

Steve Reich

Composer



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The Guardian

Steve Reich has been called "...America's greatest living composer." (The Village VOICE), "...the most original musical thinker of our time" (The New Yorker) and "...among the great composers of the century" (The New York Times). From his early taped speech pieces *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966) to his and video artist Beryl Korot's digital video opera *Three Tales* (2002), Reich's path has embraced not only aspects of Western Classical music, but the structures, harmonies, and rhythms of non-Western and American vernacular music, particularly jazz. "There's just a handful of living composers who can legitimately claim to have altered the direction of musical history and Steve Reich is one of them," states The Guardian (London).

Born in New York and raised there and in California, Reich graduated with honors in

philosophy from Cornell University in 1957. For the next two years, he studied composition with Hall Overton, and from 1958 to 1961 he studied at the Juilliard School of Music with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti. Reich received his M.A. in Music from Mills College in 1963, where he worked with Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud.

During the summer of 1970, with the help of a grant from the Institute for International Education, Reich studied drumming at the Institute for African Studies at the University of Ghana in Accra. In 1973 and 1974 he studied Balinese Gamelan Semar Pegulingan and Gamelan Gambang at the American Society for Eastern Arts in Seattle and Berkeley, California. From 1976 to 1977 he studied the traditional forms of cantillation (chanting) of the Hebrew scriptures in New York and Jerusalem.

In 1966 Steve Reich founded his own ensemble of three musicians, which rapidly grew to 18 members or more. Since 1971, Steve Reich and Musicians have frequently toured the world, and have the distinction of performing to sold-out houses at venues as diverse as Carnegie Hall and the Bottom Line Cabaret.

Reich's 1988 piece, *Different Trains*, marked a new compositional method, rooted in *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out*, in which speech recordings generate the musical material for musical instruments. The New York Times hailed *Different Trains* as "a work of such astonishing originality that breakthrough seems the only possible description....possesses an absolutely harrowing emotional impact." In 1990, Reich received a Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Composition for *Different Trains* as recorded by the Kronos Quartet on the Nonesuch Records label. He won a second Grammy award in 1999 for his piece *Music for 18 Musicians*, also on Nonesuch. In 1997, the label released a 10-CD retrospective box set of Reich's compositions, featuring several newly-recorded and re-mastered works.

In July 1999 a major retrospective of Reich's work was presented by the Lincoln Center Festival. Earlier, in 1988, the South Bank Centre in London, mounted a similar series of retrospective concerts.

The Cave, Steve Reich and Beryl Korot's music theater video piece exploring the Biblical story

of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac, was hailed by Time Magazine as "a fascinating glimpse of what opera might be like in the 21st century." Of the Chicago premiere, John von Rhein of the Chicago Tribune wrote, "The techniques embraced by this work have the potential to enrich opera as living art a thousandfold....*The Cave* impresses, ultimately, as a powerful and imaginative work of high-tech music theater that brings the troubled present into resonant dialogue with the ancient past, and invites all of us to consider anew our shared cultural heritage."

Three Tales, a three-part digital documentary video opera, is a second collaborative work by Steve Reich and Beryl Korot reflecting on the growth and implications of technology on three well known events from the 20th century: *Hindenburg*, on the crash of the German zeppelin in New Jersey in 1937; *Bikini*, on the Atom bomb tests at Bikini atoll in 1946-1954; and *Dolly*, the sheep cloned in 1997, on the issues of genetic engineering and robotics. *Three Tales* is a three act music theater work in which historical film and video footage, video taped interviews, photographs, text, and specially constructed stills are recreated on computer, transferred to video tape and projected on one large screen. Musicians and singers take their places on stage along with the screen, presenting the debate about the physical, ethical and religious nature of technological development. *Three Tales* was premiered at the Vienna Festival in 2002 and subsequently toured all over Europe, America, Australia and Hong Kong. Nonesuch's DVD/CD of the piece, released in fall 2003, appeared on many critics' 'Best of the Year' lists.

Over the years, Steve Reich has received commissions from London's Barbican Centre; the Holland Festival; the San Francisco Symphony; the Rothko Chapel; Vienna Festival; Hebbel Theatre, Berlin; the Brooklyn Academy of Music for guitarist Pat Metheny; Spoleto Festival USA, West German Radio, Cologne; Settembre Musica, Torino, the Fromm Music Foundation for clarinetist Richard Stoltzman; the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra; Betty Freeman for the Kronos Quartet; and the Festival d'Automne, Paris, for the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution.

Steve Reich's music has been performed by major orchestras and ensembles around the

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world, including the London, San Francisco, and Boston Symphonies, all led by Michael Tilson Thomas; the New York Philharmonic conducted by Zubin Mehta; Ensemble Modern conducted by Bradley Lubman; Ensemble Intercontemporain conducted by David Robertson; the London Sinfonietta conducted by Markus Stenz and Martyn Brabbins; the Theater of Voices conducted by Paul Hillier; the Schoenberg Ensemble conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw; the Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Robert Spano; the Saint Louis Symphony conducted by Leonard Slatkin; the Los Angeles Philharmonic conducted by Neal Stulberg; and the BBC Symphony conducted by Peter Eötvös.

Several noted choreographers have created dances to Steve Reich's music, including Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker ("Fase," 1983, set to four early works as well as "Drumming," 1998 and "Rain" set to *Music for 18 Musicians*), Jirí Kylián ("Falling Angels," set to *Drumming Part 1*), Jerome Robbins for the New York City Ballet (*Eight Lines*) and Laura Dean, who commissioned *Sextet*. That ballet, entitled "Impact," was premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival, and earned Steve Reich and Laura Dean a Bessie Award in 1986. Other major choreographers using Reich's music include Eliot Feld, Alvin Ailey, Lar Lubovitch, Maurice Bejart, Lucinda Childs, Siobhan Davies and Richard Alston.

In 1994 Steve Reich was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, to the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts in 1995, and, in 1999, awarded Commandeur de l'ordre des Arts et Lettres. The year 2000 brought five additional honors: the Schuman Prize from Columbia University, the Montgomery Fellowship from Dartmouth College, the Regent's Lectureship at the University of California at Berkeley, an honorary doctorate from the California Institute of the Arts. In 2007, Reich was awarded the Polar Music Prize by the Swedish Academy of Music.

Steve Reich's 70th-birthday year (2006) was marked with festivals and special concerts organized by companies around the world. In the composer's hometown of New York, the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), Carnegie Hall, and Lincoln Center joined forces to present complementary programs of his music, and in London, the Barbican mounted a major

retrospective. Concerts were also presented in Amsterdam, Athens, Brussels, Baden-Baden, Barcelona, Birmingham, Budapest, Chicago, Cologne, Copenhagen, Denver, Dublin, Freiburg, Graz, Helsinki, Los Angeles, Paris, Porto, Vancouver, Vienna and Vilnius, among others. In addition, Nonesuch Records released its second box set of Steve Reich's works, *Phases: A Nonesuch Retrospective*, in September 2006. The five-CD collection comprises fourteen of the composer's best-known pieces, spanning the 20 years of his time on the label. In 2005 Nonesuch released the premiere recordings of *You Are (Variations)* and *Cello Counterpoint*, featuring the LA Master Chorale conducted by Grant Gershon and cellist Maya Beiser.

Reich's *Daniel Variations* (2006) was co-commissioned by the Barbican Centre, Carnegie Hall, Daniel Pearl Foundation, Cité de la Musique, and Casa da Música, and was based on the writings of disappeared journalist Daniel Pearl. The work was premiered to great critical acclaim at the Barbican in London and has subsequently been performed in New York, Paris, Munich, Porto, Los Angeles, Toronto, Boston, Miami, and Tokyo, with a praised recording available on Nonesuch.

In April of 2009 Steve Reich won his first-ever Pulitzer Prize for *Double Sextet* (2007). Commissioned by eighth blackbird, the 22-minute piece received its world premiere on March 26, 2008 at the University of Richmond's Modlin Center for the Arts in Virginia. Scored for two each of flutes, clarinets, vibraphones, pianos, violins and cellos, *Double Sextet* can be played in two ways; either with twelve musicians or with six playing against a recording of themselves.

2x5, written for Bang on a Can in 2008, premiered in Manchester, England in 2008, and shared the bill with electronic music pioneers Kraftwerk. *Mallet Quartet*, received its premiere in Budapest in 2009. Both *2x5* and *Double Sextet* were recently recorded on the Nonesuch label, to much critical acclaim. *Radio Re-Write*, jointly commissioned by the London Sinfonietta and Alarm Will Sound, received its world premiere at the South Bank Centre in 2013.

In 2011, Steve Reich was honoured with concerts around the globe to mark his 75th birthday year, including performances in the

United States, United Kingdom, Portugal, Sweden, Spain, France and Poland. The Kronos Quartet commissioned a new work for string quartet, *WTC 9/11*, premiered in March 2011. Carnegie Hall and the Barbican hosted special tribute concerts featuring performances of recent works. Steve Reich was honored as the 2011 Associate Composer at the Casa da Música in Porto, with his works featured on concerts throughout the calendar year. His *Quartet* received its premiere at the South Bank Centre London in autumn 2014 by the Colin Currie Group and had further performances in Cologne, New York and Paris.

Reich's 80th birthday in 2016 was marked with over 400 performances in more than 20 countries across the globe celebrating his music and legacy. Two new works were given world premieres in autumn 2016: *Pulse*, which received its premiere with the International Contemporary Ensemble conducted by David Robertson at Carnegie Hall; and *Runner*, performed at London's Royal Ballet accompanied by new choreography by Wayne McGregor. Several presenters gave special concert series and residencies to honor his anniversary, including Lincoln Center, San Francisco Symphony, the Barbican in London, Tokyo Opera City, and Carnegie Hall.

During autumn 2018 Reich's first major orchestral score in 30 years, *Music for Ensemble and Orchestra*, was given its world premiere by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and Susanna Mälkki and had subsequent performances by London Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Symphony, New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony and Baltic Sea Philharmonic orchestras. His collaboration with renowned artist Gerhard Richter for the opening of The Shed in New York City premiered in April 2019. Titled *Reich/Richter*, the 37-minute work for 14 players explores the shared sensory language of visual art and music.

His work *Traveler's Prayer* was premiered in Amsterdam in 2021 and was commissioned by Netherlands Radio, Southbank Centre London, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Philharmonie de Paris, CAL Performances, Carnegie Hall and Tokyo Opera City Cultural Foundation.