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Prelude



BEETHOVEN'S NINTH JUNE 5 – 7, 2020

MASTERWORKS #9:

Philip Glass, an iconic composer who held intermittent careers as a plumber, moving man and NYC taxi driver, made an impact on classical music by combining a fresh perspective and an appreciation of musical tradition:

*"The search for the unique can lead to strange places. Taboos – the things we're not supposed to do – are often the more interesting."*ⁱ

By Emily Holowczak, HSO Development Assistant



Philip Glass

By the end of his career, Beethoven had become the ultimate fusion composer, taking the best of the Classical and Baroque eras and setting the stage for the new works created by 20th century composers.ⁱⁱ A

traceable pathway leads from Beethoven to prolific composer Philip Glass, a pioneer of 21st century musical experimentation.ⁱⁱⁱ Born in 1937 and now 83 years old, Glass is still in demand, with a career that spans several decades.

As a young boy, Philip worked in his father's record store in downtown Baltimore, which included a radio repair shop in the back.^{iv} Glass fondly recalled his father's influence on his broad interest in music:

"In the record store we had all kinds of music. We had country and western music, we had jazz music, we had band music, we had marching-band music, we had classical music, we had operas. But there were only two categories, really. There was good music and bad music. That's the only thing he recognized."^v

Thanks to his father's wide-reaching interests, Glass was immersed in music of every variety. With encouragement from their parents, all three Glass children were given music lessons. At the age of eight Philip began flute lessons at Baltimore's famed Peabody Conservatory.^{vi} His parents' financial means limited Philip to lessons on only one instrument, so he would "sit in" on his older brother Marty's piano lessons, playing

everything he'd heard as soon as the teacher left the house.^{vii} By passing the entrance exam for the University of Chicago at the age of 15, Philip began college and majored in mathematics and philosophy.^{viii} But Philip's education was not confined to the classroom. Chicago in the early 1950s was focused on jazz, and Philip was fascinated by the music played in the local bars and clubs. Still a minor, Philip hung around outside the clubs until he was finally invited to sit inside and listen "as long as he didn't drink."^{ix}

At the University of Chicago, Glass discovered atonal music and the revolutionary scores of Charles Ives.^x Upon graduation at age 19, he was accepted as a composition student at the Juilliard School.^{xi} But composition in the United States at that time was dominated by dense twelve-tone music, and Glass was frustrated with the curriculum.^{xii}

To focus on the basics of harmony and counterpoint, he moved to Paris to study with acclaimed composer Nadia Boulanger, who had taught Aaron Copland more than 40 years earlier.^{xiii} In Paris, Glass connected with a wide variety of artists, musicians, filmmakers and actors, and, eventually, a friend asked for his help on a film project, *Chappaqua*, that featured the music of Indian sitar player, Ravi Shankar.^{xiv} Shankar had no idea how to notate his music for Western musicians. Glass was hired to listen to Shankar's music and create a written score.^{xv}



Philip Glass

continued on next page...



But it wasn't as easy as he expected. The rhythms of Indian music were like nothing he'd ever heard, and Glass struggled to grasp the rhythmic nuances of the piece, until he hit upon an unusual discovery:

“Finally, I did a remarkable, intuitive thing... I erased all the bar lines... Suddenly, I saw the patterns... when I took the bar lines away, I saw the flow of the rhythm that I hadn't seen.”^{xxvi}

Glass credits both Boulanger and Shankar as his mentors: “I always think of them as one on my right shoulder, one on my left shoulder, both whispering in my ears.”^{xxvii}

Glass returned to New York in 1967 with new ideas about music composition. The composer formed his own group, the Philip



Philip Glass Ensemble

Glass Ensemble, an avant-garde musical group consisting of keyboards and a variety of woodwinds, each amplified and fed through a mixer.^{xxviii} The group gained popularity throughout the years and are still notable for their unique sound today.^{xix}

But even with the early success of his ensemble, Glass needed work outside of music to make ends meet. He placed advertisements in newspapers and worked as a plumber. Together with fellow composer, Steven Reich, Glass formed Chelsea Light Moving, and the two composers carried furniture up and down apartment staircases in Manhattan.^{xx} Glass took only temporary jobs to ensure that he had time to focus on composing.^{xxi} His favorite was driving a taxi, because it allowed him to listen to music all day as he drove.^{xxii}

Glass's unconventional style connected him to a broad community in theatre, dance, opera, visual arts, rock, and film scoring.^{xxiii} His involvement with theater led to his 1975 opera, *Einstein on the Beach*, and while it wasn't intended as a cycle, the opera turned out to be the first in a trio of operas about visionary historical figures.^{xxiv} In 1987, Glass began to write more accessible music that his father, who died in 1971, would have enjoyed.^{xxv} The result was his Violin

Concerto, his first composition for traditional orchestra and soloist.^{xxvi}

Glass went on to collaborate with a wide range of artists who included Twyla Tharp, Allen Ginsberg, Woody Allen and David Bowie. He has also worked with Patti Smith, Paul Simon, Linda Ronstadt, Yo-Yo Ma, and Doris Lessing.^{xxvii}

Glass has scored many well-known and popular movies, including *Hamburger Hill* (1987), *The Truman Show* (1998), *The Illusionist* (2006), *Leviathan* (2014), *Fantastic Four* (2015) and *Pandemic: Facing AIDS* (2002) to name just a few. He received an Academy Award nomination for his film score for Martin Scorsese's 1997 movie, *Kundun*, about the Dalai Lama. Additional film score nominations include *The Hours* (2002) and *Notes on a Scandal* (2006).^{xxviii}

In September of 2016, President Barack Obama presented Glass with a National Medal of Arts, honoring him for his “groundbreaking contributions to music and composition.” Obama described Glass as “one of the most prolific, inventive, and influential artists of our time”.^{xxix} Glass was one of the recipients of the 2018 Kennedy Center Honors.^{xxx}



Philip Glass and Barack Obama

Today, Glass presents lectures, workshops and solo keyboard performances around the world, and still appears regularly with the Philip Glass Ensemble. From his home in New York City, he continues to write symphonies and concertos, as well as solo pieces for a wide variety of instruments.^{xxxi}

Join us!

Please join the Hartford Symphony Orchestra for *Beethoven's Ninth*, June 5-7, 2020, and enjoy the incredible music of one of America's most beloved living composers in his Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra.



WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC WILL SOUND?

Try HSO'S Listening Guide, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Enjoy Ricardo Muti conducting the Chicago Symphony in a performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOjHhS5MtvA>

Listen to Movements 1 and 4 from Glass' Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1a8ZTF453g>

Yearning for more Philip Glass? Try these recommendations!

The soundtrack from *Kundun*:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFG_ltk7kOs

The soundtrack for the *Illusionist*:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIMnJlzLWU9cleuMkK9q4Gwb52zrz25Cc>

An interesting interview with Glass, featured in "The Guardian":

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/jan/22/philip-glass-80-interview-observer-new-review>

An interview of Philip Glass with NPR's *Fresh Air* host Terry Gross includes NPR's Ira Glass (host of *This American Life*), second cousin to the composer:

<https://www.wbur.org/npr/146092923/ira-glass-interviews-his-cousin-composer-philip-glass>



Philip Glass



Philip Glass

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Casey's
Classics

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program? Coleman Casey, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recording recommendations of selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony has been recorded almost too frequently, and very few recordings are actually equal to its challenges and transcendent themes. Among the greatest versions is Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic recorded in 1977. Of his five versions, this one is notable for its great soloists, outstanding chorus, great playing and impressive sound, and visionary conducting. (DG)

The *Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra* by Glass is a startling contrast with the Beethoven and may be heard on YouTube by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.



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