Steve Reich Collected Works

ESSAYS

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STEVE REICH

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Essays by:

Opposite page:
New York, 2005. Photo
by Jeffrey Herman.

THOUGH I DON'T REMEMBER SAYING IT, I HAVE TO ACCEPT AS FACT that I told the young composer Kirk Nurock that I had no interest in minimalism when he came to see me at the ECM offices around 1975. What I do recall is that the first words out of Steve Reich's mouth when we met in 1976 referred to that earlier pronouncement: "I hear you hate minimal music," Steve said when he entered my office, "and so do I."

Steve and I have frequently referred to and even joked about that first encounter of almost 50 years ago. But in fact, it is quite probable that when I met Kirk Nurock, I said it because all I knew of Steve's music at that point was *Drumming*, which had recently been released on Deutsche Grammophon, the most prestigious classical record company in the business. I didn't understand it. I was impatient hearing it for the first time. I did not make it to the end of the piece. Without any context — without having ever seen a performance of his ensemble, without knowing anything about him and his history — there was nothing for me to hang on to, and at that point I wasn't curious enough to listen further. If I had heard the piece live first, it would have been different, but my initial impressions came from listening to the beginning of side one. I'm sure my bafflement was conveyed to Kirk Nurock.

Drumming had almost nothing to do with the music I cared for most deeply at that point in my life. My musical world

encompassed the jazz clubs of New York City; the records of Miles, Ornette and Coltrane; the new music concerts of Pierre Boulez and the New York Philharmonic; the early 20th-century music of Stravinsky and Bartók; the modernism of Carter, Boulez and Stockhausen; and Bach.

But the event that brought Steve Reich to my office changed everything. In 1975, I became the American label manager for ECM Records, which had a distribution deal in Germany with Polydor Records, the parent company of Deutsche Grammophon. DG had a difficult time marketing *Drumming* and, although ECM had only released jazz records, the head of Polydor, Roland Kommerell, thought ECM's audience might be better suited to Reich's music.

I first heard *Music for 18 Musicians* when I was in my mid-20s, at a moment when I was still in the process of figuring out my own taste in contemporary music. I wasn't yet certain what modern classical music really meant, nor was I sure how it stacked up against work from the past. A rather severe form of modernism was in vogue at that time, and I was attracted to some of it for its visceral energy and theatrical ideas. This music was being written about enthusiastically by the most influential music critics and supported by prominent concert halls and recording companies like Nonesuch. But I had to admit that though much of it interested and intrigued me, deep down, I loved very little of it. And isn't that what truly draws us to music — loving it at an intuitive level, in the deepest and most profound way?

Whatever I might have thought of the music of Steve Reich at that moment, *Music for 18 Musicians* was an event of such immense importance that it changed how I felt not only about Steve, but about minimalism, modernism and, in some respects, classical music. *Music for 18* was a piece that could sweep listeners up with its non-stop kinetic activity, its opulent sound, its rhythmic invention, its stunning architecture. But only years later did I recognize what drew me in

to such an intense degree: it was *harmony*. Here were the kinds of colors and voicings I loved in the earlier 20th-century music of Stravinsky and Bartók and others, but had found missing in practically all of the new music I had been hearing for years. It was the key that unlocked the music of modern times for me. After learning more about Reich, I realized that many of his major influences — here again, Stravinsky and Bartók, as well as Bach, Coltrane and other leading jazz greats — were those same musicians and composers I cared most about. I couldn't hear it at first in *Drumming*, but I could hear it in *Music for 18 Musicians*.

It now seemed possible to love contemporary music. With *Music for 18 Musicians*, Steve suddenly flung open a door to the possibilities of what a modern composer could be in our time.

My first attempts to place Steve in the context of the world of modern composition were wrong-headed. I thought, at the very least, that Steve would be a great role model to future generations of composers (this, as it happens, turned out to be true) and that his greatest accomplishment would be that he helped to start a revolution, that nothing was more important than his brilliant innovations (also true). What I could not foresee — because who in their 20s can know how they will feel 30 or 40 years later? — was how incredibly *good* this music was. How could I have known how resilient it would be? No matter how positive my first reactions were, the music was even better than I thought. I would come to realize that his compositional style had nothing to do with any polemical debate about the future of classical music; it was only about the music. As Steve would say on many occasions, "End of story."

After unlocking *Music for 18 Musicians*, I went back to *Drumming* and his earlier music, following the line of development that led to *18*. Everything now made sense. ECM recorded two more albums of Steve's music, including *Octet* (later expanded to include more musicians and thereafter

known as *Eight Lines*) and *Tehillim*. There was supposed to be a fourth recording for ECM, as well. Steve had just finished his first piece for orchestra and chorus, *The Desert Music*, but for reasons that seemed inexplicable at that time, a couple of weeks before the recording was scheduled, the head of ECM, Manfred Eicher, decided he "couldn't relate to the piece," and in a telex informed Steve that he was cancelling the session. Years later, Manfred told me it was a terrible mistake: he had started working with Arvo Pärt and said he felt ill-equipped to work with both modern composers at the same time. Personally, I'm grateful for Manfred's decision (and I venture that Steve probably is as well).

Eicher's "terrible mistake" was Nonesuch's great fortune. *The Desert Music* was recorded on October 29 and 30, 1984, about seven weeks after I started at Nonesuch. It was not only our first Steve Reich record; it was our first record, period. Not long afterward, Steve became the first artist signed to Nonesuch during my tenure at the label.

Almost a decade after my proclamation to Kirk Nurock, I was running Nonesuch Records. During the first ten years I was at Nonesuch, the label became home to five of the most famous composers who had, at one point or another, been associated with minimalism, though none of them would refer to themselves as minimalists: Reich, Philip Glass, John Adams, Louis Andriessen and Henryk Górecki. With his brilliant, transformative music, Steve Reich single-handedly changed the course of Nonesuch Records. •

ROBERT HURWITZ

NEW YORK, 2023

Following page:
Reich, Michael Tilson Thomas, Robert Hurwitz (L to R) at *The Desert Music* recording session, 1984. Photo by Deborah Feingold.

I FIRST HEARD STEVE REICH'S MUSIC AT A PARTY SOMETIME IN THE early 1960s. His piece *Come Out* was played by the host at a late-night gathering of filmmakers, painters, poets and other artistic types united by their avant-garde aspirations and their search for life beyond grad school. I was the only musician present. At first, I wasn't quite sure to what I was listening. The location of the party in the risky environs of downtown LA blurred the edges of what was the piece and what were just normal noises of LA late-night weirdness.

The piece really took me aback because it was so different from any of the "avant-garde" music I had known or performed. By the mid-'60s the avant-garde wave had created and coalesced into fairly predictable stylistic puddles. Music of the future, the dogma of the day seemed to decree, would be an extremely dissonant, rhythmically fractured and abstractly deconstructed exercise. Much of this music fell into the category that, to paraphrase Stravinsky, could be described as made not to be enjoyed but to be admired. Steve's piece was different. It seemed both to engage and provoke at the same time. What else, I wondered, could the composer be writing? It was unique — both beautiful and confrontational, entirely different from other "avant-garde" music I knew. It had special notes in shifting layers of time that made ever-changing melodies. It was elating and somehow spiritual. It reminded me of Rabbi Nachman's saying, "So all things turn over and revolve and are changed ... and in the transformation and return of things redemption is enclosed."

My estimation of his music was greatly enhanced soon after, when I heard *It's Gonna Rain* and *Violin Phase*. The pieces were witty, spiritual, swinging, remarkable. Hearing those first instrumental pieces was a joy like that of hearing Monteverdi, Pérotin or James Brown for the first time. It was amazing that someone could be discovering so much music with such economy of means. There was something streetwise and at the same time enormously innocent about it.

A few years later I began a series of new and unusual music concerts with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, called the "Spectrum Concerts." The first concert was one of music for multiple ensembles written during the past 300 years. It seemed essential that one of Steve's pieces should be on this program. So, I called him up. From the nature of his music, I somewhat expected that Steve would talk in a very mellowed-out West Coast way. On the contrary. A precise New York voice answered the phone and queried my interest in somewhat cautious, disbelieving tones. Why, he wondered, would an august orchestra like the Boston Symphony want to perform his music? His music, he affirmed, was for ensembles playing in artists' lofts south of Houston Street in downtown Manhattan. It had nothing to do with the world of high-society music consumption. I told him how much I liked his music and how convinced I was that it would appeal strongly to the young audiences it was my mission to bring into Symphony Hall. Somewhat reluctantly, he agreed to let us perform *Four Organs*, but only with the stipulation that he himself would play in the performances and supervise every detail of the rehearsals. Indeed, he did supervise every detail, insisting on exactly which kind of organs (Farfisas), what kind of maracas (Latin percussion rawhide and buckshot specials), and even the sort of extension cords to be used to provide the power. All of his requirements turned out to be absolutely essential and correct for the success of the piece.

The piece made a colossal impression when we did it in Boston, and even more so in New York City. Carnegie Hall was packed with a mixture of the Boston Symphony's conservative subscription audience and a sprinkling of wide-eyed New York downtowners. In all my years as a performer, I have never seen such a reaction from an audience. A few minutes into Steve's piece, a restlessness began to sweep through the crowd: rustlings of programs, overly loud coughs, compulsive seat-shifting, gradually mixed with groans and hostile exclamations crescendoing into a true cacophony. There were attempts to stop the performance by shouting it down. The audience made so much noise that, in spite of the fact that the music was amplified, we were unable to hear one another's playing. I had to mouth numbers and shout our cues so that we could stay together. Just after the piece ended, there was a moment of silence followed by a veritable avalanche of boos. Steve was ashen. I was exhilarated. I turned to him and said, "Steve, this is fantastic. By tomorrow everyone in the music world will know about your music."

The scenario did play out much as I thought it would. The reaction of the audience turned out to be pretty much divided along lines of age. The younger public's enthusiasm for Steve's piece took off at that concert and swept right through performances of many of his pieces in the following season. Since that time, I have been thrilled to watch Steve's expanding repertoire for diverse instrumental ensembles, orchestras and choruses become part of the repertoire worldwide. We've been friends and colleagues ever since. I've been fortunate to be involved in the premieres and first recordings of *Three Movements*, *The Four Sections* and *The Desert Music*. The joyous American-Jewish melancholy that we all love rings in Reich's music anew and true. His radiant work makes its own rules, continues to deepen and explore, and reflects a lifetime of inspiration and determination. This man writes great notes. •

MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS

SAN FRANCISCO, 2020

STEVE REICH TAUGHT ME YOGA. IN 1971, AFTER EVENING REHEARSALS for *Drumming* in his loft at Broadway and Canal in New York City, Steve let me sleep on his couch so I wouldn't have to make a late-night drive to Middletown, Connecticut, where I was a graduate student at Wesleyan University. In the mornings, before breakfast, we began our yoga sessions with the salute to the sun and then worked our way through other positions in Hatha yoga, ending with a headstand.

Steve then demonstrated yoga breathing exercises, indicating I should breathe in one nostril, hold my breath, and breathe out the other nostril in a cadence of 8, 32 and 16 counts. Steve said this breathing sequence was important for musicians, implying that it helped us internalize the "base eight" rhythmic structure of much Western music.

Opposite page: Russell Hartenberger and Reich (L to R) performing *Clapping Music*, 1972. Courtesy of Steve Reich.

Yoga and *Drumming*

were two elements of a rhythmic awakening that was beginning to alter my musical awareness. Despite my training as a classical percussionist, I had not thought about rhythm in any depth until I encountered West African drumming, North and South Indian music, and Indonesian gamelan in the World Music program at Wesleyan. In these lessons, I was learning music with rhythmic complexity, and I was being taught the music by rote with no notation. So when I began rehearsing *Drumming*, I was familiar with Steve's approach to teaching

his new composition. He demonstrated the parts he had composed during the week, and we imitated and repeated the patterns until we memorized them. Then we connected this new material to the music we had learned at the previous rehearsal. I saw no notation for *Drumming* until long after I had been performing the piece.

I played music with metrical ambiguity in my West African drumming class, so I had a sense of how to comprehend the perceptual complexities of *Drumming*. Something I had not experienced, however, was standing across a row of bongos from another player and attempting to ignore all my finely honed instincts of together-playing by gradually pulling ahead in time from my drum partner and entering a netherworld of irrationality. The dark art of phasing was a new concept for me, and it was one of many new approaches to rhythm that I came to appreciate as I played each new composition by Steve Reich.

One of the joys of playing *Drumming* is the freedom we have as performers. Steve composed the piece, but he allowed the performers to determine the flow of the music. He never told us to make a phase longer or move from one section to the next faster. He relied on our natural musicianship to make musical decisions. This allowed each of the performers to have a sense of ownership of the music and a feeling of community within the ensemble. Percussionists, in particular, were given the authority to determine the playing style, sound concept and musical approach to *Drumming*, thus helping to reverse a centuries-old instrumental hierarchy in Western classical music.

When I asked Steve how he thought up the simple *Drumming* pattern, he told me that he happened upon it one day while talking on the telephone set to speakerphone and tapping his fingers on a table. I later discovered that he worked out the intricacies of the rhythm in detail in his sketchbooks, which are now housed at the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, Switzerland. Steve's early interest in rhythmic patterns was piqued when he was a teenager studying snare drum with Roland Kohloff and was assigned the renowned *Stick Control* book by George Lawrence Stone. In this book, Stone creates a sense of phrasing simply by assigning "R"s and "L"s to eighth notes in every conceivable combination to indicate sticking. Steve's sketches of the *Drumming* pattern show a similar outline of hand distribution that creates implicit cross-rhythms, both four against three and three against two, on bongos, marimbas and glockenspiels. It's interesting to note that in *Drumming*, most of the patterns begin with the left hand. Steve is left-handed and he created the patterns with a left-hand lead to make it easier for him to play them. Those of us who are right-handed learned to adapt.

Steve's background in snare drumming introduced him to his favorite drum rudiment, the paradiddle. The sticking of this onomatopoetic pattern is LRLL RLRR, comprising the two basic stroke patterns on snare drum: alternating strokes and double strokes. *Phase Patterns* is made up entirely of paradiddles and fragments of paradiddles on electric organs — an early example of what Steve called "drumming on the keyboard." He again used paradiddles to simulate train motion in *Different Trains*. The percussionists in the Reich ensemble jokingly chastised the string players for cheating when playing this pattern. Instead of moving their bows in the paradiddle configuration, they "cheated" by playing consecutive up and down bows while simply moving their fingers on the fingerboards of their instruments to create the aural illusion of a paradiddle.

The playing style that was developed by the performers in Steve Reich and Musicians was different from anything I had experienced in Western music. Steve's music is pulse-based and rhythmically complex and requires an attention to the detail of time feel. When Steve was young, he went to jazz clubs in New York City and heard many of the great jazz artists, including Kenny Clarke, who was his favorite drummer.

Clarke revolutionized drum set playing by moving his right hand from its traditional time-keeping role on the hi-hat cymbals to the ride cymbal. He created the iconic *ding-di-ga-ding* ride cymbal pattern that became a jazz trademark and allowed him to play more freely. As Peter Erskine put it, "Kenny Clarke played over the bar lines to give music its flow and sense of lilting time." Steve Reich calls this sense *magic time*, and that is the kind of time feel we tried to achieve while playing his music. In *Drumming*, and in fact in all of Steve's music, the performers developed something I call *a different kind of virtuosity*. It includes this magic time feel, a sense of inner pulse, a comfort level with repetition, the ability to play with endurance and concentration, rhythmic expressivity, and an enhanced sense of ensemble.

Previous spread: Reich, Bob Becker, James Preiss, Russell Hartenberger (L to R) performing *Drumming*, New York, 2006. Photo by Hiroyuki Ito/ The New York Times/ Redux.

These virtuosic elements were sometimes disguised inside seemingly simple rhythms. A late-night visit to a Spanish night club outside Brussels where we heard flamenco singers clapping *palmas* patterns led to Steve's creation of *Clapping Music*. The 3-2-1-2 3... rhythmic pattern of *Clapping Music* is a sort of continuous palindrome that outlines a rhythmic shape known in South Indian rhythmic theory as *damaru yati*, an hourglass-shaped rhythm that decreases in size, then increases in size. *Clapping Music* began as a phasing piece, but when Steve and I first tried to phase from one measure to the next, we fell on the floor laughing because we couldn't do it. I realized that when I phase in *Drumming*, I maintain my sense of "one" at the beginning of my pattern after the phase. But in *Clapping Music*, I think of each new measure as a discrete rhythm, making it difficult to phase from one rhythm to another. After we recovered from our laughing fit, Steve suggested I jump from one measure to the next rather than phase. This and the early drafts of *Six Pianos* were the last times Steve attempted to use phasing in his compositions.

I am often asked what the musicians in the Reich ensemble contributed to the compositions. Steve readily accepted our opinions during rehearsals, and he was keenly aware of our reactions to new pieces. With *Six Pianos*, however, I inadvertently composed one measure. In an early rehearsal for the piece, I played a measure incorrectly as I changed from one pattern to the next. Neither Steve nor I noticed at the time, but when Steve listened back to the rehearsal tape, he heard my mistake and decided he liked it better than the measure he wrote. My mistake is now forever included in the score.

Music for 18 Musicians was a watershed moment in Steve's approach to rhythmic writing, although we were given very little "writing" as we learned the piece. We all had fragments of hand-written manuscript with sparse notation but lots of instructions: look at bass clarinet; cue Jay; play from back side of marimba; listen for vibe cue; nod to Bob. The choreography became a central point of attention in rehearsals as we all learned to interpret the new rhythmic demands while piecing together the sections of the emerging composition. The alternating on-beat, off-beat pulsing in marimbas, pianos and xylophones is similar to Ugandan *amadinda* xylophone music. Breath-length phrases throughout *Music for 18 Musicians* bring to mind my yogic breathing exercises. The *Clapping Music* rhythm and the ubiquitous African bell pattern from Ewe dance drumming are transformed into melo-rhythms and are cast as an overlay to the shifting string chords throughout the piece. Vibraphone cues appear from the tapestry of sound and dictate changes in the manner of a Balinese gamelan drum signal. Together these rhythmic innovations create a mesmerizing pastiche of sound that induces a trance-like state in both the performers and listeners.

Tehillim brought a different rhythmic concept to Steve's œuvre. The one, two and three eighth-note groupings in the tuned drums and clapping create a continuous but irregular flow that establishes the

rhythmic foundation for the piece. In Part III, the vibraphone players use a dampening technique used by Balinese gamelan musicians in which notes are struck with a mallet in one hand and dampened with the other hand on the rests. As in other Reich compositions, percussionists are in charge of the pacing of *Tehillim*, and savvy conductors know to follow them.

New rhythmic ideas and challenges continued to appear with each new Reich composition. In *The Cave*, Steve adapted his music to fit the rhythmic flow of the spoken word. Act 2 has frequently changing time signatures and a sense of rhythmic abstraction created by speech melody that make it the most difficult of Steve's compositions for me to perform. In *Three Tales*, Steve uses a rudimentary drum set and electronic triggers to reference Wagner's anvil rhythms in *Das Rheingold*. He also writes explicit three against four cross-rhythms in the drum set part. In *Drumming*, the cross-rhythms are implied by hand distribution, but in *Three Tales*, the polyrhythm is heard in its basic form. In one of my favorite pieces, *Electric Counterpoint*, Steve references the Central African Republic *ongo* horn ensemble piece "Ndraje balendro," with intricate hocketing patterns creating a stunning melo-rhythmic rainbow. The vibraphone parts in *Proverb* are blissful, floating patterns in Steve's homage to medieval polyphony. The Wittgenstein lyrics of *Proverb*, "How small a thought it takes to fill a whole life," remind me how rich my life has been in my pursuit of rhythmic enlightenment.

With each of these works and all those that followed, I learned something new about the inner workings of rhythm. I eventually became comfortable with the perceptual ambiguity of Steve's music knowing that 50 years ago, practicing yoga, I established a strong sense of inner pulse through the grounding I developed breathing in and out in a regular sequence. From a broader perspective, I feel fortunate that I was a small part of a renewed interest in percussion chamber music and a renaissance in rhythm that was brought about through the compositions of Steve Reich. •

RUSSELL HARTENBERGER

TORONTO, 2020

Opposite page: Steve Reich and Musicians performing *Drumming*, New York, 1973. Photo by Gianfranco Gorgoni, © Maya Gorgoni.

IT'S HARD TO FATHOM NOW, SINCE STEVE'S COMPOSITIONS ARE played by so many performers, that when he began writing for musicians after his earlier tape pieces, he had to teach them *how* to play his music — hence, the creation of Steve Reich and Musicians. With his own group, he could work on the specific sound he wanted (for instance, no or very little vibrato), how to begin and end a note, and especially how to phase, that is, slowly move ahead and drop in one note ahead of the others. It wasn't so easy then, though many musicians can routinely do it now.

As a member of his ensemble in 1971, I was privileged to witness and be part of the process firsthand in the creation of *Drumming*. I was a singer and had just moved to New York. We would meet at Steve's place on Tuesday evenings, and he might have written a section of the bongo or marimba part. The percussionists would practice that new section, and Steve might change a few things as he saw fit. As the players phased, we singers — Joan LaBarbara, Jay Clayton and I — would start singing short phrases that we heard in the resulting changes. Steve would write these down (I'm still trying to figure out how, since he was one of the players), and by Thursday he would have chosen which to use.

On Thursday we would practice that section under his guidance until he was happy. And the next Tuesday there would be a new section awaiting us. When the instruments changed to high-pitched glockenspiels, singing the new parts became impossible, so whistling was substituted. Not all the singers could whistle, so some of the percussionists whistled too. (Later, when I began producing recordings, I had to learn how to record a whistler, since blowing air directly into a mic doesn't work.)

Fifteen years later in 1987, I got to produce the recording of *Drumming* for Nonesuch, with many of my former colleagues performing. By that time, all those techniques and ideas that at first were so difficult now felt natural. Today, when ensembles play *Drumming*, they can all do the phasing with ease. *Drumming* ended up being the first of 31 Reich recordings that I've had the good fortune of producing for Nonesuch, including some of his most beloved pieces like *Music for 18 Musicians* and *Different Trains*.

When Steve was first working on *Different Trains* in 1988 with Kronos in the recording studio, the beginning of the sessions was focused on bow stroke. Once they zeroed in on the sound he wanted, he would ask the quartet about how to notate that to make it clear on the page. Of course, in many ways, the final recording documented those performance practices, but by the end of sessions, Steve had also written any changes into his score (in erasable red pen), which was then sent to Boosey & Hawkes, his publisher. Score and recording would then agree.

We recorded *Music for 18 Musicians* in 1996 at The Hit Factory in New York, a giant barn of a place. It had to be, given the number and size of instruments, and the need for some sound separation while still maintaining good sight lines — not to mention that musicians would be moving around while changing instruments. My initial plan for recording this complicated work was that we could break it into large sections depending on who needed to be where. Also, Steve thought it prudent to record to a click track, to help with editing later. We had booked two recording days, but by the end of the first day, we were nowhere near halfway finished. We left the studio that day with a sense of "Uh-oh."

That evening, Jim Preiss, one of the

percussionists, called Steve and said that they should play the complete piece, which is over an hour long, straight through without a click track, then take a break, and do it again. After all, he said, they had performed this a lot. This ended up being the right call. John Kilgore, the engineer, and I don't remember how many performances we laid down, but now the piece was moving, singing, swinging.

Music for 18 was recorded to digital tape, which meant that we would mix the best chunks first, and then edit. We began the mix near the middle where almost all instruments were playing and went to the end. Then we mixed the beginning to the middle. When I put the two halves together I had to do a lengthy crossfade, somewhere around thirty seconds long, at the juncture. Amazingly, the groove of the group was so steady that the tempi of the two takes matched exactly.

I can't imagine my career without Steve in it. *Music for 18 Musicians* was of course a high point, but each recording in this collection has its stories. When we recorded *Different Trains*, nothing like it had ever been done before, and we needed technology that didn't yet exist. With *The Cave* we also had to feel our way along, figuring out how to make all of that work. Steve is always pushing the technology, and John Kilgore and I are racing to keep up. Technological advances enlarge Steve's toolbox, and his imagination does the rest. The fertility of that imagination has not waned, and he continues to compose, one after another, amazing, ear-opening works. •

JUDITH SHERMAN

NEW YORK, 2024

I DID AN INFORMAL POLL AND CALLED UP A BUNCH OF MUSICIAN friends — orchestral players, soloists, chamber musicians, opera singers, folk singers and composers — and asked them which of Steve's pieces they knew and loved.

Without any hesitation, they all said *Music for 18 Musicians*, and then elaborated: every percussionist has played *Drumming*, *Music for Pieces of Wood*, *Music for Mallet Instruments*, *Voices and Organ*. Many soloists would have played on the ever-expanding *Counterpoint* series, and a few of them had played *Eight Lines*. Without exception, they all said that performing these pieces represented highlights of their musical lives: ecstatic moments of individual musicianship subsumed in the kind of teamwork it takes to pull them off.

I called up percussionist Russell Hartenberger, one of Steve's longtime collaborators, who told me that in the early 1970s, *Drumming* required 60 rehearsals to put together. Now, he said, he can teach it to college students in a few days. Similarly, *Music for 18 Musicians*, once an inscrutable piece whose notation was legible primarily to the musicians who premiered it, can be more or less put together by reading its commercially available score. One of the things I've long fussed over in my own work as a composer is the distinction

between "Music for Friends," which is to say, music for people who have keys to my apartment, with whom I share a notational shorthand; and "Music for Strangers," which is to say, an orchestra who calls up and says, "Write us a piece." They feed one another, obviously, and there is a symbiotic relationship between something worked out intimately in a rehearsal or recording studio with a friend and something then transmitted to a group of people I've never met. Steve once told me that the trick is to "find your band," the group of instruments that form the core of your musical language, and this is advice I pass on to all younger composers who cross my path.

One of the things that connects the pieces of Steve's I mentioned above, which performers and audiences react to so strongly, is that they are non-narrative, almost sacred affairs; watching a group of people play that music feels almost as if one has turned up in a remote shrine, where a private ritual has been happening since before one arrived and will continue long after one leaves.

There is a sense of visible process both musically and physically: you watch the cells of the patterns put themselves together and then, with the power of a single glance or gesture on the vibraphone, transport themselves into a new space. You can speak about these early works in a reductive, mechanical sense (despite their obvious emotional effects), but the way I like to talk about them is to say that they Do a Thing: I can describe, simply, the way that *Drumming* is constructed, and each section of that piece can be perceived in a bird's-eye way, where we can see precisely how the Thing functions. The scaffolding is on the outside, and the builders' intentions are clear.

This music is as part of my artistic ecosystem as air is to my respiratory system, and I can't imagine saying anything about it which wouldn't somehow get its importance wrong; I will leave that to others. The thing I want to focus on — and the thing about which I am an absolute pest-evangelist — is Steve as a melodist and, more importantly, dramatist.

One of Steve's most deeply beloved pieces — by audiences and performers — is *Different Trains*. Here, Steve set out to write a piece about his own childhood shuttling between divorced parents on opposite coasts of the States in the 1930s. He was making recordings of key narrators of this experience: his governess and a Pullman porter, along with railroad sounds. During this process, he realized that he himself, as a Jew, would have been on a very different train journey had he lived in Europe, and the second and third movements introduce the sounds of European trains and their passengers: Holocaust survivors on their way to concentration camps.

The piece is textually quite concise — over its 27 minutes, he deploys only 46 utterances. In its concision, we also begin to see Steve as a dramatist of a very particular nature: he can't control the text he gets, because it belongs to others. What he can do, however, is put the utterances in an order which itself creates a kind of documentary and artistic poetry. This is not pure chronology: the piece resists any simple narrative structure, and the nature of each fragment requires fast, transitionless changes of tack. The third movement, called "After the war," ends with another flashback, and over the course of these three fragments, Steve creates a little opera. The first fragment, "There was one girl, who had a beautiful voice," consists of the first four notes of a D minor scale, which gets contextualized simply, in D minor and in a B-flat major chord with a raised eleventh degree. Suddenly, we are in a much rockier terrain, with the words, "And they loved to listen to the singing, the Germans." Here, the fragment outlines a gnarly little cluster, which cycles around and around in a triple canon.

Suddenly, the lights come on, the walls vanish and an unspeakably beautiful fragment arrives: "And when she stopped singing, they said, 'More, more,' and they applauded." Steve writes a kind of cradle for the voice, placing it in the middle of a delicate, luxurious tenth — the exact opposite of the twisted chromaticism of the previous section. Even though the melody

is then subjected to the same canons and fragmentation as we've heard before, here, he throws the works at it: more and more octaves of imitative responses, a simple progression of fifths and fourths split between the cellos, moving higher each time, shining different harmonic light on the dancing counterpoint. For me, the most moving part of this sequence is the addition of some quick triplets, which feel almost like ornaments. The effect, though, is more like a light emanating from inside, and outside of, the voice: a little shimmer which exists precisely in the space between musical background and emotional foreground. It's always felt like a will-o'-the-wisp just out of reach, drawing the ear and the eye towards the archival patterns of memory. This is, too, music that Does Something — you can describe it technically with ease — but the content as *drama* is so carefully thought through and composed that the mechanism has become, in all senses, sentient and fluent.

One of Steve's most profoundly moving and technically brilliant works is the multimedia opera *The Cave*, a collaboration with Beryl Korot. Like *Different Trains*, it is built on a lengthy set of interviews, but only based on questions: Who for you is Abraham? Who for you is Sarah? Who for you is Hagar? Who for you is Ishmael? Who for you is Isaac? In asking Israelis, Palestinians and Americans these questions, the opera by necessity touches on the basic biographies of these biblical characters, as well as the shocking near-sacrifice of Abraham's son. While the drama of the piece follows, more or less, the events leading up to this sacrifice, there is something always looming in the background: the Cave of the Patriarchs, in which Abraham buries Sarah, and in which he himself is eventually buried along with other Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the Old Testament. Adam and Eve are also at rest there, and in *The Cave*, we eventually realize that the narrative progression of the piece is secondary to this sense of the cave itself as a cradle and a challenge: how do adherents to any of the Abrahamic faiths relate back to that precise space?

The text for the piece, while consisting of prompted responses, shuttles effortlessly between scripture and the various oral traditions surrounding these histories. In the third act, some of the American interviewees have what seems to be the opposite of an oral tradition: a sense of disconnect from history, myth and faith. The ensemble is typical of Steve's work: pianos, vibraphones, winds and a string quartet. The primary narrative voices are interviewees, and a quartet of voices makes up a sort of chorus. While *The Cave* creates a striking double-narrative on stage, there is also a musical one from simplicity to luxurious complexity, which we can trace by looking at the choral writing alone. We begin with pitchless percussion, imitating the sounds of typing Hagar's story. To listen to it, it is fully abstract, even though scripture is literally buried inside the pitchless percussion, and the text is seen on screens in the staged production. The next time we hear scripture, it is in a standalone movement where the chorus describes G-d showing Abraham his land: "Raise, now, your eyes, and look from the place where you are. [...] For all the land which you see, to you will I give it and to your seed for ever." The text is set in the stylized and rigid way the typing works in the very opening: notes are either eighths or quarters, the result being a kind of Morse code.

The next time the chorus enters, we again have scripture: here, the prophecy of Sarah's improbable gestation. The rhythmic structures expand, and we have eighths, quarters and dotted quarters — a slow accretion of rhythmic (and by extension, expressive) possibility. For a while, the chorus imitates the vocal lines precisely, and then starts expanding outwards, imitating the shapes but not the actual notes of the voices. "He bought a cave" is a portentous one, the narrow vocal fragment exploded into a rising seventh in the voices. In a rare moment of motivic transfer, this vocal line appears later in the piece in a purely instrumental expression. The effect is subtle but has an enormous power: the voice has turned into a stylized quartet

of voices, which in turn has almost "taught" the instruments the meaning of the text.

The final scene, for me, represents a transformative moment in Steve's work. All of the processes are at their exercise here: handoffs from spoken text to sung, rhythmic typing patterns offset by long lines, harmonies reframing melodies. With few exceptions, though, the harmonic language focuses on Steve's harmonic home base: something between a cluster and a dominant fifth chord that, with the right kind of light on it, can move in any direction. Over this harmonic language, every phrase both sung and spoken takes on an especial poignance: "Entertaining angels unawares," "Other mythologies take place in sort of a never-never land or off on Mt. Olympus" and "Every city was right. There really were herdsmen like Abraham" link the divine and the practical. This sentiment is echoed in a long, lyrical line worthy of Brahms, divorced yet somehow emerging from pattern and process:

> He ran to fetch a calf. But the calf ran before him and into the Cave of Machpelah. And he went in after it and found Adam and Eve on their biers, and they slept, and lights were kindled above them, and a sweet scent was upon them.

What is extraordinary about this moment is that there are so many layers of musical information, bearing all the weight of Steve's music up to that point. Some of the most benedictory utterances ("Peace upon him") are placed over the same-ish chord that dominates *Four Organs* (1970); and while we can identify the genealogy of many of the gestures in *The Cave*, the ending reveals a new world of expressive possibility. It Does a Thing, but it means so much more. This collection of Steve's music is, in so many ways, an exploration of musical processes: short notes become long, simple lines become dense canons, patterns diverge and reemerge. However, it is the powerful undercurrent of the dramatic and emotional possibilities of pattern, the unique makeup of his "band," and the sense of more poetic forces at work which draw me back to this music day after day. •

NICO MUHLY

NEW YORK, 2024

Following spread: Philip Glass, Nico Muhly, David Cossin, Timo Andres, Reich (L to R) performing *Four Organs*, Brooklyn, 2014. Photo by Stephanie Berger, Courtesy BAM Hamm Archives.


Roland

HOW SMALL A THOUGHT IT TAKES
A LISTENER'S GUIDE TO *STEVE REICH — COLLECTED WORKS*

TIMO ANDRES

It is Steve Reich, perhaps more than any other musician, who prefigured our ideas of a 21st-century composer. His earliest recorded works, those from 1965 to 1966, are made from tape loops of human speech and urban sounds. His notated instrumental music grew out of these pieces. Unlike the intricate, serialist scores of his contemporaries, Reich's consisted of comparatively basic musical notation alongside written instructions for his hand-picked players. The sound of Steve Reich and Musicians was another departure: a flexible ensemble with percussion instruments at its core.

Reich made the percussion section his home base in a way no Western composer before him had, the clean attacks and bell-like timbres of marimba, vibraphone and piano becoming one of his recognizable sonic signatures. This is not because he's some sort of percussion virtuoso or Liszt of the vibraphone. It's because all of Reich's music comes from pulse — the feeling of some sort of regular beat.

This means that his early music derives, in a basic sense, from percussion music, more aligned with certain non-Western musics, like the Balinese gamelan and the drumming traditions of Ghana, both of which Reich spent time studying. But unlike in earlier composers' exoticist glosses, these influences played a structural role in Reich's work, informing the compositional techniques themselves rather than merely the surface style.

The opposite of a pulse is a drone, or long tone. Most percussion instruments can't produce drones, of course, because their sounds inherently decay, and so the Ur-drone in Reich is the electric organ: powerful, reedy, uninflected. Since 1970's *Four Organs*, whenever strings, voices and other sustaining instruments play long tones in Reich's music, they are effectively descendants of that organ sound. Similarly, when he writes for singers, he's hearing the pure voices of Medieval or Renaissance sacred music — not the melodramatics of the opera stage. Together with the percussion, this forms a timbral world all his own and instantly identifiable. More importantly, its clarity is perfectly suited to the structural aspects of the music: short rhythmic patterns that become canons, then multilayered canons, building up monumental blocks of bold harmonic color.

The dramatic force of Reich's music comes not from any overt emotiveness but from a pared-down approach to its basic building blocks: the contour of line, the surface texture, the gradual and continuous accretion of form. This sets it apart from the Western Classical/Romantic canon — music from roughly 1750 to 1910. There's no space in Reich's language for the dialectic of sonata and symphony, reliant as they are on the rapid alternation of contrasting themes. Reich's world of timbres and rhythms is indicative of his major influences: the 12th-century organum of Pérotin, Bach's *Brandenburg* Concertos, Bartók's string quartets, Stravinsky, Coltrane, Balinese gamelan and Ewe drumming. The common thread here is

an objective, rather than subjective, point of view. This is not music that swoons over a beautiful moment or valorizes a hero's journey. It doesn't center on independent interpretive choices, a soloist's virtuosity or a conductor's histrionics.

But Reich's music doesn't ever really *sound* like any of its influences. It sounds like Reich, and has from the very beginning. His tape-loop pieces rely on the fascination and pleasure of hearing short, intense speech samples undergo a very slow process of change. It's a completely different mode of listening from that demanded by the established avant-garde of the time, which was music by and for specialists, scavenging and repurposing relics from the corpse of 19th-century music. Instead, Reich's music invites close listening while rejecting academic obfuscation. From overlapping, repeated samples or rhythmic cells, ghostly, fleeting "resultant patterns" appear, an aural illusion that is itself a new melodic shape. Each of these early works tested its material against itself, investigating it from all sides, so that every "resultant pattern" could be heard. This sense of thoroughness is a through line in Reich's catalog, plainly felt in recent works like *Pulse* and *Reich/Richter*.

Starting in 1967, Reich began to derive instrumental forms from those looped speech pieces. Could human beings learn to gradually shift patterns against each other, like the tape loops they had set in motion? Yes, it turned out, to thrilling effect. This was a new kind of virtuosity that didn't require fast fingers, but did demand new ways of listening and playing with each other. The player "phasing" ahead needs just a little impetuousness, while the other imperturbably drops anchor. To witness human performers execute this is a little like watching a pairs figure skater throw his partner in the air; one thinks, "I could never do that." But despite the difficulties, little by little performers started to flock to Reich's music, for the simple reason that it is extremely rewarding — not to mention fun — to play. For percussionists in particular, Reich's ensemble works have become foundational literature, as Beethoven's sonatas are for pianists.

For audiences, too, Reich has proven that contemporary music can thrive outside the insular world of its own practitioners. On initial approach, Reich's music appears both friendly and a little forbidding, its surfaces immaculate, polished, yet also playful and viscerally beautiful, like a wall drawing by Sol LeWitt. It exudes a specific kind of energy in live performance as well. Watching an ensemble play *Music for 18 Musicians*, for example, one has the sense of observing a utopian society in miniature, a mass of people working towards a common goal with no apparent leader.

But for all its plainspoken matter-of-factness and certainty, at the heart of Reich's music is an ambiguity: what is the emphasis of a rhythmic pattern? What are all the different ways it can be heard? It's only through methodical examination that the truth about anything can be known, the music seems to say. And perhaps there's no single truth, but many overlapping ones.

What follows is, by necessity, only a brief accounting of the important points of Steve Reich's career and body of work. I'm interested in connecting the dots, drawing out common threads and tracing parallel stylistic evolutions across pieces. These observations are made from my perspective as a long-time admirer, listener and performer of his music, and also as a fellow composer.

EARLY WORKS

Despite their surface differences from most of the music that follows them, Reich's early works are foundational and launched his career on a distinct trajectory that is easy to trace in retrospect. The four works collected here mark the beginning of a conceptual leap from electronic music to music written for human performers.

In the succinct 1968 essay "Music as a Gradual Process," Reich describes the kind of musical form he'd been exploring, in which the composer merely has to decide the mechanism by which the music will develop, load in some material and set the piece in motion. These processes can often be reduced to a few words (*Four Organs* might be "short chord gets long") and give the listener the uncanny sense that they would've happened anyway, without a composer's intervention.

Of course, any musical score is, at its core, just a set of instructions, a kind

Opposite page: New York, 1971. Photo by Richard Landry.

of conceptual tool waiting to be used. LeWitt's wall drawings function this way. Reich's process pieces make this dynamic explicit in a musical context. But he quickly diverged from this path; he was always too concerned with execution, practicality and, most radically of all, pleasure to be a true conceptualist. His music is the sonic equivalent of Renzo Piano's Centre Pompidou in Paris. It turns musical architecture inside out, exposes it for the listener to hear and admire.

It's Gonna Rain (1965) and *Come Out* (1966) came first. For all their apparent simplicity, the pieces point toward an astonishing number of directions Reich's music would go on to follow. Through processes of repetition and canon (perhaps the defining elements of Reich's music, alongside pulse), they examine the melodic and rhythmic cadences of speech and environmental sounds in documentary-style explorations of faith, politics, trauma and tragedy. Reich traces the importance of speech in certain of his works to the composer Leoš Janáček, who made a practice of musically transcribing bits of overheard conversations around his native Brno, considering them "windows into the soul."

Any composer who sets text successfully does so by probing for something unsaid, a sonic resonance in the words. Though their timbral and structural novelty is most striking at first listen, it is in their function as found texts set to music — humans made into songs — that the true meaning of the tape pieces lies. Hearing the words "it's gonna rain" and then hearing different words and their ghosts as the process unfolds — "it's gone," "rain is gone," "let go," "go away" — allows their meaning to dissolve and crystallize, again and again.

Piano Phase (1967) was the first composition to translate that phasing process for live musicians, and one hears the same kind of constant breakdown and reconfiguration applied to melody: a pattern consisting of five pitches and 12 notes, shifting by one note until it loops back around to unison.

After that, the pattern undergoes a process of subtraction, folding in on itself, and the second piano plays a counter-pattern with two new pitches. This subtle addition to the harmony creates an illusive sense of expansiveness in the work's second half, even as the pattern continues to contract.

Piano Phase is a kind of anti-piano music. The piece sticks stubbornly to those five-pitch groups throughout, shunning the resonance of the instrument as well as its possibilities of tone color, dynamics, density or register. Instead, it treats the piano as a mechanism, a piece of equipment, a means to an end, a stake in the ground: *you're just another percussion instrument, after all.*

And the earliest percussion instrument: ourselves, of course. *Clapping Music* (1972) came about as a way of succinctly demonstrating the phasing process, but Reich and fellow percussionist Russell Hartenberger found it awkward to perform. Instead, one clapper remains steady while the other simply jumps ahead in the pattern by one eighth note. The piece is the humblest, most portable formulation of Reich possible, blurring the line between procedural art work and musical game, an ambiguity befitting a composer whose music so often celebrates the joy of playing together.

Pendulum Music (1968) is Reich's most purely conceptual work, a physical demonstration of a musical form. The "ensemble" is almost sculptural in its setup: three or four microphones suspended on long cords, swinging over the same number of upward-facing speakers. When the microphones are swung, their arcs pass just over the speakers, causing short bursts of feedback. The performers' only task is to release their microphones in unison, but, of course, the microphones' movements are never precisely synchronized as they gradually come to rest. We can immediately foresee how the piece will end: as the arcs decrease, the feedback gets longer and louder, finally coming to rest on a steady drone. But the inevitability of *Pendulum Music* makes it no less compelling as a template for musical form; there's something satisfying about watching the train come into the station.

Four Organs (1970) is a perfect demonstration of a piece composed on exactly such a template. The process here is simple: take four Farfisa electric organs, have them play two fortissimo blasts of an E dominant eleventh chord, with maracas keeping time; now listen as those chords spread out and become drones over the course of 20 minutes. The piece is stark, confrontational, stubbornly single-minded, even grating. It's also a thrilling inquiry into form, harmony, counterpoint and the limits of chamber musicianship.

Despite its hyper-methodical structure, *Four Organs* serves as a firm corrective to the idea that process music and minimal music are mechanical, cold and scientistic. The piece reveals and celebrates the compositional, authorial hand guiding the process. A great concept is just a concept, it seems to say; you still need to use your ears.

In other words, *Four Organs* wouldn't work with just any chord. Reich finds, in the dominant eleventh, an entire structural drama folded into itself: theme, development, resolution. As the piece unfolds, we begin to hear the vertical become, little by little, horizontal. The organs separate from each other, one player anticipating the chord, another hanging on to one of its notes for a moment longer. At a certain point, the rests become filled with sound from these encroachments, and the music transforms into a continuous mass of sound. Then the bars themselves begin to expand, to accommodate the chord that they can no longer contain. Each long decay is carefully planned, however, and what we begin to hear is a long melody articulated by the emphatic *release* of pitches, a counterpoint of negative space. In the end, two notes are left hanging: E and A, the barest possible tonic harmony. The entire piece has been a huge, subversive V–I cadence, the most basic harmonic building block in all of Western music.

Phase Patterns (1970) is *Four Organs*' mellower sibling, using the same ensemble

Following spread: Richard Serra, James Tenney, Reich, Bruce Nauman, Michael Snow (L to R) performing *Pendulum Music*, New York, 1969. Photo by Richard Landry.

(minus maracas) to different ends. As its title suggests, the piece explores the same phasing process as *Piano Phase*, but applied to a paradiddle drumming pattern (the elemental left-right-left-left-right-left-right-right sequence present in so much Western percussion music). In *Phase Patterns*, the players essentially "drum" on the keyboard, but the resulting sound is hardly percussive; instead, different voicings of an E-minor ninth chord mesh together to create a continuously undulating pulsing texture.

It's difficult to imagine *Phase Patterns* or *Four Organs* without the powerfully reedy timbres of the Farfisa. The melodic simplicity of *Piano Phase* (1967), on the other hand, applies itself well to various arrangements. Here, a pair of harpsichords make it sound at once Baroque and electronic. Because of the harpsichord's very distinct plucked attack, the phasing counterpoint becomes even more piquant and audible as the layers of the piece shift.

DRUMMING

Drumming (1970–71) is one of the best and clearest examples of "music as a gradual process." The listener experiences the first 12 minutes of the piece, the first complete build-up and breakdown of the phase process, as one long phrase, one continuous line pointing forwards. Process has replaced the lingua franca of sonata form, and it makes us perceive time differently from any music before it.

Though *Drumming* is his last piece to incorporate phasing, other aspects of the piece anticipate Reich's future works to a remarkable degree. The rhythmic patterns, in canon with themselves, become an essential building block of all his subsequent work. The idea of imitation — tuned percussion picking up the melodic contours of unpitched percussion — foretells the speech-melody pieces beginning with *Different Trains* (and in doing so, proves there's really no such thing as "unpitched percussion"). But it's the individuated beauty of each pattern that makes them fun to listen to. Each is carefully

fashioned: an object that works equally well upside down, backwards, inside out.

In *Drumming*, processes operate constantly on micro and macro levels. Bar to bar or module to module, notes and rhythms are added or subtracted from the patterns sequentially. This is inescapable from the very opening: an unadorned bongo hit becomes a pair, then three, and four, and so on, until a complete eight-note pattern is heard. The progressive building up and breaking down of this pattern governs the structure of each of the piece's four parts.

On a macro scale, *Drumming*'s process has to do with timbre and register. Tuned bongos imply a melody in Part I, which is then confirmed by marimbas, their "pitched" counterpart. As multiple marimbas start to build up that same bongo pattern, their rich, sympathetic resonances create illusory melodies above, which are then doubled by women's voices. A harmonic stack builds from the ground up, and the music rises in pitch with each new inversion of the harmony. Eventually, the music needs to go higher than marimbas and singers, so glockenspiels take over, their resultant harmonics doubled by whistling. Once these instruments have ascended into the stratosphere, the original bongo pattern is rebuilt on the full range of instruments, leading to an ecstatic conclusion. Paradoxically, the fact that each section of *Drumming* follows basically the same formal contour, using the same eighth-note pattern, doesn't make the piece rote or predictable. Rather, it sets in motion a grand demonstration of economy of means, careful planning and delayed gratification.

Music for Mallet Instruments, Voices and Organ (1973) is a quietly pivotal work in Reich's compositional development. In it, he combines musical techniques he had been using over the past three years: rhythmic prolongation à la Pérotin, self-assembling canonic patterns and imitation of the aural "results" of those canons. To all this, Reich adds one new element to his language: harmonic change ("...for the first time since 1965," he claims). Alongside the existing support systems of process and pulse, these harmonic shifts would quickly become an essential structural component of Reich's compositional thinking.

It's clear listening to *Music for Mallet Instruments* that it's an intermediate step, a figure study for the grand canvas of *Music for 18 Musicians*. But it's no less compelling for its modesty. It retains the rigorous architectural purity of *Drumming* but wears it more easily, like a broken-in pair of shoes. Topographically, it's a series of rolling hills, each module building up, then gently flattening out, before moving on to

the next harmony, the next gradual build.

Six Pianos (1973) is a tonal study: overlapping planes of the same color, shifting gradually over 20 minutes. Eight-beat melodic patterns are built up note by note, filling in the empty spaces, in the manner of *Drumming*. Unlike the earlier piece, however, *Six Pianos* opens with an already-constructed homogenous texture; individual lines then jump out in relief, spurring further development. The effect is a bit like a hyper-stylized jazz band, as attention is drawn from one "soloist" to another and the accompaniment recedes into the background, only to return reinvigorated by the solo turns.

Variations for Winds, Strings and Keyboards (1979) marks Reich's first step into writing for larger ensembles, though it's not quite scored for a traditional orchestra. He is selective about which instruments he includes, deciding on an ensemble of flutes, oboes, trumpets, trombones, a tuba, electric organs, two pianos (notably, the only percussion in the piece) and strings. These are strictly divided throughout by the material they play: strings and brass play long drones and swells, while the others play the melodic and rhythmic material in nimble canons. What's unique about the piece in Reich's catalog is the quality of its harmony, altering its gentle cycles of minor seventh chords with little wedges — suspensions and pivot tones — to color the music and nudge its course in surprising directions. Combined with the soft edges of its timbres, these harmonies give the *Variations* an almost impressionistic shading, a mood that reappears later on in works such as *Double Sextet* and *Quartet*.

Vermont Counterpoint (1982) is one of Reich's lightest, most pastoral works, its 11 flutes swirling upwards like a sudden gust of wind on a fall day. But the piece can also be understood as a solution to a compositional problem: a commission for a piece for solo flute. Though works such as Debussy's *Syrinx* and Varèse's *Density 21.5* made the unaccompanied flute piece a standard of the 20th-century avant-garde, Reich's existing compositional devices didn't apply well to writing one, not least because a single flute can't very well play in canon with itself. So, he invented a whole subcategory of works: music written for a solo performer accompanied by many layers of the same instrument, pre-recorded. These pieces are characterized by athletic counterpoint, a relatively fast rate of change and intricate interwoven canons. Insistent pulse keeps everything in sync, obviating the need for a click track; new material is always introduced first in the recorded parts, then joined by the live performer. These same characteristics would yield three more pieces in the Counterpoint series: *New York*, *Electric* and *Cello Counterpoint*.

Duet (1993) is a rarity among Reich's works: a miniature, occasional piece. Written in honor of the violinist Yehudi Menuhin, *Duet* finds Reich in his most lyrical mode here, unspooling close melodic canons in two solo violins, underneath which a small string ensemble oscillates between F major, D minor and B-flat major harmonies. The only note which occurs outside the F major scale is a recurring A-flat, giving this sweet, cloudless music a subtle blues shading.

MUSIC FOR 18 MUSICIANS

DISC 5

The spiritual successor to *Drumming* was *Music for 18 Musicians* (1974–76), a second grand statement for Reich's own ensemble. The piece has become many people's introduction to his music (myself among them) and commands something of a cult following. It's immediately ingratiating, based on a lush sequence of harmonies that slowly pivot between sun and shade, like a landscape changing with the time of day. The characteristic melodic patterns are present in wonderfully catchy form, built up in an easygoing, almost improvisatory-feeling way, in place of the focused, didactic rigor of *Drumming*. Here, musical process becomes a means to an end, not the main event.

But because of its popularity, it's easy to forget the qualities that set *Music for 18 Musicians* apart from the rest of his works. For the most part, these elements aren't technical, but rather qualities of tone, mood and emotional expression. Primary among these is the character of its pulse. Though it continues uninterrupted through the whole hour of the piece, giving cohesion to the various sections, the pulse advances and recedes in prominence depending on what else is happening. It has a fractal quality of feeling slow and fast simultaneously. Listen closely and you hear each individual eighth note rushing by at the rate of 420 per minute; sit back and hear the details resolve into long phrases, the phrases into a superstructure. Musically, the pulse consists of two elements: a fast (and very difficult) "hocket" split between multiple pianos and mallet percussion, and crescendo-decrescendo "swells" in the strings, voices and clarinets. The length of the swell is determined by the breath capacity of each musician: one breath per swell, so each will be a slightly different length and shape. Heard in combination with the hocket, it's a weird hybrid of human and machine, an energy source powered by lungs.

It's worth pointing out that 18 is the *minimum* number of musicians required to play the piece, and necessitates pianists pinch-hitting on marimba, vibraphone, maracas and other unconventional multitasking. For this reason, it's common to see the piece performed with as many as 22 players. Though it requires a certain logistical effort to perform because of the large number of instruments required, there's a wonderfully non-hierarchical aspect to its performance: it's one of the larger ensembles you're likely to see play conductor-less. What you may notice, though, is players glancing over at each other over the course of the piece, waiting for audible and visible signals. The first clarinetist rises slightly from their chair and gives an emphatic nod; a series of chimes from the vibraphone triggers a chord change *en masse*. This dynamic is inseparable from the emotional impact of the piece. There's a sense of camaraderie, of a group of musicians coming together for an hour to form a kind of collective consciousness, not following a single leader, but listening very carefully to one another and acting accordingly.

Opposite page: Steve Reich and Musicians performing *Music for 18 Musicians*, Saitama, Japan, 1996. Photo by Keizo Maeda.

NEW YORK COUNTERPOINT, EIGHT LINES, FOUR ORGANS

DISC 6

The second of the "counterpoint" pieces, *New York Counterpoint* (1985) is a case study in the tension between rhythm and rhythmic feel. The piece is characterized by the opposition of implacable pulses and loose, jangling eighth-note patterns, played with a slight swing. This rhythmic quality had been present in the performances of Steve Reich & Musicians at least since *Drumming*. Reich's sense of "feel" comes not from the exacting scores of his fellow contemporary composers, in which an eighth note is always just an eighth note, but from rock 'n' roll and jazz — particularly John Coltrane, Junior Walker and the pioneering jazz drummer Kenny Clarke. These musicians had a sense of what Reich calls "magic time": depending on the circumstance, holding back or leaning forward just enough to keep the music either in a sense of heightened anticipation or cool repose. Alongside the massed timbre of ten clarinets, the most garrulous and

extroverted of the woodwind instruments, the music does seem to suggest a certain New York-ness, a fast-talking friendliness that's simultaneously warm and in-your-face.

Reich changed the title of his *Octet* to *Eight Lines* (1979, rev. 1983) to be less doctrinaire about the personnel required to perform it. The original version economized by having wind players double on clarinet, bass clarinet, flute and piccolo. The string parts were also very difficult, alternating either long passages of double-stops or running eighths. With the option to perform the piece with an additional string quartet and wind players, it is no longer an octet, but remains eight musical voices.

The concession to playability doesn't diminish *Eight Lines*' crackling virtuosity. Two pianos play wide-ranging melodic patterns in canon throughout, spanning wide, perilous jumps over the keyboard. This texture gives the music a gymnastic quality, and anticipates the long, elastic vocal lines of *Tehillim*. Meanwhile, successive augmentation processes in the strings make the music sound a bit as if it's being pulled apart, flattening out and weighed down, even as the rhythmic fireworks continue unabated. That process of rhythmic augmentation (elongation) originates in *Four Organs* (1970), heard here in a performance by the Bang on a Can All-Stars.

TEHILLIM

Tehillim (1981), meaning "psalms," is Reich's first work explicitly on Jewish themes. He is careful to note, however, that it is not a piece of *functional* sacred music and adheres to no particular sacred music tradition. Rather, it is a concert work about religion that simultaneously explores and extends many threads of musical inquiry that were already present in Reich's earlier works.

Nevertheless, one has the sense, listening to *Tehillim*, of having been dropped into the long lineage of sacred music. The piece is all-encompassing, ancient and contemporary at the same time. Throughout, one perceives references to the shifting, hypnotic rhythms of the Balinese gamelan, the scholarly decadence of medieval polyphony, the declamatory expressivity of a Jewish cantor, the infectious joy of a gospel hymn, the grandeur of Bach's cantatas and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. It's a piece that makes you not merely understand, but feel, why music and religion have been inseparable for most of human history.

Though scored for a chamber orchestra of winds, percussion, electric organs and strings, it is the voices that are the main focus of *Tehillim* and deliver the piece's most complex and characteristic material. Reich is hugely demanding of the four singers, who must perform feats of vocal athleticism, rhythmic accuracy, diction and harmonization beyond almost anything else in Western music. The shifting meters and emphases of the melodies are derived from the stresses and syllables of the Hebrew psalms he sets; through repetition, continuous variation and canonic layering, these take on a mantra-like quality. But unlike the rhetorical, thoughtful koans repeated in *The Desert Music*, the overall affect of *Tehillim* is excited, celebratory and, in its last movement, ecstatic. The vocal virtuosity is not in service of itself or the individual, but instead elevates the group, the congregation — in a great performance, it quite literally inspires awe.

Three Movements (1986) is Reich's first straight-ahead "orchestral work," followed a year later by *The Four Sections*, marking a period in his career when the success of his earlier works began to attract notice from the Classical Music establishment. Though the situation has improved over the intervening decades as Reich's language has become widely known and studied, orchestral musicians of the 1980s were completely unequipped to handle the music's complex syncopations, close canons and insistent repetitions. What's more, Reich had the temerity to upend the usual hierarchy of importance: in *Three Movements*, percussion and piano come to the fore, in the manner of a *concerto grosso*; the winds take on most of the melodic duties; while the strings mainly provide volume and body, filling out the overall texture.

In this context, it's all the more remarkable how well *Three Movements* works. The material and form will be familiar to anybody who has heard the earlier *Sextet*; the piece is essentially an abbreviated, orchestrated version. The first movement opens with a series of swelling pulses on angular octatonic harmonies. The swells give way to hocketing bell patterns in the percussion and strings. There's a sense of tallness to this music, in the way it occupies the different registers of the orchestra; it expands outwards from the middle, the instrumental families mirroring and supporting each other.

The second movement works similarly, but here, the material unfurls in sinuous melodic lines, winding around each other in canon. Low strings and muted bass drum provide a throbbing, gently syncopated pulse. The finale is a bright, energetic fanfare, the high winds and brass joining with the percussion's bell patterns in sparkling counterpoint.

THE DESERT MUSIC

DISC 8

The Desert Music (1983) is, in certain ways, a bit of an outlier among Reich's works. It's the largest of his pieces by number of performers required: a full orchestra and large chorus. It also represents an important point of articulation in his harmonic language.

Reich's harmony has always found stability in instability. If this sounds paradoxical, that's the point. Early works such as *Drumming* and *Four Organs* spent long periods of time on single chords or harmonies. But the precise quality of these harmonies has perhaps eluded sufficient scrutiny. These chords sit halfway between resolution and dissonance, creating an almost gravitational energy that pushes each repeating cycle forward. Try replacing the dominant eleventh chord in *Four Organs* with a simple A major chord — the piece slackens, loses its barreling inevitable momentum.

In *The Desert Music*, these unstable pedals become even more unstable, forcing more frequent change. Reich describes these new harmonies in modal terms, but many of them also fit into octatonic scales (a series of alternating whole and half steps, first used to describe Stravinsky's harmonic language). In Reich's hands they sound nothing like *The Rite of Spring*, but *The Desert Music* derives a similarly dark, coiled energy from that characteristic scale. It's a world away from the blissed-out seventh chords and suspensions of *Music for 18 Musicians*.

Over these harmonies, Reich sets an alternately self-referential and cryptic text adapted from the 20th-century poet William Carlos Williams. The piece is structured as a palindromic arch, at the center of which sits this bit of text which reads almost like a mission statement:

> it is a principle of music
> to repeat the theme. Repeat
> and repeat again,
> as the pace mounts. The
> theme is difficult
> but no more difficult
> than the facts to be
> resolved.

As the chorus divides into subsections, their melodies shift against each other, creating canon upon canon. The theme repeats, the pace mounts, text and process becoming an endless series of self-reflecting mirrors. Williams's rhetorical question, "Well, shall we think or listen?" has found its musical answer: thinking *is* listening, and vice versa.

SEXTET, SIX MARIMBAS

DISC 9

Sextet (1985) is, in certain key ways, *The Desert Music* writ small. This was intentional; Reich wanted to write a piece for his own ensemble using the expanded harmonic palette he'd developed. What resulted was, in its formal concision, a more conventional piece of chamber music than any of his works thus far. But it is still very much on Reich's own terms. Like its immediate predecessor, *Sextet* is structured in a five-movement arch (influenced by the forms of Bartók's fourth and fifth string quartets). Its timbral world, however, is classic Reich-ian clarity: pianos, marimbas, synthesizers and vibraphones played with bows as well as mallets, with colorful interjections from crotales and a pair of antiphonal bass drums. Each movement introduces its harmonic topic with a prefatory series of chords: swelling pulses in the first movement, and, subsequently, aggressive exchanges accompanied by clicking mallet sticks, the drummers counting off the band. The second and fourth movements are dark

Opposite page: New York, 1985. Photo by Clive Barda/ArenaPAL.

and slinky, their melodic patterns played *legato* by the pianos and synths. The third is an intensely satisfying combination of high energy and slow tempo, the pianos exchanging thick *fortissimo* accents as the vibes ring out high above them. The final movement is a swinging rush to the finish, based on a jangly four-against-three polyrhythm which constantly turns itself inside out, the four on the bottom, then on the top, then back again.

Six Marimbas (a 1986 arrangement of 1973's *Six Pianos*) makes a stark contrast to *Sextet*, and is a striking study in how deeply Reich's style had changed in the intervening years. For all of *Sextet*'s colorful orchestration and sharply articulated changes of mood, the earlier piece's homogeneity is even more striking. These differences are representative of a deep shift in the construction and conception of Reich's music over the intervening decade, away from a Modernist conception of form as content, to a much more visceral, emotional and instinctual way of composing music.

DIFFERENT TRAINS, ELECTRIC COUNTERPOINT

Musically and programmatically, *Different Trains* (1988) marks a wholly new stage of Reich's music, even as it represents the joining together of many long-standing interests. Equal parts string quartet, autobiography and audio documentary, it fuses these elements into an entirely new form, extrapolating the personal into the historical, and vice versa. Its narrative draws a parallel between Reich's childhood, during which he traveled between New York and Los Angeles by train, dividing time between his divorced parents, and the experiences of European Jews, who, during those same years, were forced onto trains and deported to concentration camps.

Reich began the writing process by conducting extensive interviews with his childhood nanny, by then in her seventies, and a train porter who'd worked on those transcontinental lines. He also sifted through archives of recorded testimonies of Holocaust survivors in the Yale Library. Through months of painstaking editing, Reich boiled these interviews down to a

terse, potent libretto, epigrammatic bits of speech divided into three movements. But Reich does more than simply set interviews to music. He transforms the speech itself *into* music, transcribing the subtle intonations and inflections of his subjects into notated pitches and rhythms, then embedding these melodies alongside chuffing train engines, clanging bells and screaming sirens. Just as in *Come Out* and *It's Gonna Rain*, each bit of tape was chosen specifically both for its meaning and its melodic shape.

Instead of tape loops, the string quartet is the engine of *Different Trains*, running along in paradiddle-style drumming patterns (though it's actually four quartets: one live, three pre-recorded, for a total of 16 string parts). The transformation from speech to melody is underscored by the strings' searching chromatic inner voices, but their motion is mercurial; the pace of the engine is determined by the pace of speech, and therefore given to unpredictable shifts in tempo. The effect is a music of multiple perspectives, vignettes shifting from one person's recollections to another's, the changing view from a train's window. No one perspective dominates for long. It's different from the structural thinking that characterizes Reich's earlier works, governed less by predetermined processes than by careful juxtaposition of materials serving an extra-musical narrative.

After building to a wailing fury in its middle movement, which depicts Europe during the War, a post-war third movement sounds relieved but stunned, hardly joyful. The Holocaust survivors still speak in terms of travel: to New York, to Los Angeles, those same cities that defined Reich's childhood. The piece ends with its most intricate, lyrical writing, the quartet playing delicately interlocking canons, mirroring a final recollection: "There was one girl who had a beautiful voice / and they loved to listen to the singing, the Germans." It's a chilling confluence of text and music, equal parts beauty and terror, coexisting, for a moment, in equilibrium, warning us never to conflate art with morality.

Written just a year earlier for a stack of electric guitars and two bass guitars, *Electric Counterpoint* (1987) makes a sunny companion. It's full of dancing syncopations and bouncy, intertwining melodies, oscillating between a handful of simple harmonies introduced in the first movement with *Music for 18*-like pulse-swells. With its pastoral middle movement and rollicking, swinging finale, the piece reads almost as a Classical sonata, but filtered through the bright, geometric modernism of Ellsworth Kelly, and imbued with the sound of rock 'n' roll.

THE FOUR SECTIONS

DISC 11

The orchestra is, by his own admission, not Reich's favorite medium. In his small catalog of works for standard orchestra, one has the sense that he's challenging it to do things which are outside its typical purview, even antithetical to it. It is therefore unsurprising to find it less central to his œuvre than almost any other composer of the Western canon since Chopin. Reich orchestrates with a broad brush, juxtaposing sections rather than instruments; you'll never find a poignant English horn solo or a dramatic timpani roll. Meanwhile, his rhythmic writing is extremely detailed, just as much as in the music written for his own ensemble.

The Four Sections (1987) is his second purely orchestral piece, composed after *Three Movements*. In it, he takes a different approach, organizing his forces more hierarchically, turning his attention to each of the four instrumental families in turn, then subdividing each movement into four contrasting harmonic areas. As a result, the four movements, taken individually, almost sound as if they could be from different pieces. It's only in the full sweep of the piece that *The Four Sections* reveals its formal journey.

The first section opens in a lyrical mode, the strings playing canons on winding melodic patterns as in the slow movements of *Sextet*. Reich divides the strings into 15 sections instead of the usual five, saturating registral and harmonic space with rich layered textures. Especially once the brass comes in underneath, sustaining long, organ-like chords, the effect is almost Romantic. But the brief second section is a dash of Reich-ian cold water, the percussion section taking over the texture with emphatic accents. The third section modulates to a faster tempo, and focuses on the oboes, flutes, then clarinets and trumpets in staccato canons, like a cubist rendition of a Bach *Brandenburg* Concerto. The concluding passage of the movement snaps into compound meter, giving it a playful bouncing quality, like a *gigue*.

In the fourth section, all the instrumental families join in the mêlée, and before long, the music has become a juggernaut. Reich lingers on the final harmony for a glorious two-and-a-half minutes, everyone playing at full volume, horn blasts and pounding drums trading wallops. It's about as bacchanalian a passage as exists in Reich, and you can sense him reveling in it.

THE CAVE

DISCS 12-13

The last sentence of Reich's own program note for *Different Trains* envisions "a new kind of documentary music video theater in the not-too-distant future." Reich would set to work on just that in the years to follow, collaborating with video artist Beryl Korot. The resulting work, *The Cave* (1990–93), is both a natural extension of *Different Trains*' musical and dramaturgical innovations and something yet again entirely new.

Korot and Reich decided to focus on Abraham, the Old Testament "common ancestor" of Jewish, Christian and Muslim doctrine, and as such, the forefather of much of modern belief and practice. As in *Different Trains*, *The Cave*'s lines of inquiry run in parallel, assembled using bits of speech from recorded interviews with Israelis, Palestinians and Americans. Its three acts shift perspective, *Rashomon*-like, each structured around different groups' responses to the same questions: Who, for you, is Abraham? Who is Sarah? Hagar? and so on. The responses act as a framing device to narrate and provide commentary on three stories from the life of Abraham. Meanwhile, Korot's visuals weave these stories, subjects and settings together into a video tapestry that unfolds on five separate screens. In doing so, they become a kind of multimedia *Midrash*, an inquiry into, and exegesis on, ancient texts.

Over its three acts, adding musical ingredients one by one, *The Cave* traces a distinct formal arc. Act 1 opens with the sound of rhythmic typing. As music, it's about as unadorned as it gets. Each keystroke triggers the appearance of an additional syllable of text on the video screens — history being recorded, stories recounted. The interview sections of *The Cave* have a fragmentary and conversational quality, because of the way text and music interact, their pacing constantly pushing and pulling the tempo. Fast, vigorous settings of the Book of Genesis, in the manner of *Tehillim*, bring these fragments together and push the story forward. Because so much of the music in *The Cave* grows out of everyday sounds — typing, clapping, conversing, chanting — it's as if the act of transcribing and inscribing these sounds in music places them in the long lineage of oral tradition, the melody acting as mnemonic for the text, almost like learning the alphabet. The message sticks in your head, thanks to the medium.

The titular Cave of Machpelah is the burial site of Abraham and Sarah and their offspring, as well as, according to some traditions, Adam and Eve. Though it is obscured today under centuries of building, it remains one of the only places in the world where Jews and Muslims both worship. It is to this site that the first two acts inexorably lead, musically represented by a few minutes of *musique concrète* over a gentle A-minor drone, situating the listener inside a temple built on top of the site. It's a somber acoustic space, but alive; we hear murmuring voices, distant footsteps, a general hum of activity. Because the first two acts end with the same sounds, we experience them as the meeting point of traditions, a common musical ground on which different stories and systems of belief can coexist.

The third act ends differently. Most of the Americans confess, in their interviews, to never having heard of the Cave, having no idea how it relates to their religious lineage, much less to Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar or Ishmael. For Israelis and Palestinians, these are vital texts full of distinctive characters with personalities, foibles and identities; for many of the Americans, they are simply old stories: "Irrelevant. In the drawer in the hotel." As if responding to the vertiginous gulf between the Americans and the Cave, choral music begins to interject frequently, echoing, responding to and even at times underlining the humor in the responses of those interviewed, leading to a lively call-and-response debate. As the music escalates, the chorus's interruptions build in length and intensity, hastening towards the piece's dramatic crux, a retelling of the story of Abraham and the near sacrifice of his son Isaac (with commentary: "There were people around that did that... very difficult for modern people to conceive of").

Previous spread: Reich and Beryl Korot, Hebron, c. 1990. Photo by Maryse Alberti.

With Abraham's faith in God confirmed, and in turn, God's faith in him, *The Cave* concludes with the story of three travelers who, unbeknownst to Abraham, are actually angels. He hastens to prepare a feast for them while they relax in the shade, and the pulse of the music finally regulates. Commentary tapers off, replaced by a simple choral melody. It's one of the most disarmingly beautiful moments in Reich's music, both for what it is and what it represents. It is for his unquestioning hospitality that Abraham seems most pointedly relevant to modern ideas of religion and morality. These old stories and systems of belief are not just useful for the sake of their cultural meaning, the piece seems to say, but as ways of understanding the world and each other. *The Cave* posits that religious inquiry can be a form of belief in and of itself, not despite, but because, its stories mean such different things to different people.

PROVERB, NAGOYA MARIMBAS, CITY LIFE

DISC 14

The three works collected on this volume are homages, providing as clear a line as anything he's ever written to three of Reich's major influences: the 12th-century composer Pérotin (*Proverb*), Igor Stravinsky (*City Life*), and the percussion music of West Africa (in the brief, virtuosic marimba duo *Nagoya Marimbas*, from 1994).

Proverb (1995), written for five voices, two organ samplers and two vibraphones, sets a single line of text by Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose writing had inspired Reich since his school days: "How small a thought it takes to fill a whole life!" This could almost be the piece's program note — what more is there to say? *Proverb* is an oasis of calm, bearing a distinctly autumnal cast that resurfaces in much later works like *Pulse* and *Reich/Richter*.

The music unfolds like an unhurried train of thought. Solo singer and organ intone the text in unadorned unison, touching every note of the harmonic minor scale, which hints at the gravitational pull of harmonic

functionality with its raised leading tone. Simultaneous canonic and augmentation (lengthening) processes then draw out this melody, distort it, mull it over. A few pages in, each word lasts for many bars, and the text becomes unintelligible. This process recalls the extremely drawn-out dominant chords of *Four Organs*, but it's a reflective, philosophical response to the earlier work's youthful brashness. The tenors join in, stretching out individual syllables even further over a lilting, *long, short-long, short-long* rhythm — an affectionate reference to Pérotin's *Viderunt Omnes*, an organum setting in which just the first syllable "Vi-" lasts for nearly a minute. Reich alters Pérotin's rhythm slightly to make it conform to the same groupings of twos and threes later introduced by the vibraphones, fusing the melodic material of the piece to his characteristic pulse. *Proverb* concludes as it began, the small thought clear and audible once more, a worthy end in itself.

After an austere introductory chorale of minor seventh chords — what Reich calls his "poor man's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*" (in reference to Stravinsky) — *City Life* (1995) begins with a literal *bang* of slamming car doors, honking trucks and a street peddler yelling "Check it out!" These recorded samples are integrated into the musical texture like instruments, meshing with the ensemble on rhythmic, harmonic and timbral levels. Reich mines them not just for speech melodies (in the manner of *Different Trains*) but also jackhammer rhythms, boat horn antiphony, car-alarm descants. *City Life* is, like New York itself, a patchwork gestalt, encompassing its liveliness, loneliness, ugliness and vital beauty.

TRIPLE QUARTET

Looking at the score of *Triple Quartet* (1998), one is struck by the specificity of its notation, particularly pertaining to note lengths and articulations. The indication *tenuto sempre* ("always held") is reiterated in all twelve string parts. Early in his career, Reich fought a misconception among musicians that minimal music was meant to be played short, sharp and brittle. When articulated this way, harmonies are drained of their pungency, rhythms of their characteristic syncopation. When it's three string quartets, precision about such notations becomes triply important: because of its timbral density, there's the risk of the music's becoming a chaotic jumble, each voice competing for space.

Triple Quartet is at times quite crunchy, but joyously so. The outer movements' dense counterpoint, close harmony, stabbing offbeat accents and galloping rhythms bring Bartók's string quartets to mind, particularly the fourth, a favorite of Reich's since his studies at Juilliard. Like Bartók, Reich has absorbed his source materials

so completely that they coalesce into a totally integrated new style. In listening to either composer, one can choose to hear the references to "traditional" sources, or, more easily, to absorb it all as a whole.

The middle movement's keening canonic violin melody recalls Bartók's "Dance from Bucsum" from the *Romanian Folk Dances*; its lowered second and sixth scale degrees are also reminiscent of Klezmer music. These are some of Reich's most song-like instrumental melodies yet, stretching phrase lengths and blurring the boundaries between bars. Ever-longer and more discursive melodic writing would come to characterize Reich's music over the next two decades, particularly in his slow movements; one hears echoes and further developments of *Triple Quartet*-style materials in *Double Sextet*, *Pulse* and *Music for Ensemble and Orchestra*.

Music for a Large Ensemble (1978), a much earlier piece of Reich's, represents an intriguing in-between stage in his writing, as well as a link to the present. The piece takes up where *Music for 18 Musicians* left off, using similar slowly shifting blocks of harmony, self-assembling rhythmic patterns and indeterminate repeats. Its melodies, especially in the high pianos, xylophones, violin and flutes, are dancing and agile, with a rhythmic snap anticipating the *Counterpoint* pieces. Along with *Variations for Winds, Strings and Keyboards* and *Eight Lines*, the piece represents the end of the *Music for 18* trajectory, perhaps surprisingly, given that piece's success; Reich would reinvent his harmonic and structural language soon after in *Tehillim* and *The Desert Music*. Taking an even longer view, the piece represents the seeds of the *concerto grosso* format of recent works like *Runner* and *Music for Ensemble and Orchestra*; it's an orchestra of soloists, a way of fooling an orchestra into thinking it's a chamber group, and vice versa.

Two other early works included here are alternative treatments of previous works: *Electric Guitar Phase* (2000) was originally

Violin Phase (1967), and *Tokyo/Vermont Counterpoint* (2000) is an electronic marimba treatment of *Vermont Counterpoint* (1982). Pieces like *Violin Phase* are easy to transport to other instruments: the point of the music is the form, process and counterpoint, and a different timbre is an added bonus. Here, a layer of distortion gives the piece the grit of the violinist's bouncing bow, and adds new harmonic overtones, giving it a Hendrix-like rawness. Conversely, the pristine MIDI version of *Vermont Counterpoint* makes its parallels to the intricate layering and sequencing of electronic music plain, while allowing its crystalline form to shine through.

THREE TALES

DISCS 16-17

"We've always thought of our brains in terms of our latest technology," says computer scientist Rodney Brooks in the final act of *Three Tales* (2002). During the 19th century, he continues, our brains were steam engines, then later, telephone switchboards, computers and, at the turn of the 21st century, the Internet. In other words, humans are so complex that we're incapable of understanding ourselves except in relation to our most complex creations — all of which are, inevitably, crude by comparison. At the beginning of the 21st century, as Reich and Korot planned a new "video opera" looking back on the 20th, they settled on three technological signposts and apt metaphors: the explosion of the Hindenburg Zeppelin, the first U.S. tests of the atomic bomb on the Bikini Atoll, and the advances in DNA science leading to the cloning of Dolly, the sheep. The resulting work is equal parts critique, elegy, prophecy.

In "Hindenburg," a chorus of anvils hammers out Wagnerian motifs, caricaturing a technological hubris simultaneously risible and deadly. After all, the infamous Zeppelin was designed to be filled with helium, and it was only when the U.S. banned its export that the Germans decided to use flammable hydrogen instead. The disaster that resulted decisively ended the airship experiment.

Because it was the subject of the first eyewitness radio and film accounts, endlessly rebroadcast, the spectacular failure of one industry helped give rise to another. The modern news media looms over *Three Tales*, foretelling the technologies of television and social media, which have added layers of reflection and distortion to humanity's perception of itself. Media magnifies speech as it is repeated and consumed, mass processes of canon and augmentation. In the final scene of "Hindenburg," the newspaper line "Captain Ernst Lehmann gasped, 'I couldn't understand it' as he staggered out" is musically "staggered out" in a series of ever-lengthening vocal canons, one man's confusion and disorientation inscribed in history.

In the second act, "Bikini," Reich and Korot tackle the apocalypse. The end of the world was one of Reich's first subjects, in *It's Gonna Rain*. Though the human preoccupation with our own destruction has likely existed as long as humanity, it was only in the 20th century that humans developed the capability to end the world as we know it. Reich and Korot set a stretched-time countdown to the first test of the atomic bomb on Bikini Atoll, interpolated with newspaper headlines, clips of speech from navy officers, radio announcers, nuclear scientists and, in emphatic percussion rhythms, lines from the Book of Genesis. The relationships among these bits of text change gradually, from diffuse to pointed, over 20 continuous minutes of music — dramatic and musical processes playing out in tandem. As the countdown reaches zero, we see the words "and the Eternal formed the man, of dust of the ground / and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to serve it and to keep it" flash on the screen. Palm trees bend and catch fire, and King Judah of Bikini walks along the beach

of his peoples' still-uninhabitable home. That act of destruction, labeled by history as a mere "test," was the original sin of the 20th century, from which so many others derive. Listening to "Bikini" two decades later, it reads as a frightening premonition: the explosion itself doesn't need to kill anyone, or even to happen, for the mere evocation of the bomb to rationalize the destruction of human life.

In Act III, "Dolly," the titular sheep's cloning is treated not as another historical inflection but as a point of departure for a ruminative discourse. Scientists and philosophers, seen and heard in talking head-style interviews, discuss robotics, androids, consciousness, artificial intelligence, religion and humanity's future in cautious tones, as though they're a bit spooked by the unquestioned "march of progress" that has characterized the past century. "Dolly" is structured as a continuous stretch of music, lacking demarcated scenes; the experience of it is less like traditional opera or theater and closer to being a fly on the wall at a rarified dinner party, overhearing people expound on their life's work and private enthusiasms. The act is punctuated by video appearances of the humanoid robot Kismet, who "sings" synthesized bits of text in the manner of *2001*'s HAL. This sense of uncanniness pervades "Dolly," fitting the unsettling ethical implications of its subject matter.

In contrast to his earlier pieces using speech-melodies (*Different Trains*, *The Cave*) Reich plays fast and loose with the source material in *Three Tales*. Quotations are slowed down, stretched out, chopped up and looped *ad infinitum* in order either to give the words different meaning or suit musical purposes. The words "Intelligent machines," "copies of copies" and "gives me pause" loop and spiral out of control, transformed from soundbites into aural memes that take over the music's texture for minutes at a time.

Opposite page:
Beryl Korot and Reich, Vienna, 1993. Photo by Didi Sattmann.

The questions raised by "Dolly" reverberate as a warning: we should endeavor to understand history as deeply as possible to equip ourselves to face the present. In "Hindenburg" and "Bikini," we witness two avoidable catastrophes of the 20th century; let's not make the same mistakes a third time. *Three Tales* may be best summed up by a line from William Carlos Williams, set in Reich's *The Desert Music*: "Man has survived hitherto because he was too ignorant to know how to realize his wishes. Now that he can realize them, he must either change them or perish."

YOU ARE (VARIATIONS)

DISC 18

Whenever he uses the term "Variations," Reich means the continuous kind: sharply delineated blocks of harmony and texture snapped together to form grand arcs. The four movements of *You Are (Variations)* (2004) gather many of his career-long preoccupations: philosophy and religious study, form and harmony, motion and stasis. The piece, to me, heralds an era in which Reich's music takes on the visceral intuitive confidence of an artist who has worked within rigid, self-imposed systems, and has earned the ability to abandon them when inspiration strikes.

Reich has said that he spent the first six months of composition selecting the epigrammatic lines of text for the piece. As in *Proverb*, they aptly describe the compositional process and musical form: *You are wherever your thoughts are. Say little and do much.* The first and third movements are sung in English, the second and fourth in Hebrew; this has less to do with compositional structure than it does with vocal prosody, using the language with the most natural-sounding vowels for the benefit of the singers. As in all his vocal music, Reich calls for "straight tone" rather than operatic vibrato, striving for clarity of pitch and diction. The four voices are always shadowed by woodwinds, giving the singers support and heft — a trick Reich picked up from Bach's cantatas and passions.

A heavy implacable rhythm section of four pianos and four mallet percussionists anchors an amplified chamber orchestra of winds and strings. Like a curious mind content to wander, the first movement follows its train of thought to new and unexpected places. The text is initially sung in short, powerful bursts; over the ensuing variations, it is drawn out, simultaneously obscuring its message and concentrating its emotional flavor, becoming a series of long drones that provides a framework for the unfolding instrumental drama. The percussion octet constructs, from what appear at first to be classic Reich drumming patterns, a pounding stack of James Brown riffs, volleying infectiously funky syncopations back and forth in ever-increasing volume and scale.

The second and fourth movements mirror each other in form and content. Those same augmentation processes are sung over rowdy ostinati of dominant-eleventh chords — the old familiar harmony from *Four Organs*, tense and expectant, optimistic but never resolved. The third movement is cool and contemplative, the pulse slowing and the harmony clouding. *Explanations come to an end somewhere.* Sometimes you simply have to let the music show you where it wants to go.

The emotional and timbral intensity of *Cello Counterpoint* (2003) sets it apart from the earlier "counterpoint" pieces, which are some of Reich's lightest and most *scherzandi*. After all, the cello, especially in its high altissimo register, can't help but be plangent and expressive, a musical protagonist. One hears Reich coming to terms with this innately Romantic persona. In place of the bouncy rhythmic hooks

of *New York* and *Electric Counterpoint*, the upper voices of *Cello Counterpoint* are twisting melodies with the power of a Jimmy Page guitar solo, soaring over dark ambiguous pulses and drones. The result is a work that foregrounds a new character in Reich's string writing, more extroverted and virtuosic than anything in his previous quartets or orchestral pieces. His next two works, *Variations for Vibes, Pianos and Strings* and *Daniel Variations*, continue this trajectory, expanding on it still further.

DANIEL VARIATIONS

Though *You Are (Variations)* and *Daniel Variations* are doppelgängers in form and ensemble, their similarity ends there. *Daniel Variations* (2006) was written in memory of Daniel Pearl, the American journalist killed by militants in 2002 while investigating a story in Pakistan. It is the rawest and angriest of Reich's pieces on geopolitical topics, and his first addressing a post-9/11 world. But, in keeping with works like *Come Out*, *Different Trains* and *Three Tales*, it approaches its subject matter obliquely and non-narratively, instead using musical development to create an alternately jarring and meditative memorial.

This musical alternation underscores Reich's choice of text: lines from the Book of Daniel in the first and third movements, and in the second, Daniel Pearl identifying himself in a video released by his kidnappers: "My name is Daniel Pearl, I'm a Jewish American from Encino, California." The final movement paraphrases the title of a song by the jazz violinist Stuff Smith, a favorite of Pearl's: "I sure hope Gabriel likes my music, when the day is done." Throughout the piece, Reich uses intertwining violin melodies as a musical characterization, a sublimated spirit of the piece's missing subject.

Daniel Variations is characterized by juxtaposition, vertical harmonies meeting horizontal melodies at sharp angles. Each variation begins with a dissonant barrage of piano and percussion chords, announcing the entrance of the chorus, which sings jagged syllabic lines over uneasy pulses, restless and unpredictable. *I saw a dream, images upon my bed, and visions in my head frightened me.* This stark alternation continues in the second movement, where brighter harmonies and those ebullient violin lines give it a stubborn optimism. The third is an existential struggle with the nightmare of the first, choral lines pulling the harmonies back towards the light; in the finale, all the material is finally united, chiming chords, racing pulse, string melodies spinning out endlessly.

Previous spread: Grant Gershon, Gloria Chang, Reich (L to R) rehearsing *Daniel Variations*, Los Angeles, 2006. Courtesy of Los Angeles Master Chorale.

Because it's such a slow process, composing music can feel like finishing a sentence you have started months earlier. Writing a piece never takes exactly the course you've originally mapped out, and over time, this can lead to unexpected results. Sometimes this ends up being a very good thing: the ability to surprise oneself is one of the great joys of making any kind of art. Case in point: those James Brown-esque riffs from *You Are (Variations)*. They spontaneously occurred halfway through the composition of the first movement, and Reich clearly hadn't gotten them completely out of his system. *Variations for Vibes, Pianos and Strings* (2005) picks up right where he left off. Written for Akram Khan's dance company, the piece seems to encourage movement. Syncopation has a way of doing that; the body wants to fill in the missing beats. Here, Reich's melodies are daringly sparse, but the beat is heavy, and the harmonic pacing quick. Without *You Are*'s long choral lines, the piece becomes a study in ever-changing hockets, generating an irrepressible momentum, a barbaric yawp after *Daniel*'s weight and sorrow.

DOUBLE SEXTET, 2x5

Written a year apart, *Double Sextet* (2007) and *2x5* (2008) are formal twins. Both are named for their antiphonal ensembles and structured in fast–slow–fast arches. The instrumentation and resulting timbral differences between the works make for a controlled study in contrasts, reflecting the two new-music ensembles that commissioned them. The Bang on a Can All-Stars' rock band-influenced lineup stems from the compositional interests of its composer founders — Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon and David Lang — who were, in turn, heavily influenced by Reich's work for his own ensemble at the start of their careers. Eighth Blackbird, on the other hand, is a Pierrot ensemble (after Arnold Schönberg's expressionistic, astringent 1912 song cycle *Pierrot Lunaire*) and as such, typifies an "uptown" breed of 20th-century modernist music which, at one time, would have seemed diametrically opposed to Reich's. Heard alongside *2x5*, it's difficult not to perceive the mere existence of *Double Sextet* as a referendum on the change in priorities of contemporary music from 1980

to 2010. As if to underscore this, the piece was awarded the 2009 Pulitzer Prize.

The most remarkable music in *Double Sextet* is found in its slow middle movement, in which several Reich tropes are recast in a new light. The insistent tempo of the first movement is halved to become a sinister groove, over which winds and strings sing plaintive canons in two-part harmony. The movement remains in B minor throughout, the melody giving special emphasis to the raised seventh, the note in the scale which tugs the music back to the tonic chord. This cyclic reinforcement of the minor home key gives the movement a mournful inevitability, a moment in the deep shade in contrast to the outer movements' brilliant bustle. It's a mood that has reappeared sporadically in Reich's music ever since; the opening of *Reich/Richter* is one example. The last movement's pounding hockets oscillate between half-step intervals, perhaps a subconscious integration of the chromatic melodies Reich has transcribed from recorded speech.

Had he been born in the 1980s, Reich's formative works might have used a sequencer or DAW as their medium instead of a tape recorder. As it happens, some of his staunchest advocates and interpreters have been artists from the worlds of electronic dance music and more experimental-leaning pop. Those artists found an immediate kinship with the slowly developing, gradually layering patterns in Reich's music, the innate sense of pulse, and, crucially, an instinctive sense of when to "drop the bass." (More evidence of this can be found in the several compilations of Reich remixes released by Nonesuch over the years; suffice it to say, most "classical" composers don't inspire such tributes.)

There's a satisfying visual rhyme between the four bongo players in the first part of *Drumming* and the pioneering electronic quartet Kraftwerk, who operated with similarly precise synchronization and economy of movement at their matching podiums. In 2009, Reich's *2x5* premiered alongside Kraftwerk at the Manchester Velodrome, making this imagined parallel a reality. The piece's title refers to its instrumental configuration: two antiphonally opposed five-piece bands of electric guitars and basses, keyboards and drums. Interlocking, they play a cubist rock 'n' roll, all sharp edges and cleanly delineated lines. Electric bass, newly prominent here, goes on to feature in many of Reich's subsequent works; he likes the way its snappy percussive articulation lets him write similarly complex rhythms in the lowest registers without the danger of them becoming muddy or indistinct. Forgoing the rock band's midrange saturation, Reich makes the four guitars into treble instruments, vaulting into the upper register, thanks to octave transposition pedals. The guitars take on a curious, transparent tone color, like a cross between a 1980s synthesizer and a set of orchestral tubular bells.

Reich connects his utilization of instruments from the world of "popular" music to Kurt Weill and George Gershwin's use of techniques and sounds from cabaret and jazz. None of these three composers set out to write music with an eye towards any particular "genre"; rather, they used borrowed tools to achieve specific artistic goals. In the process, they all made music which became part of multiple traditions. (See Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood performing *Electric Counterpoint*, or singer-songwriter Sufjan Stevens's affectionate homage to *Music for 18 Musicians* in the coda to his album *Illinois*.)

WTC 9/11, MALLET QUARTET, DANCE PATTERNS

DISC 21

In Reich's words, *WTC 9/11* (2010) is a piece that resulted from a feeling of having to confront "unfinished business," nine years after the event. Away from New York City on the morning of September 11th, 2001, Reich watched the events unfold over the course of what became a desperate six-hour phone call to his family, in their apartment four blocks from the World Trade Center site.

Though the quartet appears to be a sequel to *Different Trains*, which drew historical resonance between Reich's own childhood in the relative safety of 1940s America and the lives of European Jews during that same period, *WTC 9/11* is essentially its inverse. Here was a tragedy experienced not through the filters of recorded history, media and time passing, but as something personal, immediate and still raw. Reich's response to it is even more distinctive in its compact fusion of heart-racing immediacy and documentarian matter-of-factness. It's a crystallized remembrance that, two decades and untold ramifications later, effectively reminds us of the fear and chaos of those first hours.

WTC 9/11 opens cinematically, in first person: a jarring busy signal from a landline phone, distorted voices of NORAD air traffic controllers, panic in their voices, everything right in your ear. Each utterance of text is shadowed by both a speech-melody in the strings and its "frozen" after-image, the sample paused and extended, as if echoing around a vast space. Throughout the piece, one is struck by this eerie juxtaposition of closeness and distance.

The second movement is Reich's most narrative music, unfolding as if in real time, with neighborhood residents, fire-fighters and rescue workers describing the immediate aftermath of the buildings' collapse. Though the music bears all the Reich-ian signifiers — driving compound-meter pulse, short sections delineated by harmony changes, imitative counterpoint — the quartet often seems secondary to the recorded voices, mixed louder here than they are in *Different Trains*, where they often merge with the overall texture. The effect is of music struggling to be heard, pulsing wearily along, sporadically interrupted by flailing outbursts or stabbing, unresolved chords.

Only in the third movement does the sense of panic subside, when the music breaks quietly into song. The quartet accompanies psalms and prayers sung by a cantor and other mourners in stark open fifths, drifting along without pulse or direction. It's hardly a resolution, but it's at least some temporary comfort, a space for thoughts to wander. "The world to come?" a voice asks. "I don't really know what that means." Then, without warning, that busy signal — an apparition, an intrusive thought, a nightmare? — and the music cut off. It's the most unsettling of Reich's endings, because it's not really an ending at all. As survivors, it seems to say, the grief and trauma remain with us in some form for the rest of our lives.

The pocket-sized *Mallet Quartet* (2009) represents both a "back to basics" return

to writing for percussion ensemble and a premonition of things to come. Bell patterns played on marimbas — here the deeper, five-octave models, which have become standard in recent decades — provide a running ostinato in the outer movement, over which vibraphones climb canonic ladders of scales. The slow movement shows a new willingness to pare things down — to desaturate the texture, merely imply the pulse, let the instrumental timbres ring out and speak for themselves. Vibraphones and marimbas have played central roles in the majority of Reich's pieces since the 1970s, and in the *Mallet Quartet* he still finds new uses for them, enjoying the unobstructed interplay of their characteristic attacks and decays.

Reich's music has long been popular with choreographers, but he's written only two works specifically for dance. The brief, punchy *Dance Patterns* (2002) is a series of rambunctious hockets for the same mallet percussion quartet, plus two pianos. A restless flipping of rhythmic subdivisions between registers provides a kinetic and ever-changing backbeat, pulling the piece irresistibly forward.

RADIO REWRITE

One could in theory narrate an entire history of music through the lens of musicians rewriting each other. From the "parody masses" of Medieval and Renaissance composers like Pérotin and Josquin, which took preexisting plainchant or popular tunes as their themes, to Stravinsky's borrowings from Pergolesi and other Italian Baroque composers in *Pulcinella*, composers have long used earlier composers' music as a springboard for study, homage and play.

It's rarer to find examples of this kind of exchange where the borrowing goes in reverse: a venerated, late-career composer looking to music of the younger generation. This is one of the many remarkable aspects of *Radio Rewrite* (2012). Reich first encountered the music of Radiohead through the band's guitarist Jonny Greenwood, who had performed and recorded *Electric Counterpoint* (1987). Radiohead, meanwhile, had long been in dialogue with music from the classical and experimental traditions (Messiaen,

Penderecki, Stravinsky and Reich himself), thanks in part to Greenwood's background in composition study and his continuing work as a composer for film. Many of Radiohead's albums have the grandeur, sweep and arc of large-scale symphonic works; their characteristic sound combines late-Romantic harmonic richness with a modernist's timbral palette. Their songs often depict a desolate landscape of modernist alienation, even despair.

Refracted through the prism of *Radio Rewrite*, Radiohead's songs are transformed into cubist studies in harmonic and melodic layering, expansion and distortion. The first section breaks down its elements: a repeating cycle of chords, articulated by two pianos and electric bass in unpredictable patterns of five, seven and six. Strings and winds play drawn-out fragments of Thom Yorke's plangent vocal melodies, first in unison, then in increasingly elaborate canons. The slow second and fourth movements consist of held chords only, ratcheting up the tension with thick, unresolved octatonic canons. Though the source of these harmonies is the song "Everything in Its Right Place," the effect is not dissimilar to the single harmony of *Four Organs* — an inherently unstable thing forced into a foundational role through repetition. Radiohead's harmonies have the same tendency to cycle restlessly, each repetition leading not to resolution but to endless self-replicating chains. The overlap of Reich and Radiohead lies in the inherently unresolved nature of their work: comfort in ambiguity, change via repetition, the unknowable enormity of the modern world in a short cycle of chords.

PULSE, QUARTET

There's always been a certainty to Reich's music: he knows what he wants to say, and says it. But in recent years, this certainty has begun to give way to a kind of questioning, a sense of ambiguity at peace with itself. *Pulse* (2015), whose whose emblematic title hints at a retrospective quality, opens with the sustained timbres of violins, flutes and clarinets. When the "pulse" does arrive, it's gentle, easy, intimate, the pulse of a person at rest, with open, ringing piano chords, and warm electric bass rounding out the low end. This two-instrument rhythm section serves as a core around which the opening melody spirals and evolves. And it's within that evolution that we find the music's retrospective element: those same harmonies from the opening "Pulses" of *Music for 18 Musicians*.

The written dynamics of *Pulse* never rise above *mezzo forte*, that simultaneously non-committal and enigmatic volume, right in the middle of the dial. Given this narrow compass, its mono-thematic quality and its constant tempo, *Pulse*'s 15-minute structure is paced, therefore, by harmony (of course) and by continuous variation of that single theme. It can be difficult to deduce sections within music that's this

continuous, but different treatments of the melody provide clues. Material that might at first seem like a new theme actually proves to be that same melody, but stretched out into long sustained notes, or chopped up into short, repeated sections to form a tense canon. It's a slightly sneaky feat of compositional virtuosity that lends a necessary sense of departure and return, while never actually leaving the station.

After the continuity of *Pulse*, the opening of *Quartet* (2013) feels like a bracing jump into a cold pool. Where *Pulse* is cohesive, even texturally static, *Quartet* is all rambunctious energy and hyperactive change. The piece is clearly in the lineage of *2x5*, *Radio Rewrite* and *Double Sextet*: music propelled by strong beats, driving syncopation, layered drumming patterns. Here, Reich has chopped these elements into smaller chunks than ever before, and the effect is somewhat dizzying. Grooves start and stop without warning, the ensemble comes to halt after screeching halt, instruments spiral off in seemingly all directions. It's all very unlike his typical process of worked-out canons over steady grooves. He's essentially remixing himself, just as in *Pulse*.

For all the jostling activity of the outer movements, the slow center of *Quartet* feels audaciously spare, even haunted. One begins to imagine *Quartet* as a symbolic inverse of *Pulse*, perhaps with an equally pithy title: "Harmony." Lapidary chords are passed between the instruments, cohering into diffuse melodies that are spiked here and there with canonic fragments. But everything is blurred, stretched and overlapped. The texture evokes Reich's reverence for the French tradition, the effect not unlike Debussy's tone-painting piano *Préludes* — intoxicating, even dramatic, but at a distance. It's a recent addition to Reich's ever-expanding toolbox: music with a kind of subjectivity, a private space surrounded by, but protected from, the world's bustle. Here, moments of change are less structural signage, more changes of color, shifts of light. Those old obsessions with pulse and harmony have led us into new territory.

RUNNER, MUSIC FOR ENSEMBLE AND ORCHESTRA

Runner (2016) begins in a pressurized state, like an athlete waiting for a starting pistol: coiled, but focused; tensed, but poised. The instruments huddle together in the middle register, playing tight sixteenth-note arabesques in small intervals — seconds, thirds, fourths. These figures chase each other in small circles, expanding their intervals and registration. Long tones provide harmonic support, and the music takes on a determined horizontality and velocity. As the music expands in register, it expands in rhythm, and in the second section, the governing pulse doubles to eighth notes and the first bell patterns are heard. The arabesques are still present, but set further apart, with more space to hear their dialogue. The music hasn't tired itself out; it's pacing itself for the road ahead.

As the structure unfolds further, we begin to parse it from above. Eighth notes expand to quarters, and we've transitioned seamlessly into a "slow movement." Then in reverse: contracting, tensing, downshifting rhythmic gears again, until we're back to the opening mood of contained expectancy. The piece is one long, smooth palindrome, all in the same tempo. The closing gesture is unlike anything previously in

Reich's catalog: not an ending so much as an evaporation. Canons, hockets and counterpoint are absent. What remains is pure texture, landscape, a long line pointing towards the horizon.

The success of *Runner*'s palindromic form led directly to *Music for Ensemble and Orchestra* (2018), of which Reich says, "I finally solved how to deal with the orchestra." It's his first true orchestral piece since *The Four Sections* (1987), which broke down the orchestra methodically by family. Here, Reich's solution to the "problem" of the orchestra is to use its principal players as a *concerto grosso* group, as in Bach's *Brandenburg* Concertos. To phrase it another way: it's the *Runner* ensemble, plus trumpet and string sections.

The mechanics of Reich's music have always depended on drawing a contrapuntal transparency, a purity of tone, from his ensembles. The orchestra can be at odds with this. Part of the beauty of an orchestra playing in a reverberant space is its tendency to smudge and blend sound, like watercolors. But in Reich, you want to hear the borders between sounds, the strict delineation of the colors. It's not a coincidence that a LeWitt wall drawing graces the original cover of this volume, in which intertwining arches of brightly colored segments serve as an apt visual metaphor for the music.

Though the added heft of strings and brass lend strength and weight to the piece, its temperament is still for the most part restrained, like *Runner*. The second and fourth movements are the most distinctive, their three-part canons ringing out with a Baroque pungency. Like melodic figures from a Bach prelude or Coltrane solo, their architectural shapes spin forth to create a seemingly endless skyline. Forgoing *Runner*'s small, contained circles, they instead ascend long staircases, surveying the landscape from magisterial heights. The sound is unmistakably Reich in its lucid clarity, but with just enough orchestral soft-focus to evoke a grand acoustic space.

There's a clear through line across *Pulse*, *Runner* and *Music for Ensemble and Orchestra*. The pieces function as teleological forms, but also as textures, musical objects, acoustic spaces, sound installations. There's a smoothness, an objectivity to this music; it builds expectation and momentum through accrual, repetition, rhythm and juxtaposition. All of the musical processes which animate these earlier pieces are present in *Reich/Richter* (2019).

They also find a potent visual metaphor in Gerhard Richter's *Patterns: Divided, Mirrored, Repeated*. Richter, like Reich, is an artist who remixes elements of his earlier work. In this series of images, he does so by slicing preexisting paintings into vertical strips and reflecting the results on a horizontal axis. This process results first in horizontal bands of color, and later, as the number of strips multiplies, they are sliced with progressively more vertical details, like sinister digital artifacts, until they become fractal shapes in wild colors. It was Richter

who asked Reich to compose a musical companion piece, recognizing that his fellow artist was using analogous techniques in his manipulation of sound over time.

The structure of Reich's accompanying music holds up yet another mirror. Like the tempo-modulating arches *Runner* and *Music for Ensemble and Orchestra*, *Reich/Richter* begins with a long stretch of fast sixteenth-note subdivisions, and later relaxes into quarter notes and long tones. Its opening is, in fact, very close to the "evaporative" endings of the earlier pieces, but here the gesture is stretched, the landscape even wider. There is no melodic material at this point, just oscillating intervals, gradually climbing scales, swelling and decaying in long breaths. Rumbling piano tremolos anchor the bass. The overall effect is, in its pacing and gesture, not unlike the introductory pulses of *Music for 18 Musicians*, except that here, the weather has turned cloudy, dark, slightly threatening.

Another aspect one notices in the first minutes of *Reich/Richter* is the blurriness of the boundaries between harmony changes. It's a technique first deployed in *Quartet*'s impressionistic slow movement, though in this piece, it's applied to music with a fast pulse. The ensemble doesn't always change harmonies in unison; instead, notes from the previous chord are held over and blended with the new one, creating a new feeling of continuity and smoothness. One senses that this music is neither slow nor fast, but operating simultaneously at many different speeds. Large bodies of sound advance and recede from view, rotating like massive interstellar bodies around an endless carousel. But listened to closely, each mass teems with activity. Those oscillating dyads transform into more Bach-like sequences, scaling the landscape step by step, climbing over each other before tumbling back down.

The slight smudging between borders becomes even more important in the third section, "Cross fades." As the pulse slows further, from quarters, to dotted quarters, and finally half notes, the colors bleed together until entire chords are overlapping. Even though these chords are part of Reich's established harmonic language, in these new combinations, they result in an ambiguity and dissonance that hasn't occurred in his music before. It feels worlds away from the brightly lit, dustless surfaces of *2x5* or *Double Sextet*. Instead of pointing ceaselessly forward, these chords feel as though they focus in on themselves, filling the frame with Richter's alien fractals, letting us sit with the strangeness for a while.

The piece ends by zooming back out through the rhythmic layers: it's another palindrome, but the return trip is compressed, the opening music vertiginously slingshot. Though Reich may be looking further inward, examining the seams and intricacies of his mature voice with a renewed intensity, he's still racing forward, towards the horizon.

JACOB'S LADDER, TRAVELER'S PRAYER

DISC 26

As Reich approaches his tenth decade, it's worth trying to define his "late style," a quality of calm self-assurance balanced with bold adventurousness that certain artists attain over a lifetime of experience. Listening chronologically, it's first evident in his slow movements, which grow more harmonically mysterious in pieces like *Double Sextet* and *Quartet*. A bit later, in the fast tempi of *Runner*, *Music for Ensemble and Orchestra* and *Reich/Richter*, there is a marked turn towards a Baroque style of motivic development, departing from initial materials less methodically, more playfully. But even in the music's most active moments, there's a feeling of reserve and an efficiency of expression. Harmonic areas tend to be expressed horizontally in long, unspooling melodies, letting the listener assume their implications, instead of the thick, saturated block chords of earlier works.

Jacob's Ladder and *Traveler's Prayer* share a sense of moving from one place to another. *Traveler's Prayer* (2020), written first, evokes the inherent uncertainty, even danger, of travel. Reich sets three sentences from Genesis, Exodus and Psalms concerning arrivals and departures, both real and metaphysical. Two of these excerpts are heard in their traditional cantorial melodic forms, hearkening back to the last movement of *WTC 9/11*. Hebrew cantillation is a topos to which Reich's music returns to express mourning, gravity and grief, but also to bring comfort and reconciliation, engaging with tradition and history to face the trials of the present.

Much of the composition of *Traveler's Prayer* took place during the pandemic in 2020, and it's not difficult to hear the music as a reflection of this period of sad, static uncertainty. Its surface is tidy, even ascetic, and — setting it apart from the vast majority of Reich's music — never establishes a regular pulse. Instead, it seems to hover, suspending time. Reich's typical canonic processes are abstracted to the point of obscurity, the vocal lines imitating each other not literally, but backwards, upside down, in different intervallic permutations. The small ensemble of eight strings, two vibraphones and piano holds down a virtual sustain pedal on the vocalists' pitches, creating the illusion of a soaring, hyper-reverberative acoustic in which the harmonies ring and evaporate (a technique also used in *WTC 9/11*). Like all of Reich's works on religious themes, *Traveler's Prayer* is music for the concert hall; though not functionally liturgical, it nonetheless creates a protective sacred space.

The Old Testament is also the source material for *Jacob's Ladder* (2023), Jacob's description of his dream of a giant ladder on which angels travel between heaven and earth. Its pervading mood is one of quiet wonder (the diametric opposite of Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare in *Daniel Variations*) and its musical materials are emblematic, clearly depicting the dreamer and the dream. The vocal setting is spare, sustained and relatively sporadic. It is less the driving force of the piece than intermittent narration which introduces

long passages built from rising and falling musical ladders, emerging from a simple motor played by violas and vibraphones. The ladder figures outline the governing scale or mode of the harmony, moving in confident diagonal trajectories.

Instead of depicting the enormous scale of the ladder itself, Reich represents the angels using it, messengers with specific motivations and purposes, moving at their own paces. The effect is a bustling multiplicity of activities rather than a unified purpose. Sometimes the messengers flock together on the ladder in a joyful tangle of counterpoint; then they go their separate ways, trailing off, slowing down, melding with the motor, making space for the voices. In fact, there are very few points in the piece when the full ensemble plays at once. Only in the piece's last section do voices and instruments join together, the ladders taking on their most melodic and extended form over a pulse that doubles in length to eighths, then finally quarter notes. The final gesture is a rising question, not trying to explain the ladder's mystery but intent to bear witness.

MUSIC FOR 18 MUSICIANS

Towards the end of the 1990s, Reich decided to spend less time on the road touring with his ensemble and more time composing. As part of this shift, he and his publishers decided to make his early ensemble works available to, and more easily playable by, other groups.

Music for 18 Musicians (1974–76) hadn't ever existed as a traditionally notated score. Reich had written out individual parts for the musicians in shorthand, adding verbal instructions as needed; players would often further refine these during rehearsals, adding their own annotations, abbreviating further. Giving the piece over to the next generation of players meant figuring out a cohesive way to notate it. That challenge fell to the composer Marc Mellits, who, in collaboration with Reich, found elegant notational solutions to the piece's flexible pacing, frequent instrument changes between players, and conductor-less cueing system.

This turned out to have been a canny move.

The piece has since been performed and recorded by countless ensembles, ranging from college percussion studios to major orchestras and new music ensembles. Ensemble Signal, which formed in 2008 and is representative of the vanguard of these younger groups, has become a regular collaborator of Reich's, playing his music with a fluency and verve that comes only with the passage of time, as a composer's language settles into the musical substrate. Their comfort with the music is clear from the opening "Pulses" of their recording of *Music for 18 Musicians*, the swells and hockets passing between instruments with virtuosic clarity and smoothness, imperturbable consistency of rhythm and attack. In later sections, their quicker tempos give the piece's melodic material a wonderfully hierarchical sense of phrase structure. It's not just an excellent performance, but a moving document of evolving performance practice, passed from generation to generation. Reich's musical legacy is secure, and in capable and enthusiastic hands. •

TIMO ANDRES

NEW YORK, 2024

Following spread: New York, 2001. Photo by Michael Wilson.

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