



After 25 years under Marin Alsop, the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music is ready to hand its baton over to Cristian Macelaru. Contributed photo.

By [Wallace Baine](#), Sentinel Entertainment Editor

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Celebrated percussionist Evelyn Glennie gets the Cabrillo Festival started with a performance Aug. 4. Contributed photo.

Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music

When: July 30-Aug. 12

Where: Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, 307 Church St., Santa Cruz.

Details: For ticket information and a full schedule of events, go to cabrillomusic.org

Much will look familiar at the 2017 iteration of the celebrated Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music – the calendar of events, the musicians, the venues, even many of the composers on display. But there is one major, fundamental change at the Cabrillo Festival this year. And it has to do with

leadership.

After 25 years under the guidance of Marin Alsop, the Festival this year turns to Cristian Macelaru as its new music director and conductor. The 37-year-old Romanian-born conductor and violinist takes control of the Cabrillo Festival this year, bringing with him some of his artistic collaborators and creative themes. But, he said, there's no reason to expect big changes.

"Continuity is on my mind and will be on my mind going into the future," said Macelaru, known by his friends as "Cristi." "I never felt like the Cabrillo Festival needed some kind of brand-new direction and not have any link to the past. What attracted me to the Festival is what it is, and I don't feel like I need to make any break from the past."

The program for this year's festival – the main concerts of which takes place the first weekends in August – reflect both Macelaru's plans for the future and his nods to the past. In the former, he is excited about bringing to Cabrillo composers who he feels fit well in Cabrillo mold, namely Michael Gandolfi from the New England Conservatory of Music, and Canadian-born composer Karim Al-Zand who teaches at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

"Karim is a new voice and one that I have taken to orchestras across the world," said Macelaru. "He has a strong background in jazz and much of the music that he has written and I have performed has a lot of those elements to them."

Al-Zand – whom Macelaru has described as having a "Debussy style" – has been given the feature slot as the last piece in the Festival's last concert Aug. 12. The Festival commissioned piece is titled "The Prisoner," and it's based on the story of a man wrongfully imprisoned in the American detention center at Guantanamo Bay for more than 10 years. Words from the man's experience at Guantanamo have been set to music and will be sung by New Zealand-born bass/baritone Jonathan Lemalu.

"The whole reason that I commissioned a piece like this," said Macelaru, "is to make us reflect, to let us have a conversation. I want to invite people to reflect on what they hear at Cabrillo as a commentary on who we are. That's why I picked it as the last thing at the Festival, so that we end the Festival with a question."

The Al-Zand piece is one of four world premiere Festival commissioned pieces to be presented at that final concert Aug. 12. But Macelaru, balance is part of his aesthetic as music director as well. And, as such, the "Con Brio" concert on Aug. 11, will be "made of pieces that are all lighter in their approach," he said. "The way I envisioned the program, it was all about laughter."

The performance by celebrated percussionist Evelyn Glennie of a piece by Clarice Assad is a holdover from the Alsop years that Macelaru inherited "with open arms," he said. Glennie's performance of Assad's "Ad Infinitum" along with Gandolfi's "Points of Departure" and the "Second Symphony" from Festival mainstay Aaron Jay Kernis open the Festival on Aug. 4.

Also at the center of this year's program is a pair of salutes to two of the towering figures in contemporary American music, both of whom have direct links to the Cabrillo Festival. Former Aptos resident Lou Harrison, who died in 2003, would have turned 100 this year. To mark the centenary of Harrison – a key figure in the establishment of the Cabrillo Festival – Macelaru will unveil David T. Little's tribute piece to Harrison, commissioned for the Festival, titled "The Conjured Life" (Aug. 5).

Also part of the Festival's salute this year will be the great composer John Adams, who will celebrate his 70th birthday this year. Adams, who served as the Cabrillo Festival's music director for the transitional year between Dennis Russell Davies and Alsop, will be the subject of a new piece from young composer Gabriella Smith titled "Field Guide" (Aug. 12).

Neither the music of Harrison or Adams will be on the program this year. Macelaru wanted to honor the two greats in a different way, by turning to other composers. For Adams, Macelaru said, "Endorsing the young composers who he has supported at the Festival was, for him, the best birthday present we could have given him."

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About the Author



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