard Bernstein, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Morton Feldman, Dizzy Gillespie, Steve Reich, Michael Tilson Thomas, Virgil Thomson, Randy Weston, the Kronos Quartet, Bang on a Can, and the American Composers Orchestra.

The **Founders Award** was established in 1999 and is named in honor of the six founders of the American Music Center. The Founders Award, which celebrates lifetime achievement in the field of new American music, is awarded at the discretion of the Board of Directors. Previous winners have included Elliott Carter and Lou Harrison.

The **Trailblazer Award** was inaugurated in 2003 to recognize and celebrate early and mid-career individuals deserving of support and applause for their efforts toward furthering new music. Last year’s Trailblazer Award recipient was eighth blackbird.

The **American Music Center** is dedicated to building a national community of artists, organizations, and audiences creating, performing, and enjoying new American music. Since its founding in 1939 by composers Marion Bauer, Aaron Copland, Howard Hanson, Harrison Kerr, Otto Luening, and Quincy Porter, AMC has been a leader in providing field-wide advocacy, support, and connection. AMC advocates for the community through NewMusicBox, its award-winning web magazine, and CounterstreamRadio, a 24-hour online station broadcasting music by a broad range of United States composers. AMC supports the community by making grants to composers and dance companies each year, and by offering professional development programs for artists. AMC connects the community with an array of information services designed to facilitate performances, including a vast, searchable online database of almost 49,000 works by American composers; publications compiling opportunities in new music and other information useful to industry professionals; and benefits and services for nearly 2,300 members in all fifty states and around the world.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AMERICAN MUSIC CENTER HONOREES – 2008

Robert Ashley A pioneer of opera-for-television, Robert Ashley is internationally revered for his work in new forms of opera and multi-disciplinary projects. His recorded works are acknowledged classics of language in a musical setting. The operatic works of Robert Ashley are distinctly original in style, and distinctly American in their subject matter and use of American language. During the 1960s, Ashley organized the ONCE Festival, the annual festival of contemporary performing arts in Ann Arbor which, from 1961 to 1969, presented most of the decade's pioneers of the performing arts. In 1969, Ashley was appointed Director of the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College (Oakland, California), where he organized the first public-access music and media facility. From 1966 to 1976 he toured throughout the United States and Europe with the Sonic Arts Union, a composers' collective that included David Behrman, Alvin Lucier, and Gordon Mumma. With the support of the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, Ashley produced and directed *Music with Roots in the Aether*, a 14 hour television opera/documentary about the work and ideas of seven American composers, which premiered at the Festival d'Automne à Paris in 1976 and has since been shown worldwide in over 100 television broadcasts and closed-circuit installations. *Perfect Lives*, his 1980 opera for television in seven half-hour episodes, has aired on television in Great Britain, Austria, Germany, Spain, and the United States, and is widely considered to be the precursor of "music-television."

Joan La Barbara Composer. Performer. Sound Artist. La Barbara explores the human voice as a multi-faceted instrument that expands traditional boundaries. Her works for multiple voices, chamber ensembles, music theater, orchestra and interactive technology unveil her process of creating a unique vocabulary of experimental and extended vocal techniques. Having garnered numerous awards in the U.S. and Europe for her own music, La Barbara's new music advocacy includes collaborations and world premieres of several pieces written for her by such colleagues as Robert Ashley, Philip Glass, Morton Feldman, Steve Reich and Morton Subotnick. Her music has been choreographed by Martha Curtis, Martha Scott, and Merce Cunningham, and has written three commissioned scores for the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company. Her cinematic work includes recordings for several studio films as well as her own film score for *Anima*. Upcoming performances include: Ferrara, Italy; Mexico City; the Bard Music Festival; Basel; the Barbican; and Buenos Aires.

Edgar Meyer Often described as a master instrumentalist and stylistic chameleon, Meyer is well-respected as a vibrant performer and an innovative composer whose style blends everything from classical to bluegrass. His commissions include pieces written for Hilary Hahn, the Emerson String Quartet, the Minnesota Orchestra and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. Raised in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, Meyer's love of folk and concert music is evidenced by his explorations into new musical territory. His collaborations include working with such diverse musicians as Joshua Bell, Yo-Yo Ma, Mark O'Connor, Béla Fleck, and Mike Marshall. In 1994, Meyer became the only bassist to receive the Avery Fisher Career Grant; and, in 2000, a further honor was extended to him as he was named the only bassist to receive the Avery Fisher Prize. In 2002, Meyer was named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow.

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Ned Rorem Hailed by *The New York Times* as "the world's best composer of art songs," Ned Rorem's exquisite, intimate, natural, and uniquely American text settings are revered by singers, teachers, pianists, and audiences alike. However, his musical contributions venture far beyond the vocal recital, with a wide-ranging catalogue of symphonies, concerti, chamber works, operas and theater pieces, choral music, and ballets. This creator of over 500 art songs and Pulitzer Prize-winning orchestral composer continues to be a vibrant force in American music. His 80th-birthday season (in 2003) brought three new concertos for Cello, Flute, and Mallet. In 2006, his opera *Our Town* — an adaptation of Thornton Wilder's classic novel — premiered, and since then there have been five subsequent productions with three additional stagings scheduled this year. Rorem's newest opera, *Little Nemo*, premieres in 2009. Commissioned by the Sarasota Opera and featuring a libretto by J.D. McClatchy, *Little Nemo* is based on Winsor McCay's seminal comic strip "Little Nemo in Slumberland," which ran in the New York Herald and New York American newspapers from 1905 through 1913. Rorem is also a noted author of 16 books, including diaries as well as collections of lectures, essays, and criticism.

Joan Tower The first woman to be awarded the Grawemeyer Award for Composition, Joan Tower's voice is one of energetic music with striking imagery and novel structural forms. Her advocacy for contemporary music is fostered by the many hats she wears as pianist (and former founding member of the DaCapo Chamber Players), conductor, and educator. Born in New Rochelle, NY and raised in Bolivia, Tower creates intricate works which embrace the strong rhythmic patterns and sounds of her South American childhood. She infuses each piece with an inner strength and earnestness which communicates directly with listeners. With an extensive catalogue of chamber, orchestral, and band works, and several forays into the dance world, Tower's piece *Made in America*—her landmark 50-state orchestral co-commission which was inaugurated and partnered by the League of American Orchestras and Meet the Composer—received performances in every state during the 2005-2007 seasons; and its world premiere CD garnered three 2008 Grammy Awards. This season, as she celebrates her 70th birthday and five-decade career, Tower ventures into uncharted territory—this spring brings the world premiere of her first choral work, *Can I*.

Steve Reich Steve Reich's instantly recognizable musical language combines rigorous structures with propulsive rhythms and seductive instrumental color. Recently hailed as "the most original musical thinker of our time" (*The New Yorker*) and "among the great composers of the century" (*The New York Times*), Reich has forged a unique compositional vocabulary which embraces not only aspects of Western Classical music, but the structures, harmonies, and rhythms of non-Western and American vernacular music, particularly jazz. According to *The Guardian* (London): "There's just a handful of living composers who can legitimately claim to have altered the direction of musical history and Steve Reich is one of them." With over 45 works in his catalogue ranging from the noted early tape pieces *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*, to his innovative multimedia collaborative video operas *The Cave* and *Three Tales* with Beryl Corot, Reich's music is celebrated by critics and audiences alike for its dynamic vitality, its influence on contemporary musical life and its ability to draw the listener into its own energy.

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Derek Bermel As a composer, clarinetist, conductor, and educator, Derek Bermel is at the forefront of today's new music scene. As a composer, he has forged a personal style based on hands-on experience with musical traditions from Bulgaria to Ghana, creating a unique body of solo, chamber, and orchestral compositions. The founding clarinetist of Music from Copland House, Bermel has been hailed by *The New York Times* as "brilliant" and "first rate" for his performances. In addition to appearing as soloist in his own concerto with the American Composers Orchestra, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, the BBC Symphony and the Los Angeles Philharmonic (with John Adams conducting), he has also premiered dozens of new works for clarinet around the world. As a conductor, Bermel has led the Cleveland Chamber Symphony and the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble and has received a Ford Foundation Conducting Award. As an educator, Bermel is the founding director of the Making Score program of the New York Youth Symphony, an annual, year-round program for 25 young composers and has led master classes throughout the U.S. and abroad. Bermel currently serves as the 2006-2009 Music Alive Composer-in-Residence of the American Composers Orchestra, where he curates the Orchestra Underground: Composers Out Front series as well various educational and outreach programs. He is also active in the pop music scene with his soul band PEACE BY PIECE which has performed to capacity crowds at many of the top clubs in New York City.

Historical List of American Music Center Award Recipients

Founders Award

- 2008** Steve Reich
- 2007** Philip Glass
- 2006** Milton Babbitt
- 2005** William "Count" Basie (posthumous); Charles Ives (posthumous)
- 2004** Ornette Coleman
- 2003** Betty Freeman; Lou Harrison (in memoriam)
- 2001** John Duffy
- 1999** Elliott Carter

Trailblazer Award

- 2008** Derek Bermel
- 2007** eighth blackbird
- 2005** The Minnesota Commissioning Club
- 2004** Matt Haimovitz
- 2003** George Steel/Miller Theatre

Letter of Distinction

- 2008** Robert Ashley; Joan La Barbara; Edgar Meyer; Ned Rorem; Joan Tower
- 2007** Marin Alsop; T.J. Anderson; John Corigliano; Ralph Jackson; Terry Riley
- 2006** Chanticleer; Bill Frisell; Alex Ross; Billy Taylor
- 2005** Laurie Anderson; Lukas Foss; Ahmad Jamal; Richard Kessler; Gian Carlo Menotti; The Other Minds Festival; Frances Richard
- 2004** John Adams; Art Ensemble of Chicago; Dave Brubeck; Ben Johnston; George Perle; Stephen Sondheim; Dawn Upshaw; Yale Oral History of American Music/Vivian Perlis
- 2003** George Crumb; Ronald Freed (in memoriam); Kyle Gann; Steve Reich; Wayne Shorter
- 2002** Henry Cowell (in memoriam); Phyllis Curtin; Sylvia Goldstein, Ursula Oppens, John Schaefer
- 2001** Donald Erb; Hale Smith; Mark Swed; Lyn Austin (in memoriam); Teresa Sterne (in memoriam)
- 2000** Composers Recordings, Inc.; John Harbison; Robert Hurwitz; K. Robert Schwarz (in memoriam); Michael Tilson Thomas
- 1999** Ellis Freedman; Philip Glass; California EAR Unit; Harvey Lichtenstein; Mel Powell (in memoriam)
- 1998** Arnold Broido; Yo-Yo Ma; George Walker; Bette Snapp (in memoriam)
- 1997** Merce Cunningham; Tania Leon; Paul Sperry; Jacob Druckman (in memoriam)
- 1996** Earle Brown; Thomas Buckner; Randy Weston; Ulysses Kay (in memoriam)
- 1995** Ed London and the Cleveland Chamber Symphony; Max Roach; Gregg Smith
- 1994** David Baker; Arthur Cohn; Francis Goelet
- 1993** Morton Gould; Modern Jazz Quartet; Dizzy Gillespie (in memoriam); Stephen Albert (in memoriam)
- 1992** (none awarded due to schedule change)
- 1991** Bang on a Can; New World Records; Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust
- 1990** Muhal Richard Abrams; Pauline Oliveros; Lawrence Leighton Smith and the Louisville Orchestra
- 1989** Leo Ornstein; Minna Lederman Daniels; and Jan DeGaetani (in memoriam)
- 1988** Cecil Taylor; Sylvia Smith and Smith Publications; Peter Garland and Soundings Press
- 1987** Ornette Coleman; Kronos Quartet; Morton Feldman (in memoriam); Vincent Persichetti (in memoriam)

- 1986** Lou Harrison; Betty Freeman
- 1985** Gunther Schuller; Margaret Jory (in memoriam); Leonard Fleischer of Exxon, Howard Klein of the Rockefeller Foundation, and Frank Hodsoll of the National Endowment for the Arts for the Meet the Composer Orchestra Residencies Program
- 1984** Milton Babbitt; KPFA/Charles Amirkhanian; St. Louis Symphony/Leonard Slatkin
- 1983** Robert Erickson; C.F. Peters Corporation/Evelyn Hinrichsen; Paul Jacobs (in memoriam)
- 1982** Henry Brant; Institute for Studies in American Music/H. Wiley Hitchcock, founding director; Robert Miller (in memoriam)
- 1981** Conlon Nancarrow; American Composers Orchestra/Francis Thorne, Dennis Russell Davies
- 1980** Meet the Composer/John Duffy; Samuel Barber
- 1979** John Cage; Lawrence Morton
- 1978** Leonard Bernstein; Nicolas Slonimsky
- 1977** Hugo Weisgall; Martin Bookspan
- 1976** Virgil Thomson; Paul Fromm
- 1975** Aaron Copland; Otto Luening
- 1974** Koussevitsky Foundation; Olga Koussevitsky
- 1973** Elliott Carter; Roy Harris
- 1972** Hugo Weisgall; Max Pollikoff
- 1971** Howard Hanson; Roger Sessions
- 1970** Aaron Copland; Leopold Stokowski; Benjamin Steinberg
- 1969** Stefan Wolpe; George Balanchine; Samuel Rosenbaum
- 1968** Roger Sessions; Alberto Ginestera
- 1967** William Schuman
- 1965** Adele Addison; Milton Feist; Henry Allen Moe; Thomas Scherman
- 1964** Claire Reis; Donald Engle; Richard Franko Goldman; Virgil Thomson

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