

## PRESS RELEASE

15 March 2010

### MAJOR NEW COMMISSION BY SOUND ARTIST BILL FONTANA AT SOMERSET HOUSE

This spring, Somerset House Trust and Sound and Music, will present **River Sounding**, a major new commission by sound artist Bill Fontana, which will invite visitors on a journey through the hidden sound worlds of the River Thames. Opening on **15 April 2010** at Somerset House, the work will create an imaginary acoustic map of the Thames, taking visitors through Somerset House's atmospheric subterranean spaces, normally closed to the public, and out to the Great Arch on the Embankment, highlighting the building's historical connection to the river.

**River Sounding** at Somerset House features a series of different sound sequences, recorded by Bill Fontana along a one-hundred-mile section of the Thames stretching from Richmond to Southend. Projected through loudspeakers installed at river level, in the hidden pathways beneath the courtyard, visitors will be immersed in the rich musical vocabulary of the Thames, from whistling buoys and steam pumps to hidden underwater sounds and rushing water at river locks. The sounds will be played alongside his video images of the recording locations, which include Tower Bridge, HMS Belfast, the Thames Barrier and the historic Teddington Lock.

As well as revealing the rich and varied sound worlds of the Thames, **River Sounding** will pay homage to Somerset House's historical connection to the river. Somerset House was originally built as a grand riverside palace in the sixteenth century and in the eighteenth century became the home of Admiral Nelson's Navy Office, with boats entering through the building's Great Arch. **River Sounding** will return the sounds of the river to Somerset House, highlighting the forgotten shared history of one of London's most iconic buildings and the Thames.

**River Sounding** demonstrates the communicative power of sound art, and the commission launches Sound and Music's new programme, dedicated to championing and developing audiences for new and innovative music and sound. It will be complemented by a series of talks and film screenings engaging with **River Sounding**'s themes, which will take place in and around Somerset House.

Trained as a composer, Bill Fontana (born 1947, USA) is internationally known for his pioneering works in sound, which examine the nature of our acoustic environment. He has presented his "sound sculptures" at leading museums around the world, as well as at iconic locations in many of the world's great cities, including London's Millennium Bridge and Big Ben, San Francisco's Golden Gate and Paris's Arc de Triomphe. He has received numerous fellowships for his work, including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship in 1986. He lives and works in San Francisco and is represented in the UK by Haunch of Venison.

Listings information:

**Bill Fontana: River Sounding**

Dates: 15 April – 31 May 2010

Somerset House

The Strand

London WC2R 1LA

[www.somersetthouse.org.uk](http://www.somersetthouse.org.uk)

Opening hours: Monday – Wednesday: 10:00am– 6:00pm (last entry 5.30pm), Thursday & Friday: 10am – 9pm (last entry 8.30pm), Saturday & Sunday: 10am – 6pm (last entry 5.30pm)

Admission Free

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## **Notes to Editors:**

### **About Sound and Music**

**River Sounding** forms the launch event – SAM #1 – of Sound and Music's new programme. Sound and Music presents fresh and challenging new music and sound through a range of live events, learning and digital projects, and publications. Formed in October 2008 from the merger of the British Music Information Centre, Contemporary Music Network, Society for the Promotion of New Music and Sonic Arts Network, Sound and Music aims to create an influential voice for new music and sound, building support and audiences for innovative work.

For more information on Sound and Music and its programme, please go to [www.soundandmusic.org](http://www.soundandmusic.org) or contact Truda Spruyt at Colman Getty on 020 7631 2666 or [truda@colmangetty.org](mailto:truda@colmangetty.org).