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## PHILIP GLASS APPRECIATION

Through his operas, his symphonies, his compositions for his own ensemble, and his collaborations with artists ranging from Woody Allen to David Bowie, Twyla Tharp to Allen Ginsberg, Philip Glass has had an extraordinary and unprecedented impact upon the musical and intellectual life of his times.

The operas – “Einstein on the Beach,” “Satyagraha,” “Akhnaten,” and “The Voyage,” among others – play throughout the world’s leading houses, and rarely to an empty seat. Glass has written music for experimental theater and for Academy Award-winning motion pictures such as “The Hours,” while “Koyaanisqatsi,” his initial filmic landscape with Godfrey Reggio and the Philip Glass Ensemble, may be the most radical and influential mating of sound and vision since “Fantasia.” His associations, personal and professional, with leading rock, pop and world music artists date back to the 1960s. Indeed, Glass is the first composer to win a wide, multi-generational audience in the opera house, the concert hall, the dance world, in film and in popular music – simultaneously.

For Glass, such distinctions are not terribly important. To him, it is all music – *period* – something he creates every morning, whether the studio of his house in Manhattan’s East Village or in the hotel rooms he occupies when on tour. He is never without several projects on which to concentrate and, by now, his output runs to many thousands of hours. “It’s in my nature to write a lot of music,” he once explained, with typical understatement.

Glass has always gone his own way. Born in Baltimore in 1937, he began his musical studies at the age of eight. His father, Ben Glass, ran a record store and the young Philip was acquainted early on with the actual *business* of music. Small wonder that he would become one of the first composers to found his own record label -- indeed, three of them to date, over the course of 35 years.

By the age of 15, Glass had matriculated at the University of Chicago, where he continued what had already become an exhaustive involvement with music. After graduation, he attended the Juilliard School, then emigrated to Paris where he studied with the legendary pedagogue Nadia Boulanger (who, in the course of her 60-year career, also tutored Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Roy Harris, Quincy Jones and several other important American composers). During his time with Boulanger, Glass also explored less-conventional musical venues, and worked intensively with Ravi Shankar and the Indian tabla player Allah Rakha. This music – particularly its highly structured approach to rhythm - affected Glass’ own work profoundly.

He moved back to New York in 1967 and quickly established himself in the blossoming arts community in downtown Manhattan. There he worked as a plumber, drove a cab at night and spent his spare time assembling an early version of the Philip Glass Ensemble - seven musicians playing keyboards and a variety of woodwinds, amplified and fed through a mixer.

The new musical style that Glass was evolving was eventually dubbed "minimalism." Glass himself never liked the term and preferred to speak of himself as a composer of "music with repetitive structures." Much of his early work was based on the extended reiteration of brief, elegant melodic fragments that wove in and out of an aural tapestry. Or, to put it another way, it immersed a listener in a sort of sonic weather that twists, turns, surrounds, develops.

"I had to play my music myself," Glass remembered. "The musical establishment of the time thought I was crazy, and foundation support was out of the question. We'd play for free or for a small donation in old buildings where you had to climb six sets of stairs if you wanted to hear what we were doing."

But those who responded to his music tended to become fanatical about it, and word spread about the young composer whose work sounded so unlike anything else around. Glass developed his first core following in lower Manhattan, among the writers, artists and sculptors who then peopled the dusty lofts, paying next to no rent, baking in the summer and freezing in the winter. But as his concerts attracted larger and larger audiences, museums and local galleries began to invite him to play. And then "Einstein on the Beach," conceived and executed with theater visionary Robert Wilson, made Glass famous.

"Einstein," presented throughout Europe and then at the Metropolitan Opera in November, 1976, broke all the traditional rules of opera. It was five hours long, with no intermission; the audience was invited to wander in and out at liberty throughout the performance. Instead of a plot, Glass and Wilson presented a poetic look at the life and legacy of Albert Einstein: scientist, humanist, amateur musician -- and the man whose theories led to the splitting of the atom. Glass' text consisted of numbers, do-re-mi's and nonsense phrases. The stage was flooded with white light; a train moved slowly through space; a young boy threw a paper airplane, and Lucinda Childs paced back and forth, resolutely going nowhere and everywhere. There had never been anything quite like it and, 30 years on, its radical uniqueness has only become more apparent.

Since "Einstein," Glass has been involved in so many diverse projects that to list them all would require several pages. He has composed more than twenty operas, large and small; eight symphonies (with others already on the way); concertos for violin, piano, timpani, and saxophone quartet and orchestra; soundtracks to films ranging from new scores for the stylized classics of Jean Cocteau to Errol Morris's documentary about former defense secretary Robert McNamara; string quartets; a growing body of work for solo piano and organ. He has collaborated with David Byrne, Twyla Tharp, Paul Simon, Linda Ronstadt, Yo-Yo Ma, and Doris Lessing, among many others.

Most recently, the Metropolitan Opera, where “Einstein on the Beach” received its American premiere and which commissioned “The Voyage” in 1992, has announced that they will co-produce with the English National Opera “Satyagraha” to be revived for the 2007-2008 season. And then there are the lectures, the workshops, the appearances with the Philip Glass Ensemble and the solo keyboard performances throughout the world.

And yet Glass has somehow managed to remain remarkably accessible to the public – a genuinely “good citizen” in a field that desperately needs some. He makes a determined effort to examine the myriad unsolicited scores and tapes that hopeful musicians press upon him, and he has played benefit concerts for causes ranging from college radio stations to the preservation of Tibetan culture. Warm, funny and unpretentious, he remains very much the same person he was three decades ago – somebody who followed what Henry David Thoreau once called a “different drummer” and made the world resound to his beat.

Bio by Tim Page