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Ptaszynska to serve as artistic director of Contempo

Award-winning composer succeeds retiring director Shulamit Ran

Award-winning composer Marta Ptaszynska will succeed Shulamit Ran as the artistic director of [Contempo](#), the University of Chicago’s renowned contemporary music collective.

Ran, the Andrew MacLeish Distinguished Service Professor of Composition and a Pulitzer Prize winning composer, will retire in June after more than 40 years of service to the University and 12 years as artistic director of Contempo.

“Contempo’s commitment to performing the work of living composers with the highest levels of passion and artistry makes it an integral part of the artistic life of the University of Chicago and the city,” said Anne Walters Robertson, the Claire Dux Swift Distinguished Service Professor of Music and the Humanities in the College and chair of Music. “We are exceedingly grateful to Shulamit Ran, who has so energetically led this important institution for more than a decade, and to Marta Ptaszynska, whose vision will guide Contempo in its next chapter.”

Contempo—then called the Contemporary Chamber Players—was founded 50 years ago by composition professor Ralph Shapey. Over its long and distinguished history, the ensemble has garnered many accolades for its fearless performance of contemporary music.

A [special 50th anniversary concert](#) featuring the world premiere of John Eaton’s *The End of It*, as well as the premiere of a short documentary about Contempo, takes place on Saturday, Jan. 24 at the Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts.



Under Ran's leadership, Contempo strengthened its partnership with resident ensembles eighth blackbird and Pacifica Quartet and introduced the Contempo-Jazz Double Bill, a program that brings together classical musicians with an artist outside of the classical art music tradition. The collective also continued to perform the compositions of University of Chicago doctoral students, whom Ran has described as "an exceptional group of young composers."

"I depart with a tremendous sense of gratitude to have had the opportunity to serve in this role, and gratification at seeing the place Contempo is occupying in the life of the arts," Ran said. "It is a joy for me that my cherished colleague, Marta Ptaszynska, is taking over the mantle. She is a brilliant composer and brings multi-faceted experience from her own career also as a noted percussionist. Her great imagination, energy and vision assure us all that Contempo and its legacy are in wonderful hands."

Ptaszynska, the Helen B. and Frank L. Sulzberger Professor of Music, joined the University of Chicago faculty in 1998. An internationally renowned composer, she has received commissions from orchestras and opera houses worldwide, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Cincinnati Symphony, the Cleveland Chamber Orchestra, the Polish Chamber Orchestra and the National Opera in Poland. Her many works include the *Holocaust Memorial Cantata*, *Concerto for Marimba*, the opera *Oscar of Alva*, *Mister Marimba*, an opera for children, and the opera *Valldemosa* on Chopin in Majorca, commissioned by the National Chopin Institute and the Polish Ministry of Culture for the Chopin Bicentennial in 2010.

In 2010, she received a Guggenheim fellowship to complete a concerto for percussion, electronic tape and orchestra, *Of Time & Space*, which is designed to be performed simultaneously by different ensembles around the world. Ptaszynska was awarded the lifetime achievement award by the Union of Polish Composers in 2011. She received the Officer's Cross of Merit from her home country of Poland in 1995.



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Ptaszynska said she is already making plans for the next year of Contempo, which will be devoted to new trends in contemporary European music. “We will have a great variety of works, including electronic and multimedia presentations, along with a jazz concert by Grazyna Auguscik and a portrait concert of Shulamit Ran,” Ptaszynska said.

For more information about Contempo and details about its 50th anniversary season, please visit the Contempo website: <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/contempo/>

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