

Pauline Oliveros

Deep Listening

Pauline Oliveros' haunting harmony

By Brett Campbell



This spring, Eugene gets to meet two of the most important American composers of the 20th century. Most readers are already familiar with Laurie Anderson, who appears at the Shedd in March. But **Pauline Oliveros**, who will perform at Beall Hall on Feb. 18, has been almost as influential, if not as widely visible.

Oliveros was present at the birth of the most important post-WWII musical movement: minimalism. Her first exposure to the music came in San Francisco Bay area classes and ensembles with pioneers Terry Riley (Oliveros played accordion in his landmark 1964 composition "In C") and LaMonte Young. Oliveros became a trailblazing composer in electronic and tape music in the mid-1960s and has won Guggenheim and NEA grants.

But she was more attracted to the sensu-

ous nature of sound than to minimalism's formal procedures, especially after taking up Tai Chi. Her later work involved theatrical elements, group improvisation, drone sounds and spacey effects.

In the late 1980s, Oliveros and two colleagues found an unused two million gallon water tank (which they dubbed "the cistern chapel") near Seattle. The tank's 45-second echo made it an ideal vehicle for what Oliveros calls "deep listening." She has written that deep listening, "includes lan-

guage and its syntax, the nature of its sound, atmosphere and environmental context. This is essential to the process of unlocking layer after layer of imagination, meaning and memory down to the cellular level of human experience. Listening is the key to performance. Responses, whatever the discipline, that originate from deep listening are connected in resonance with being and inform the artist, art and audience in an effortless harmony." Her **Deep Listening Band** albums contain some of

the most hauntingly moving music I've ever heard.

Oliveros has been a key figure in American experimental music through her compositions (for Sonic Youth, among others), collaborations with musicians from Stewart Dempster to DJ Spooky, her foundation and her teaching, most recently at Mills College. She's appearing in Eugene to receive an award at the three-day Society of American Music conference, which brings together music scholars to discuss topics from hip hop identities to country music roots, women composers, jazz and the Cold War, musical theater, Leonard Bernstein, John Cage and on and on.

Oliveros' concert is part of the **Music Today Festival**, one of Oregon's most valuable music institutions. This biennial celebration of new music showcases a bevy of terrific musicians, including a Feb. 17 show by UO faculty featuring the music of 20th century American composers such as **Libby Larsen** and **Henry Cowell**, works of **George and David Crumb**, plus jazz, performed by soprano **Ann Crumb** on Feb. 16. The festival also includes Argentina's **Santa Fe Guitar Quartet** on Feb. 19, world premieres by locals in the Eugene Composers Collective (at Cozmic Pizza) on Feb. 20, and new old music, as it were, by the great **Benjamin Bagby**. Last fall Bagby entranced a packed Beall Hall audience with his group **Sequentia**. He has composed music in an ancient style to accompany his performance of *Beowulf* on Feb. 23.

With performances of new music drawn from cultures across the centuries and around the globe, the Music Today Festival is the highlight of Eugene music this season. ■

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– Pauline Oliveros

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