

# Composer heads Morrison Artists Series

July 13, 2011 -- Professor of Music and SF State alum (B.M. '76) Richard Festinger has been appointed the new artistic director of the Morrison Artists Series at SF State. A composer and performer, Festinger's background includes prestigious awards for contemporary chamber music composition and a performance at the Woodstock music festival in 1969.



Festinger is currently planning the 56th season of the Morrison Artists Series, a world-class chamber music concert series based at SF State. He promises a mix of classical masterpieces and cutting-edge contemporary compositions.

The son of a classical pianist, Festinger says he has been at the piano since he was able to sit and reach the keys. He has also studied cello, trumpet and jazz guitar. Prior to earning a bachelor's degree in musical composition from SF State, he played guitar on the 1969 Joan Baez tour of the U.S. and Canada, which included the legendary stop near Woodstock, New York.

Festinger's role as artistic director of the Morrison Artists Series begins with selection of the featured ensembles. Once these are chosen, he collaborates with the musicians on the choice of music to be performed, arranges master classes for SF State students given by the visiting performers and organizes pre-concert discussions.

"We present a broad range of music," Festinger said. "But we always ask our guest performers to include very recent compositions." He notes that contemporary composition is a continuation of European art music influenced by popular music, jazz and non-Western musical traditions.

Festinger brings to the role of artistic director a long career as a contemporary composer. He is a co-founder of Earplay, a San Francisco-based chamber music ensemble that has performed hundreds of 20th and 21st century works since 1985. His compositions have received awards and

honors from the Aaron Copland Fund, American Academy of Arts and Letters, and MetLife Creative Connections. The Alexander String Quartet, Boston Chamber Ensemble, San Francisco Chamber Orchestra and the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, China are among the ensembles that have performed Festinger's work.

Festinger was recently awarded a \$10,000 National Endowment for the Arts grant to record one of his compositions. The Works and Process Series at the Guggenheim Museum of Art in New York commissioned the composition, titled "The Coming of Age." The lyrics to the piece are from poems by the celebrated, German-born fiction writer and playwright Denis Johnson.

The Morrison Artists Series, a program of the May Treat Morrison Chamber Music Center, is based at SF State and presents six free performances a year. The 2011/12 series, which opens Oct. 21, includes the Borealis Wind Quintet and the Alexander String Quartet. For more information about the 2011/12 line-up, visit <http://creativearts.sfsu.edu/morrison/about>.

- Denize Springer