

Roger Reynolds' work chosen to represent U.S. at International Rostrum of Composers/UNESCO meeting

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One of two composers whose works were chosen to represent the United States at the International Rostrum of Composers/UNESCO meeting last May was Roger Reynolds, professor of music at the University of California, San Diego and the new chairman of the Department of Music.

Reynolds' "Fiery Wind" originally was commissioned by the Contemporary Music Society in New York and it was first played by the American Composers' Orchestra in 1978.

The piece was selected from 187 tapes submitted to a committee of seven composers, conductors and critics who chose the two pieces sent to the International Rostrum of Composers meeting. During the gathering, music directors of 40 national broadcasting networks heard and exchanged tapes of contemporary music to be broadcast in each of the participating countries.

Reynolds is a prolific and widely honored composer. Last year he was one of two American composers chosen to have his work performed at the International Society for Contemporary Music Festival in Stockholm and Helsinki and he has been the recipient of awards from the Guggenheim, Rockefeller and Fromm foundations and the National Endowment of the Arts.

"I turned to composition as an act of outrage," Reynolds said. "I had graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in electrical engineering and I went back for a degree in music. I was outraged that all of the students around me were performing music of other times by foreign composers."

He began composing in 1960, and after spending several years traveling and giving concerts in Europe, Japan and the United States, Reynolds joined the UC San Diego faculty. He has been instrumental in establishing the campus as a major west coast center for the creation and performance of contemporary music.

"The scientists who originally formed the campus had the remarkable good sense to make sure that the arts departments were composed of practitioners," he said. "There are parallels between the arts and science. People here are concerned with making new materials, not with disseminating old materials. Can you imagine a physicist being content with teaching Newton's law? Yet somehow we think of music as stopping somewhere back with the classics."

The emphasis of the UC San Diego music department is on 20th century music. Some of the most active and innovative composers of the contemporary music world are involved with the program, as permanent faculty or as visitors.

The Center for Music Experiment (CME), which Reynolds helped create about six years ago, today attracts artists from all over the world, as well as giving UC San Diego faculty and students a facility where they can experiment with new sounds and techniques.

CME was launched with a sizable grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, and Reynolds currently is pursuing funding to purchase a modern computer system for the center.

"The computer provides horizons which are extremely exciting to the musician," he said. "It can produce a greater range and wider variety of sounds than have been possible before. I see electronic technology in general as something which enlarges performance opportunities, not something which replaces human interaction."

The music department includes two faculty members with doctoral degrees which at first seem incongruous. One has a Ph.D. in cognitive psychology, and the newest faculty member is a specialist in electrical engineering from Bell Laboratories.

"A computer doesn't just give out sounds. You have to ask it," Reynolds said. "They're not easy and they don't give you the benefit of the doubt; they do only what you tell them to do. Consequently, you have to understand the substance of music and have first-rate people as well as first-rate equipment.

"Musicians must learn more now than was previously necessary in order to make music," he concluded. "Technology has made music a more demanding, complex procedure than ever before."

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