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Atheneum Theatre
4 p.m. and 7 p.m.
Co-sponsored by Real Art Ways
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Philip Glass, photograph by Robert Mapplethorpe

These performances are supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, a Federal agency and Meet the Composer.
SOME THOUGHTS ON THE MUSIC OF PHILIP GLASS:

If mechanical reproduction is to the composer roughly equivalent to what photography was to the painter, it can hardly be surprising that new musics have developed, making demands upon our ears equally as unusual or different as those made upon our eyes at the turn of the century when non-figurative art first began to be developed. The music of Philip Glass, like that of several of his colleagues, Steve Reich and Terry Riley, is born of this electronic age, and is rooted to some extent in the characteristics of the instruments for which it has been written. A Bass Synthesizer, various Keyboards, the Electric Organ, and most of all, an instrument which hardly can be called one, but without which the various other electronic components would virtually cease to function, the Mixer (which controls the levels of sound and how they are matched), are all instruments in search of repertory. There is little for them in the past, if nothing at all. There is only their future, which is most everything, if not all.

New instruments in and of themselves change our listening habits. Wagner was continually adding to his orchestra, and being taken to task for it as his listeners were continually asked to accustom their ears to new sounds. Electric Organs and Keyboards are commonly found in cafés, restaurants, or in rock groups. For some reason we seem to have to stretch our ears when they venture forth into what are commonly called serious musical ventures. I am told that the same was true when the clarinet, or the trombone, first appeared in the symphony orchestra. We really ought to be more tolerant by this time. If Philip Glass wishes to restrict his ensemble to the sounds of the above mentioned electronic instruments, along with a selection of flutes and saxophones, as opposed to a string quartet or perhaps even a woodwind quintet, by all means let us take him at face value. There is a good deal of thought that goes into the instrumental blend of the sounds he wishes to create, as much thought went into the palette of the impressionist painters whose colors were so vastly different from late nineteenth century romantic painting.

Indeed, there is something of impressionism in the music of Glass, something akin to the gentleness, the softness of those French painters who were uninterested in the epic, the tragic, or the monumental. Glass and many of his contemporaries refer to the term, process music. More correctly, as the composer himself has stated, it is an additive process. Speaking of his Music in Twelve Parts, of which parts one, two, and three will be performed this evening, he notes that it is a process "in which a simple melodic figure is
altered after a number of repetitions by the addition or subtraction of one or a group of related notes." In more general terms this means that the process is one of almost microscopic change, barely perceptible, so much so that one must catch it quickly before it moves on, as if it were obeying the same principles of subtle gradations as those which effect changes of light and color in a painting by Monet.

An additive process is more closely tied into non-Western music, however, and Glass admits that his introduction to this method came about through his encounters with the Indian musicians Ravi Shankar and Allah Rakha. Speaking of their music, he further noted that "they build very complex structures with an additive process. Our point of view is opposite: we divide, they add."

"But there's something else; cycles of beats going against other cycles of beats. We call it polyrhythmic, but it's really cyclic. There are traditions where you have cycles of repeating rhythms going on at the same time, like little wheels turning inside big wheels and all the revolutions are different and at a certain time they come out together. That's the way it works."

The principle then is a music which is non-Western based, one which does not adhere to the traditional formal concepts which have characterized the last several hundred years of Western music. We must put Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, Schumann, Verdi, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and all others out of our minds, to "discover another mode of listening -- one in which neither memory nor anticipation (the usual psychological devices of programmatic music whether Baroque, Classical, Romantic, or Modernistic) have a place in sustaining the texture, quality or reality of the musical experience."

The composer is no longer the centerpiece of his composition, the process is. Our ears should be attuned to it alone. Sol LeWitt, in whose honor the Philip Glass Ensemble performs the November 22 concerts in Hartford, made the statement in one of his Sentences on Conceptual Art that "the artist's will is secondary to the process he initiates from idea to completion. His willfulness may only be ego." There is a good deal in this maxim which is safely paralleled in the music of Glass. Glass and LeWitt have in fact collaborated. The last composition on this evening's program, Dance, was created by them in tandem with the dancer-choreographer, Lucinda Childs. But Glass and LeWitt collaborate in other ways as well. Both could be the draftsmen (or the performers) of their respective compositions. Glass often is. Neither need to be. Both conceive or conceptualize as the case may be. It seems distinctly that the process of conceptualization is more important to their creative thought than that which is finally conceived. We need therefore a new way of looking and hearing if we are to understand them on their terms.

Excerpted from a text on Philip Glass by Donald Harris, Dean, Hartt College of Music, University of Hartford.

Special thanks to Dean Harris for his guidance in the planning of this concert.
THE PROGRAM:

MUSIC IN 12 PARTS
(1971-1974)
Parts 1, 2, 3

- Intermission -

MUSIC IN SIMILAR MOTION
(1969)
DANCE #5
(1979)

These performances mark the closing of the Atheneum exhibition, Sol LeWitt Wall Drawings 1968-1981.

PHILIP GLASS ENSEMBLE:

Jon Gibson  Flute, Soprano Saxophone
Philip Glass  Electric Organ
Dora Ohrenstein  Voice
Jack Kripl  Flute, Piccolo, Soprano Saxophone, Baritone Saxophone
Kurt Munkacsi  Mixer
Richard Peck  Flute, Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone
Michael Riesman  Keyboards, Bass Synthesizer

Photograph by Paula Court
MUSIC IN 12 PARTS, begun in May 1971 and completed in April 1974, is an extended cycle of music normally requiring three concerts to perform in its entirety. It is intended to describe a vocabulary of techniques which have been and are appearing in my music. Individual parts feature one or several aspects of a common musical language, presenting and developing them in somewhat unusual ways. They are characterized by different procedures, note choices and rhythmic profile.

Parts 1 and 3 combine divergent and overlapping figures to produce new resultant musical patterns. In Part 1, a sustained F#-C# is heard behind a shifting rhythmic/melodic figure. In Part 3, the individual melodic patterns interchange to produce a strong, pulsating rhythm. Part 2 explores devices of augmentation and diminution within a fixed rhythmic cycle.

Certain principles remain constant in MUSIC IN 12 PARTS -- a stable harmony, repetitive structures and a steady eighth-note beat. Additive process (in which a simple melodic figure is altered after a number of repetitions by the addition or subtraction of one or a group of related notes) is used throughout, though often combined with principles of cyclic rhythmic structures (a device familiar in a number of non-Western traditions). However, the individual parts in MUSIC IN 12 PARTS tend to be highly divergent from each other, exhibiting a range as wide as I could conceive of at the time of writing.

A view of the work as a whole would have to take into account these two rather contradictory tendencies. In any case, the question of whether MUSIC IN 12 PARTS is an organic whole or a collection of distinct pieces may prove to be irrelevant -- that is, if, as I suspect, the musical personality of the composer is in fact the fundamental unifying principle of the music.

In undertaking a work of this length it was my intention to confront directly the problem of musical scale (or time). The music is placed outside the usual time scale, substituting a non-narrative and extended time sense in its place. It may happen that some listeners, missing the usual musical structures (or landmarks) by which they orient themselves, may experience some initial difficulties in actually perceiving the music. However, when it becomes apparent that nothing "happens" in the usual sense, but that, instead, the gradual accretion of musical material can and does serve as the basis of the listener's attention, then he can perhaps discover another mode of listening -- one in which neither memory nor anticipation (the usual psychological devices of programmatic music whether Baroque, Classical, Romantic or Modernistic) have a place in sustaining the texture, quality or reality of the musical experience. It is hoped that one would then be able to perceive the music almost as a "presence", freed of dramatic structure, a pure medium of sound.

(Note above by Philip Glass)

MUSIC IN SIMILAR MOTION is from a period when Philip Glass was developing a technique of "additive process", wherein a repeated melodic figure is stretched, shortened, transformed, by the addition or subtraction of related melodic units or increments of the original figure. The simplest kinds of pitch choices were made in order to render the musical structure as clear as possible.
DANCE #5 is part of DANCE, a three-way collaboration between dancer/choreographer Lucinda Childs, visual artist Sol LeWitt, and Mr. Glass. DANCE was cast in five parts which alternate between ensemble solo sections choreographed by Miss Childs. DANCE was premiered and toured extensively in Europe in the fall of 1979, and was presented at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in November 1979.

BIOGRAPHY:

Composer PHILIP GLASS has worked in a broad spectrum of the performing arts, composing for opera, dance, theater, chorus, as well as film. Solo and with his Ensemble, he has performed his music in over 300 concerts in the United States and Europe. A graduate of The Juilliard School, Mr. Glass has received numerous awards, including a Composer-in-Residence Grant from the Ford Foundation and a Fulbright Grant which enabled him to study with Nadia Boulanger. His music is distinguished by a repetitive structure, modular-form style of composition, designed for the specific resources of his Ensemble, and he is best known for works of extended duration in that style (e.g. MUSIC IN 12 PARTS).

In 1976, Philip Glass was awarded a special OBIE for his work with the experimental theater company, Mabou Mines. Mr. Glass was awarded a second OBIE for his opera EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH, created in collaboration with director Robert Wilson. EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH toured widely in Europe in 1976 and received its American premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in November of that year.

Mr. Glass' commissions include the film NORTH STAR: MARK DISUVERO, an organ work commissioned by the Doelen Hall, Rotterdam, for the Tenth Anniversary of the Doelen Organ, and ANOTHER LOOK AT HARMONY, PART IV for the Holland Festival (June 1977). The last work was later performed at Carnegie Hall, along with excerpts from EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH, featuring the Gregg Smith Singers. In 1979, Mr. Glass collaborated with dancer/choreographer Lucinda Childs and visual artist Sol LeWitt on the unique work, DANCE, which toured Europe and received its American premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in November 1979. His opera SATYAGRAHA (based on the early years of Mahatma Gandhi), with libretto by Constance DeJong, was commissioned by the City of Rotterdam and premiered by the Netherlands Opera in the fall of 1980. SATYAGRAHA received its American premiere at Artpark in Lewiston, New York, this past summer and made its New York City premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music two weeks ago.